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**THE USES OF THE DGONGS PA 'DUS PA'I MDO IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE RNYING-MA SCHOOL  
OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM**

**by**

**Jacob P. Dalton**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Asian Languages and Cultures: Buddhist Studies)  
in The University of Michigan  
2002

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**For Kate and Roger**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**My successful completion of this dissertation has depended on so many people and I am happy to finally be able to thank some of them. First of all, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee. My advisor, Donald Lopez, has skillfully guided me over the past nine years, through my coursework, exams, and dissertation. Perhaps most important for me has been the wonderful clarity and efficiency of his thought and his writing, setting an example towards which I can only aspire. He has provided me the space to explore my wild interpretations while teaching me how to better communicate them to others. Luis Gomez has expertly revealed to me the wonders of Sanskrit and Indian Buddhism. Robert Sharf inspired me with his enthusiasm for Buddhist ritual. Tomoko Masuzawa generously shared her creative insights into the more theoretical issues in my dissertation. And last but certainly not least, Janet Gyatso took time out of her busy schedule at her new job to help me yet again. Janet first infected me with her love for Buddhism and Tibetan culture fourteen years ago in her exciting classes at Amherst College. Since then, she has accompanied me through every stage of my education: She told me about the study abroad program that first took me to Tibet, served as my “outside**

examiner" for my B.A. thesis, paved the way for my acceptance at Michigan, took me along on a research trip to Tibet, and now returns to bring my studies full circle. I cannot thank her enough for all she has given me.

Several other scholars have provided me with their crucial friendship, encouragement and support. David Germano's unending generosity, knowledge and dazzling creativity has inspired me throughout my M.A. and Ph.D. research. Gene Smith, whose munificence is already legendary and hardly needs my own praises to be added, pointed the way for me through the complexities of Tibetan literature. Hubert Decleer has showed me the joys of storytelling and opened Asia to me by giving me a true home in Kathmandu. Sandy Huntington has encouraged me with his insightful writings and excited conversations. In addition, I have received support and inspiration from Leonard van der Kuijp, and occasional advice from Dan Martin and Matthew Kapstein. Many thanks to them all.

A number of younger scholars working in Buddhist Studies at Michigan have also given me their close friendship during my years as a graduate student. These friends have taught me and made me feel like I am part of an exciting community: Reiko Ohnuma, Benjamin Bogin, Alexander Gardner, Amanda Goodman, Juhn Ahn, and Andy Quintman. I would also like to dedicate a special thanks to Elena Pakhoutova, who is now studying Tibetan Art History at Virginia. She was my invaluable partner during my two years in India and

Nepal. She helped to improve my Tibetan, assisted me in my research, and brought me great happiness.

Nazneen Zafar and Kabir Heimsath provided me a home and family in Kathmandu. Jet Thomas of Marlboro College guided me through my undergraduate studies in religion and philosophy. Matthew Carrigan and Tenzin Parsons, over many a bottle of red wine, have long been my Buddhist partners-in-conversation. And Melissa Mckenzie gave me infinite support throughout my time in Michigan.

In the rich world of Tibetan Buddhism, several masters of infinite learning and charisma have helped me: Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche and Dodrupchen Rinpoche gave me constant inspiration. Penor Rinpoche made this entire project possible by preserving the tradition and with amazing generosity he granted me initiation into the world of the *Dgongs 'dus*. Khenpo Pema Sherab sat with me for hours every day for many months, explaining the complexities of the Buddhist teachings. Khenpo Chowang of Gangtok, Sikkim, guided me into the genre of Tibetan biographical literature. Thubzang Rinpoche affirmed many of my insights and revealed to me the beauty of the *Dgongs 'dus*'s recent history. And innumerable other lamas, present and past, have moved me through the examples they have set with their lives. My thanks can never be enough for all they have given me. I am honored to be able to dabble in the rich ocean of their Tibetan culture.

**Several institutions have provided me with the funding that made the completion of this dissertation possible. I would like to thank the Rackham Graduate School of the University of Michigan for granting me a Regents' Fellowship that covered all four years of my coursework, a Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship for 2000-2001, and numerous other awards that have freed me to concentrate on my studies. I would also like to thank the U.S. Department of Education for the Fulbright-Hays Fellowship that funded much of my research in India during 1999-2000.**

**Finally, I would like to thank those closest to me: My mother and my sister have shared my life with me since the beginning. They are the foundation upon which this work is built. My father, step-mother, and sister in Berlin have been my home in Europe, have pushed me to develop in new ways, and have touched me with their own loving relationships. Finally, Alice Robinson has been a dear friend for a long time, but in the past year she has shared her love with me and made me a part of her family. I have already learned so much that I can't wait for the rest of our life together. Thankyou to all those mentioned and all my personal friends unmentioned.**

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation traces the life of a single text, the *Sutra of the Gathered Intentions* (Skt. *Samāja vidyā sūtra*, Tib. *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*), from its late ninth century origin to the present day. The *Sūtra* (as it will be referred to here) is the fundamental “root tantra” (*rtsa rgyud*) of the *anuyoga* class of teachings belonging to the Rnying-ma (“Ancient”) school of Tibetan Buddhism. The odyssey of this text offers unique insights into the history of the Rnying-ma school, insights that are often at odds with its standard presentations in traditional and western literature. Indeed, the *Sūtra* and its legacy reveal facets of the school that have been consistently ignored by scholars of Tibetan religion.

The *Sūtra*’s story is divided into seven chapters that proceed chronologically. In an attempt to position the *Sūtra* within a broader religio-political environment, each chapter opens with an introduction to the pertinent period, before proceeding to examine how those wider issues were reflected in changing uses of the *Sūtra*. Thus the dissertation shows how the *Sūtra* was manipulated in seven distinct ways for seven historically relevant purposes. Such an approach leaves one with the picture of a system in constant negotiation with the events of Tibetan history. Each chapter presents an encounter, and

often a confrontation, between the root text—in this case, the words of the *Sūtra* itself—and the latest commentary or ritual manual written for it. Each new author undertakes his next text because he perceives an unsettling gap between the *Sūtra* and the tradition of his day. The relationship between certain enduring structures of Tibetan religion and the changing conditions of history is therefore a central theme in this study: Which parts of a given tradition do Tibetans consider fixed and which parts are available for adaptation to present-day needs and conditions? At certain points in its history, the very canonicity of the text is thrown into question. As the *Sutra* moves into each new phase in its history, does it remain the same text? Or has it in some way died out, become obsolete? This question is raised in each chapter, as the *Sūtra* is reborn again and again, taking new form, generation after generation, amid the dominant paradigms of the Tibetan Buddhism: as myth, as doctrine, as ritual, as lineage, as institution, as festival.

## I. Summary of contents

All Tibetan canonical works, whether sūtras or tantras, are supposed to have been translated from Sanskrit (or at least Prakrit) originals. The *Sūtra*, however, is a rare exception. It claims to have been translated into Tibetan from *Bru-sha-sknd*, the linguistically exotic language of Burushaski, spoken today only in one remote valley in Kashmir. Given the internal evidence of the *Sūtra*, there may be

some limited truth to this claim, but the bulk of the work appears to have been composed directly in Tibetan.<sup>1</sup> This composition seems to have occurred around the second half of the ninth century, in the midst of the so-called “dark period” of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> In traditional Tibetan historical materials, this period of 100-150 years, which separated the early spread (*snga dar*) of Buddhism into Tibet from the later spread (*phyi dar*), was a time of degeneration for Tibetan Buddhism.

The original purpose of the *Sūtra* seems to have been to provide Tibetans with a comprehensive system for organizing all the Buddhist teachings that had arrived in Tibet. It wove together the day’s most popular myths, doxographical schemes, rituals, and doctrines into a single, elaborate structure. This system is examined in Chapter One of the present work. The chapter opens with a brief review of tantra’s development in India and in early Tibet, and then turns to examine some of the strategies used by the *Sūtra* in building its tantric system. One of the most important of these strategies was the nine vehicles (*theg pa dgu*) scheme that classified all Buddhist teachings within a doxographical hierarchy. The *Sūtra*’s empowerment ceremony, whereby one was ritually inducted into the system and its mandala, could then be used to grant initiation into any one of these levels of the teachings, or all levels at once. The mandala palace had nine

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed presentation of the evidence on this point can be found in Appendix One.

<sup>2</sup> On dating the *Sūtra*, see again Appendix One.

stories, one for each vehicle, with places for all the deities from the other tantric systems. The *Sūtra* also developed new tantric doctrines that echoed those already common in the Buddhist sūtras and āgamas. Chapter One places particular emphasis on the *Sūtra*'s use of tantric myths, for these came to be especially influential in later Tibetan Buddhist traditions. In addition to the *Sūtra* itself, this first chapter bases its conclusions on the great commentary by Gnyubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes (b. 844), entitled the *Mun pa'i go cha*, or "Armor Against Darkness."

In the eleventh century, this system came under attack from Tibetans who claimed the *Sūtra* was apocryphal, and therefore not a legitimate source of true Buddhism. While many then renounced it, some tied their reputations to the work, and in the twelfth century Dam-pa Bde-gshegs (1122-1192), the founder of Kah-thog monastery, recast the *Sūtra* as the basis for the curriculum at his new monastic college. Chapter Two, "Codification," centers on the *Sūtra*-related materials by Dam-pa Bde-gshegs, setting these works within the wider historical background of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. This was a period of intense competition between the various Buddhist communities emerging at that time. Each group, in order to ensure its survival, sought to codify and gain exclusive control over its own set of teachings; pressures such as these were behind the very creation of the "Rnying-ma school." The latter was a banner that

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brought together all those who continued to tie their fortunes to the figures and events of the early imperial period of Tibetan history.

One especially powerful group that fell under this banner was the Zur clan of central Tibet, who staked their reputations on the *Sūtra*. Over the next two centuries, this family used the *Sūtra*'s system as the basis for their spiritual patrimony, which dated back to the early period of Tibetan Buddhism (pre-tenth century). They codified the work as a core part of a larger set of teachings that they termed the “ancient Spoken Teachings” (*rnying ma bka' ma*). These Spoken Teachings were juxtaposed to the new Gsar-ma teachings still arriving from India, but also to another kind of purportedly older Rnying-ma teachings—the *gter-ma* (“treasure”) revelations that were being received from the early masters in visionary encounters or through physical excavation from hiding places in the earth.

In the twelfth century, Dam-pa Bde-gshergs traveled from eastern Tibet to study with the Zurs. With their blessing, he brought their Spoken Teachings system, with the *Sūtra* at its core, back to his home in Khams. There he founded the monastery of Kah-thog, and he used the *Sūtra*'s elaborate organizational system as the basis for his new monastic curriculum. He paid particular attention to the *Sūtra*'s nine vehicles schema, and, building upon the work of the earlier Zurs, to smoothing over certain discrepancies between the *Sūtra* and the

other Spoken Teachings tantras. Over the next few centuries, the Kah-thog tradition would remain closely associated with the Spoken Teachings.

Meanwhile, back in central Tibet, the *Sūtra*'s influence began to wane. Chapter Three, "Ritual," traces this decline as it was represented in a series of ritual manuals for the performance of the *Sūtra*'s empowerment (Skt. *abhiṣeka*, Tib. *dbang*) ceremony. The empowerment rite is common to almost all tantric traditions. It is performed by the tantric guru to initiate the disciple into the mandala specific to a given teaching system, and by this means the system's lineage is sustained as an unbroken line, stretching from the original Buddha to the present-day disciple. As mentioned above, the *Sūtra*'s empowerment is a particularly elaborate one that can grant initiation into all nine vehicles. Over the four centuries following Dam-pa Bde-gshegs, three major empowerment ritual manuals were composed, each reflecting the declining influence of the *Sūtra* within the Rnying-ma school.

After the twelfth century, the new revelatory *gter-ma* teachings continued to gain in popularity, as the *Sūtra*'s commentaries gradually slipped into obscurity and its rituals ceased to be practical. Only the *Sūtra*'s central role within the Spoken Teachings kept it alive, and even then, only in the form of its empowerment ritual, the minimum requirement for the continuation of the lineage. By the early fourteenth century, the scattered notes on how to perform this ritual were no longer enough to ensure the *Sūtra*'s survival, and Glan Bsod-

nams Mgon-po, a close associate of the Zurs, was compelled to compile an authoritative manual to provide guidance. Around this time, the *Sūtra* began to be referred to as simply the “*Sūtra* empowerment” (*mdo dbang*). Over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, two more manuals were composed, one in the Zur family and another at Kah-thog. Each expanded the role of the other Spoken Teachings systems, effectively reducing the *Sūtra*’s own influence in its empowerment ceremony.

The tumultuous political events of the seventeenth century brought a resurgent interest to the work. In 1642, the fifth Dalai Lama gained control of Tibet and began consolidating the modern Tibetan state (as it was until the Chinese invasion of 1950). During this period, the *Sūtra* became a kind of pawn in the politics of the day. With the Dalai Lama’s support, large new Rnying-ma monasteries began to spring up throughout central and eastern Tibet. The first of these was Rdo-rje Brag, founded just outside Lhasa in 1632. The power of this new Rnying-ma monastery grew swiftly, thanks to the combined efforts of the fifth Dalai Lama, his regent successor, and the second head of Rdo-rje Brag, Padma ‘Phrin-las (1641-1717). All three figures were politically astute, and they all recognized the benefits of having the *Sūtra* as a jewel in the crown of Rdo-rje Brag. To place it there, however, a new third lineage had to be created in order to wrest control of the *Sūtra* away from Kah-thog and the current inheritors of

the Zur system in central Tibet, both long-time enemies of the Dalai Lama and Padma 'Phrin-las.

Chapter Four, "Lineage," turns to the writings of Padma 'Phrin-las, and in particular his collection of lineage biographies (*Mdo dbang gi bla ma'i rnam thar*). Through this work, Padma 'Phrin-las sought to construct a new *Sūtra* lineage that would establish his new monastery as the major Rnying-ma institution in Tibet. The chapter examines the motivations behind this work, exposing the deep, and often violent, involvement of Rnying-ma-pa religious masters in the politics of this formative period in Tibet's history.

As the seventeenth century came to a close and the Dalai Lama's new government was stabilized, another, less divisive and far more significant shift began within the Rnying-ma school. This one was centered at Smin-grol-gling, located just across the river from Rdo-rje Brag. Smin-grol-gling's founder, Gter-bdag Gling-pa (1646-1714), together with his brother, Lo-chen Dharmāśri (1654-1717), embarked on a mission to reunite the Rnying-ma school through rigorous historical investigation and the creation of new, large-scale public festivals. Their strategy closely mirrored the Dalai Lama's own use of public festivals in his construction of the nascent Tibetan state, and their efforts marked a turning point in the identity of the Rnying-ma school. Late into their lives, they worked assiduously to export their new vision, inviting lamas from all over Tibet to

grand festivals at their monastery in which they would transmit their new ritual systems.

The brothers paid particular attention to the Spoken Teachings and the *Sūtra*, which they now recast as the ritual backbone of the school. Chapter Five, “Reformation,” examines the *Sūtra*’s role in this wider Smin-grol-gling project. The chapter takes as its primary focus Lo-chen Dharmaśri’s history of the *Sūtra* empowerment tradition (*Mdo dbang gi spyi don*). Through exhaustive historical research, Dharmaśri excavated the foundations of the Rnying-ma school that lay hidden in the *Sūtra* and its early ritual manuals, and on the basis of his findings he built a new ritual system that negotiated a path between the warring factions within the Rnying-ma School.

Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the effects of the Smin-grol-gling project continued to bear fruit, as the Rnying-ma school became increasingly concentrated in its monastic institutions. In central Tibet, Rdo-rje Brag and Smin-grol Gling became responsible for performing many rituals necessary for the well-being of the state. In eastern Tibet, massive new anthologies of the school’s key ritual systems were assembled, and the “mother monasteries” that had been founded under the support of the new government continued to grow in size and influence, as “branch” monasteries associated with each mother proliferated throughout Tibet. While these developments contributed to the preservation of the Rnying-ma teachings, they also led to an

unintended homogenization of the school, as certain traditions were left out of the anthologies and normative practices were adopted at most Rnying-ma monasteries.

Chapter Six, "Preservation," examines this tension between conservation and homogenization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the mid-nineteenth century, an elaborate new Spoken Teachings festival (*bka' ma'i sgrub mchog*) was created at Dpal-yul in eastern Tibet. Every ritual used to form the festival was derived directly from the manuals developed at Smin-grol-gling. Within a few years, all the mother monasteries in Khams had adopted the festival, and today it is the one uniquely Rnying-ma-pa event to be observed on an annual basis at almost all of the school's major monasteries.

In this chapter the *Sūtra*'s place within the Spoken Teachings festival is analyzed, based on my attendance at two such festivals. There the *Sūtra* played an incongruous role, for on the one hand, it defined the ritual space for the entire festival, yet on the other hand, its own rituals were strangely absent. This incongruity suggests the tensions inherent in canonization and preservation.

The chapter concludes with a description of the remarkable events of the twentieth century, a series of adventures that included the magical rediscovery of a long-lost text, a reenactment of the *Sūtra*'s mythic origin atop a mountain in eastern Tibet, and the fateful smuggling of a manuscript across the world's highest mountain range. Each of these is another story of preservation, another

example of how Tibetans have struggled to maintain their religious traditions in the face of possible extinction.

Today the *Sūtra* and its commentaries are almost never read and its rituals are rarely performed, yet its organizational strategies, especially its nine vehicles schema and its myths, continue to be extremely influential in new ways. The final Chapter Seven, simply entitled “Conclusions,” considers the *Sūtra*’s contradictory position in today’s Rnying-ma school. Here, I suggest that the *Sūtra*’s demise was written into its own project, made inevitable by its very success. Back in the ninth and tenth centuries, the *Sūtra* sought to provide Tibetans with an elaborate system for organizing all the doctrines and practices flooding in from India. In this regard, the *Sūtra* succeeded, but once its system had been adopted by the Rnying-ma-pa, the *Sūtra* itself began to fade away. It became so ubiquitous as to disappear from sight. The *Sūtra* continues to be fundamental to the identity of today’s Rnying-ma school, but its structures are so familiar to the Rnying-ma-pa that they are normally overlooked. Taken as a whole, the dissertation seeks to identify and explore the genealogical continuities and discontinuities of these fundamental structures, structures that are both historically determined yet arbitrary in their origins.

## **II. This work's position in the field of Tibetan Studies**

The Rnying-ma school is known among Tibetans, Rnying-ma-pa as well as followers of the other schools, as one of wild-eyed, antinomian visionaries, lone hermits meditating in caves, or at most, lay village lamas working as local priests in small communities. Such images are juxtaposed to those of the other three Gsar-ma ("New") schools, which, according to this stereotype, are comprised of strictly disciplined Buddhist monks ensconced in large, hierarchical institutions where complex scholarship and large state rituals are the primary focus.

These characterizations have exercised a significant effect on Western scholarship as well. As long ago as 1895, in his seminal work on Tibetan religions, L. Austine Waddell referred to Tibetan Buddhism as "Lamaism," a tradition that had so corrupted true Buddhism with its "monster outgrowths" of tantric "goddesses and fiendesses"<sup>3</sup> that it could not properly be called by the same name. Within Lamaism, Waddell further described a spectrum of impurity, with the Dge-lugs school at one end, being "the purest and most powerful of all,"<sup>4</sup> and the Rnying-ma school at the other, exhibiting, "a greater laxity in living than any other sect of Lamas."<sup>5</sup> Sixty years later, in another major survey of Tibetan Buddhism, a similarly dim view of the Rnying-ma school

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<sup>3</sup> Austine L. Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism, with Its Mystic Cults, Symbolism and Mythology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972 [1895]), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 73.

persisted. Thus Helmut Hoffman described the school, which traces its roots back to the arrival in Tibet of the Indian master, Padmasambhava, as a “Padmaist religion” that deviated so far from Buddhism into tantric excess that it required repeated purges by the followers of the other Gsar-ma (‘New’) schools.<sup>6</sup>

More recently, in 1993, Geoffrey Samuel refined this prejudice by removing the negative judgments that accompanied it. Noting the damage already done by such views throughout “popular texts on the history of religion,”<sup>7</sup> Samuel placed “the Nyingmapa yogin in his or her mountain hermitage” on an equal footing with “the Gelukpa scholar with his *geshe* diploma.”<sup>8</sup> Despite this apparent rehabilitation of the Rnying-ma, however, Samuel enshrines the characterization of the Rnying-ma school as “shamanic,” as opposed to “clerical”: “The most ‘shamanic,’” he writes, “and least centralized and hierarchical of these [Tibetan Buddhist] orders are the Nyingmapa.”<sup>9</sup> Thus to be a Rnying-ma-pa means, according to Samuel, to be tantric, non-monastic, to act primarily through “analogy and metaphor,” and *not* to be engaged in scholarship, textual analysis, and centralized monasticism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Helmut Hoffmann, *Religions of Tibet*, transl. E. Fitzgerald, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), 50-65 and 166-167.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press 1993), 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. My italics.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

This stereotype, like all stereotypes, is not without its truths. It has persisted in the West in part because it mirrors our own familiar dichotomies of the mystic vs. the scholar, the ecstatic vs. the rational, the profligate vs. the celibate. But these categories are not confined to the West; Tibetans themselves have long espoused similar views, commonly portraying the Rnying-ma-pa as absorbed in meditation and the Dge-lugs-pa as obsessed with scholarship. The Rnying-ma-pa themselves often see their role in these terms.

The problem is that the stereotype, like all stereotypes, also conceals much. Indeed, many of the most significant aspects of the Rnying-ma school are occluded by its standard portrayal. The present study is in many ways a history of the Rnying-ma school as seen through the vicissitudes of a single text, and the picture that emerges stands in stark opposition to the one presented in Western scholarship. The *Sūtra* is without doubt a thoroughly “tantric” work, yet every time it is reworked in some new commentary or ritual manual, the purpose is precisely to bring greater “centralization and hierarchization” to the Rnying-ma school. In every instance, the writings on the *Sūtra* are rigorous works of scholarship and textual analysis. The Rnying-ma school revealed in these pages is deeply involved in highly complex and carefully constructed hierarchies, its practitioners often housed in large monastic institutions.

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<sup>10</sup> For Samuel’s definition of his terms, see *Ibid.*, 9-10.

The partial view of the Rnying-ma school has been exacerbated in the past decade by a wealth of scholarship, scholarship that has focused almost exclusively on the *gter-ma* revelation systems. These are revealed teachings that were concealed at some point in the past, whether physically in the earth or spiritually in the discoverer's mind.<sup>11</sup> Considered by many scholars as the sine qua non of the Rnying-ma school, the *gter-ma* revelations offer a rich medium for exploring questions of legitimization, inspiration, and obfuscation. But the Rnying-ma-pa traditionally divide their teachings into two: the *gter-ma* and *bka'-ma* ('Spoken Teachings'). The latter—the Spoken Teachings—are based on the tantras that were translated during the early spread (*snga dar*) of Buddhism from India into Tibet, between the seventh and tenth centuries. Perhaps because the Spoken Teachings appear to be rather similar to the tantras familiar from India (whence many of them derive), the vast majority of recent studies of the Rnying-ma school have focused on the *gter-ma* teachings at the expense of the Spoken Teachings, perhaps seeing the treasures unearthed from Tibetan soil as more indigenous.

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<sup>11</sup> For recent work on *gter-ma*, see Tulku Thondup, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1986); Janet Gyatso, "The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition," in *History of Religions* 33.2 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 97-134; Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); David Germano, "Remembering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People's Republic of China" in *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet*, ed. M. C. Goldstein and M. T. Kapstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 53-94.

Once again, this partiality reflects the Tibetan tradition's own tendencies. After the eleventh century, the innovative new *gter-ma* ritual systems grew in popularity, eventually eclipsing the far more elaborate and cumbersome systems of the Spoken Teachings. Today almost all Rnying-ma-pa practice rituals derive from *gter-ma* revelations, while the Spoken Teachings are rarely practiced or taught. Following the modern Tibetan tradition, Western historians have left the Spoken Teachings literature largely untouched. The *Sūtra* stands at the heart of the Spoken Teachings. The chapters that follow provide both a close analysis of the *Sūtra* and its history, as well as a preliminary study of this wider class of the Spoken Teachings.

While nothing has been published on the Spoken Teachings class as a whole, a few studies have appeared on single texts contained therein. For example, the root tantra of the *atiyoga* (or *rdzogs-chen*) sub-category, entitled the *Kun 'byed rgyal po*, has received some attention,<sup>12</sup> a fact that can be attributed in part to *rdzogs-chen*'s recent surge in popularity in the West. In the *mahāyoga* category, there is a study of an influential tantra dedicated to the Buddhist deity,

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<sup>12</sup> On this tantra, see Longchenpa, *You Are the Eyes of the World*, translated by K. Lipman and M. Peterson (Novato, California: Lotsawa, 1987); E. K. Neumaier-Dargyay, *The Sovereign All-Creating Mind, the Motherly Buddha* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and Adriano Clement, *The Supreme Source* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1999). The first and the third of these three references were inspired by the work of Namkhai Norbu, who is one of the few Tibetan scholars conducting research into the Spoken Teachings, though for the most part, only those works categorized as *atiyoga*.

Vajrakilaya.<sup>13</sup> The one work to touch upon the Spoken Teachings as a class is the unpublished dissertation by Gyurme Dorje, the bulk of which is a translation of the *mahāyoga* root tantra, the *Guhyagarbha*, together with its commentary.<sup>14</sup> Still, apart from this basic introduction to the class, little has been said about its importance.

Regarding the *Sūtra* itself, the root tantra of the *anuyoga* category of the Spoken Teachings, there is only passing mention: in his article on vows in the Rnying-ma school, Gyurme Dorje has presented the *Sūtra*'s system of tantric commitments (*dam tshigs*).<sup>15</sup> R. A. Stein has referred to the work for its influential myth of the buddhas' subjugation of Rudra, the demon of primordial ignorance.<sup>16</sup> Matthew Kapstein has also remarked on this myth,<sup>17</sup> and in another study, he has noted the influence of the *Sūtra*'s nine vehicles (*theg pa dgu*) system on the second Karma-pa, Karma Pakṣi (1204-1283).<sup>18</sup> Finally, Samten Karmay has mentioned the *Sūtra* in his article on the mythical figure of King Dza.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis* (Oxford: Kiscadale Publications, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> See Dorje 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Dorje 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Stein 1972, 1972b, 1973, 1974.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Kapstein, "Samantabhadra and Rudra: Innate Enlightenment and Radical Evil in Tibetan Rnying-ma-pa-Buddhism" in Frank Reynolds and David Tracy, eds., *Discourse and Practice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 51-82, republished in Kapstein 2001, 163-177.

While each of these articles draws attention to a particular element of the *Sūtra*, none tries to analyze how that element has functioned as a part of the larger whole, and none explores the *Sūtra*'s profound historical influence within the Rnying-ma school.<sup>20</sup> This may also be attributed to the sheer size of the *Sūtra* and its earliest commentary (without which much of the *Sūtra* would be incomprehensible), as well as the arcane terminology unique to the *Sūtra*'s elaborate tantric system. Were this not enough, the ritual manuals for the performance of the empowerment ceremony vary in length from one to three large volumes (with around 800 folio sides in each); these are the essential sources for any effort to make sense of the *Sūtra*'s role in the later Rnying-ma tradition.

### III. Methodology

In his later writings, Michel Foucault outlined a “genealogical” method that he juxtaposed to normative history and positioned as a supplement to the “archaeological” method he developed earlier in his career. The latter was

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew Kapstein, “Religious Syncretism in 13<sup>th</sup> Century Tibet: *The Limitless Ocean Cycle*” in B. N. Aziz and M. Kapstein, eds., *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985), 358-371, reworked and republished in Kapstein 2001, 97-105.

<sup>19</sup> Karmay 1981.

<sup>20</sup> In his two articles cited above, Kapstein does venture some preliminary suggestions on how the Rudra myth functions to organize the *Sūtra* as a whole and how the work's presentation of the nine vehicles (*theg pa dgu*) may have affected how the Rnying-ma school was understood by Karma Pakṣi, and therefore his teachers from the early Kah-thog tradition.

essentially a structuralist approach to history that sought to explain concepts and practices in terms of a relational system whose limits are defined by a given historical stratum. Archaeology tried to distance itself from normative history, which tends to locate power in the subject, by emphasizing the constructed nature of the self, the extent to which historical agency is defined by larger systems of knowledge and power. But after writing his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault began to see that his archaeology still shared with history certain contradictions and limitations. In particular, his earlier method could not address the continuities of power and resistance that bridged supposedly discontinuous historical periods—how, for example, a subject can actively bend the structure within which s/he exists. Nor could archaeology attend to the minutiae of historically, or structurally, “insignificant” details that make up a single period. Archaeology, like normative history, tends to ignore these details that do not appear to contribute to the teleological trends that are the focus of that history.

Genealogy, on the other hand, suggests more complex views of historical developments, ones that allow room for the constant shifts and creative “dead-ends” that go ignored by history. Simultaneously, it calls attention to the historian’s own involvement in the history. By intensifying multiplicity and detail, it suggests alternatives to the historical assumptions held by the historian. Like biological evolution, historical development is seen to be comprised of

innumerable branches and sub-branches that are constantly growing together or dying out.

The *Sūtra* has, in many regards, died out as an active religious system. For this reason, a genealogical approach to its history may be particularly appropriate. The pages that follow will seek to delineate some of the less expected developments in the *Sūtra*'s history and its influences within the Rnying-ma school. And in so doing, some fundamental characteristics of the Rnying-ma school, as it is portrayed in both Tibetan and Western literatures, may be called into question.

As seen in the above summary, the chapters proceed chronologically, tracing the vicissitudes of the *Sūtra* from its late ninth century origin to the present day. The purpose for each chapter is to examine how the *Sūtra* functioned in a particular setting. The details that are revealed are often relevant within that setting alone. Certain offshoots of *Sūtra* interpretation are built upon in later chapters, but many simply wither away and fall by the wayside. Despite their apparent historical irrelevance, these details are important to explore, not simply because they might resurface unexpectedly at some later date for some new purpose, but because they represent possibly unexpected facets of the earlier strata within which they surfaced.

Thus I have tried to emphasize both the continuities between chapters and the discontinuities. It is important to recognize that Foucault's turn to genealogy

did not involve a complete repudiation of his earlier, more purely structuralist, “archaeological” methods. Archaeology still plays a significant role within genealogy, demonstrating the discontinuities beneath genealogy’s continuities. It is only the peculiar combination of genealogy and archaeology that reminds us of history’s arbitrariness.

In this way, a genealogical study of the *Sūtra* allows for alternative histories to surface. I have argued above that the *Sūtra*’s structures continue to play a crucial role in shaping today’s Rnying-ma school, but that the *Sūtra* has disappeared from view because of its ubiquity. In this sense, too, the present work is a genealogy, for it is the genealogist’s aim to call attention to the truths that are so closeby as to be normally overlooked. Thus Foucault studied the body: “Effective history... shortens its vision to those things nearest to it—the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies.”<sup>21</sup> By turning to the *Sūtra*, this dissertation does not look to the body, but to the basic structures of the Rnying-ma school that so often go unnoticed.

Foucault’s development of his “genealogical” approach to history was inspired by Nietzsche’s use of the same term. Nietzsche drew attention to the *pudenda origo* (“lowly origins”) of history. For the genealogist, historical origins are founded upon a series of accidents, lies, and petty vanities. Recent work in the field of Buddhist Studies, on Buddhists’ involvement in money, sex, power

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<sup>21</sup> Foucault 1977, 155.

and violence, has certainly reflected this aspect of Nietzschean thought, but it is important to note the difference in tone between Nietzsche and Foucault on this point. As Dreyfus and Rabinow point out, “Foucault the genealogist is no longer outraged, as was Nietzsche, by the discovery that the claim of objectivity masks subjective motivations. Foucault is interested in how both scientific objectivity and subjective intentions emerge together in a space set up not by individuals but by social practices.”<sup>22</sup> In this dissertation I have tried to follow Foucault in my treatment of the “lowly origins” of Buddhist history. I am less interested, for example, in whether the new lineage constructed by Padma ‘Phrin-las in the seventeenth century was objectively accurate, than in how it reflected his own intentions and how, in turn, his intentions were affected by the social structures of lineage. It is the constant interplay of subject and object, of social structures and individual intentions, both within the Tibetan tradition and between myself and my object of study, that provide the larger focus of this study.

Nietzsche and Foucault identified three “uses” that traditional history has provided the modern genealogist, and all three are active within this dissertation.<sup>23</sup> The first is “parody,” which opposes history’s recognition and reminiscence. Below I provide a summary of my own research processes. As I hope is clear from that description, I am truly unsure of my own role in relation

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<sup>22</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 108.

<sup>23</sup> See Foucault 1977, 160-164.

to the *Sūtra*. Is the genealogy I have woven in these pages itself another chapter in the *Sūtra*'s story? I felt a certain camaraderie and affinity with the Tibetan scholars I studied, as I read how each of them, from Dam-pa Bde-gshergs in the twelfth century to Mkhan-po Nus-l丹 in the early twentieth, had carefully gathered all the texts they could find, studied for years, and then used their discoveries to create their new *Sūtra* tradition.

Before I could begin my research I was required to receive—indeed, I was the glad recipient of—the empowerment. Ignoring this command would have resulted in the loss of valued assistance from both traditionally trained Tibetan scholars as well as from some potentially dangerous protector spirits. Having sat through the empowerment ritual, my position vis-à-vis the tradition was even less clear: Was I within it or without? Donald Lopez has noted this “ambivalence of looking Janus-faced toward two myths of the text, one Tibetan, one western,” and how this ambiguity serves the West’s curatorship of Buddhism.<sup>24</sup> And I have to admit that after this powerful ceremony, I felt a sense of responsibility for and to the tradition, that I was, in some small way, helping to revive a dwindling ritual system. My repeated (threefold, as per the

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<sup>24</sup> Lopez 1995, 18.

hagiographies) requests resulted in the granting of the empowerment ceremony for only the third time in fifty years.<sup>25</sup>

While the ambivalence of my parodic masks is disturbingly convenient for the purposes of control, there is no way out of this predicament. Yet this insight should not freeze us in horror (a reaction much exhibited in recent scholarship). Rather, it can inspire us to leap into the masquerade. I both enjoyed the power and the romance of the tradition's ritual elements *and* found that my masquerade repeatedly served to challenge my own academic assumptions and to sharpen my insights into my subject of study. Foucault has described his genealogist as someone who:

will know what to make of this masquerade. He will not be too serious to enjoy it; on the contrary, he will push the masquerade to its limit and prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing. No longer the identification of our faint individuality with the solid identities of the past, but our 'unrealization' through the excessive choice of identities.<sup>26</sup>

My changing masks included not just myself as recipient of the empowerment vs. myself as Western academic, but also the masks of the *Sūtra*'s commentators, Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, Dam-pa Bde-gshegs, Padma 'Phrin-las, Lochen Dharmashri, and Mkhan-po Nus-ldan. As I read and translated their

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<sup>25</sup> And now the first performance of the empowerment in the Kah-thog tradition is being planned for February 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault 1977, 160-161.

words, I donned these various masks. Each change of persona was always surprising and productive, as if the discontinuities opened up new insights.

I have tried to retain some sense of these exciting discontinuities by organizing my seven chapters as I have, along two axes. They are arranged chronologically to trace the diachronic nature of the *Sūtra*, while their one-word titles are meant to call attention to the synchronic nature of the *Sūtra*. Should these chapters be understood alongside one another, or as a linear progression, or in some partially overlapping, interwoven mix of these two models? These are some questions I hope to raise.

The second use Foucault suggests is that of “dissociation,” which opposes normative history’s identities and continuities. This is perhaps the most obvious genealogical use at work in this dissertation. I have tried to dissipate the identity of the Rnying-ma school as it is conceived by its modern-day followers and Western scholars. I have also, more directly, tried to call into question the idea of any Buddhist religious system as a singular whole with an unchanging identity over time. Here we must ask ourselves whether the *Sūtra*, as it moves from one chapter of its history to the next, is the same work or a different one. Buddhist thought has applied precisely this kind of question to the identity of the self over time. Yet within the Tibetan Rnying-ma tradition, offence would certainly be

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taken at the kind of historical interrogation contained herein, and in this sense I am violating the religious system that is the object of my study.

This brings me to Foucault's third use, that of "sacrifice," which effectively opposes truth, or history as knowledge. In Foucauldian genealogy, what is to be sacrificed is the subject of knowledge. "Where religions once demanded the sacrifice of bodies," he writes, "knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge."<sup>27</sup> As this quotation indicates, genealogical sacrifice is particularly relevant to the academic study of religion, and it reveals my own awkward position as perpetrator of violence against the Buddhist tradition. Sacrifice, "discovers the violence of a position that sides against those who are happy in their ignorance, against the effective illusions by which humanity protects itself."<sup>28</sup> I would like to be able to sacrifice myself to this study, and I have sought to do so by switching masks as often as possible. But I remain suspicious of my own motivations here. From the chaos of my research and writing, other stories could easily have been told. I hope that by providing the discontinuities in the *Sūtra*'s history, I have left room for alternative readings, reserved a space for myself to be laid out on the chopping block of history.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 162.

#### **IV. My story**

Before deciding to undertake this project, I spent a year in Asia, conducting some preliminary research into the topic prior to completing my coursework. In the spring of 1997, while living at Rnam-grol-gling monastery in south India, I began to work my way through the *Sūtra*, with the help of Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Yes-shes' late ninth century commentary, the *Mun pa'i go cha*. By the time I returned to Michigan, I had read through the first twenty chapters, with little help from anyone. I was confused, but I was also captivated by the vast and mysterious unexplored territory I had glimpsed.

Over the next year and a half, as I finished my requirements for candidacy, I assembled a small library of everything written on the *Sūtra* that I could find. Finally, in October of 1998, I was ready to return to India to begin my research proper. On the advice of Gene Smith, I decided to begin with Padma 'Phrin-las's collection of biographies of the lamas belonging to the *Sūtra*'s lineage. This work gave me a good preliminary sense of the tradition's history and introduced me to some of the basic terms by which the tradition has been understood.

In the winter of 1998-9, while still occupied with reading through this collection under the supervision of Khenpo Chowang at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok, Sikkim, I learned that the current head of the Rnying-ma school, Penor Rinpoche, was in town at the behest of the Sikkimese royal family.

This was fortunate because I was having an extremely hard time locating anyone with experience in the *Sūtra* with whom I could study, and I had heard that Penor Rinpoche was the last holder of the complete lineage, having received the empowerment, the reading transmission, and the explanations (*dbang lung khrid*).<sup>29</sup>

On his last morning before leaving, Penor Rinpoche granted me an audience in his hotel room, with many members of the local government present. I prostrated three times, and in my still halting Tibetan I explained my predicament. I was quickly reprimanded that I should not be reading the text in the first place without first receiving the empowerment. When I asked if Penor Rinpoche would grant me that empowerment, he told me he would be in the United States the following summer and that I should meet him there.

It so happened that I was back in the U.S. for a brief visit that summer. One day, while staying with friends in upstate New York, I learned that Penor Rinpoche had just opened a new center only a few hours away and that he was staying there just at that time. On a hot afternoon, I found Penor Rinpoche sitting alone in an upstairs room in an empty farmhouse that was scattered with slumbering monks. After prostrating three times, I reminded Penor Rinpoche of our meeting in Gangtok and that he had told me to come see him here, in the U.S. Again I asked him for the empowerment. This time he responded kindly

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<sup>29</sup> It later turned out that Thubzang Rinpoche of Dpal-yul monastery in eastern Tibet also holds the lineage.

that the following October he would be at his monastery in south India, and that I should come see him there. I thanked him and drove away.

Returning to India, I made sure to arrive at Rnam-grol-gling monastery, located in the Tibetan settlement of Bylakuppe a few hours from Mysore, at the proper time. The Dalai Lama had just left, having helped Penor Rinpoche with the consecration of his grand new temple, and Penor Rinpoche was preparing to leave for Singapore. I gained entrance to his room. After prostrating three times, I reminded Rinpoche of our first meeting in Gangtok and how he had told me to come see him in the U.S. the following summer. Then I reminded him of our second meeting in the isolated farmhouse and that he had told me to come see him here, in Bylakuppe, in October. Again, I asked him for the empowerment. This time he responded with exasperation, telling me to go wait in the monastery's guesthouse until summoned.

I waited for four days. One morning I awoke to find the monastery bustling with preparations for an empowerment that was to begin that day. I went in to see Rinpoche and asked if this was anything to do with the request I had made. It was indeed. He impressed upon me the seriousness of the event, that he had postponed his trip to Singapore just for this, and that I should not take this empowerment in order to become famous. Sufficiently cowed, I crept out of the room.

Somewhere between two and three thousand people attended the ceremony. For three days, Penor Rinpoche granted the hundreds of empowerments for all nine vehicles of the Rnying-ma school's teachings. At the end, as the blessings were distributed and Penor Rinpoche sat upon his throne in meditation, a hard rain fell. At the end, as he raised himself up to leave, it stopped as suddenly as it had begun, leaving the grounds of the monastery cleansed.

Over the months that followed, in Bodhgaya and Kathmandu, I read through the various writings by Kah-thog Dam-pa Bde-gslegs (1122-1192), paying particular attention to his influential commentary on the *Sūtra*'s nine vehicles, the *Theg pa spyi bcings*. I also used this time to produce a complete translation of his *Bsdus don*, a detailed outline of the entire *Sūtra* that itself fills about 146 folio sides.

Meanwhile, I still had not found anyone who knew the *Sūtra* apart from Penor Rinpoche, who obviously could not afford the time to read with the likes of me. Finally, Khenpo Pema Sherab, the abbot of Penor Rinpoche's Rnam-grol-gling monastery, agreed to help me, even though he had never read the text himself. For four months in the spring of 2000, we sat together for two hours every day in his room at Shugs-gsebs nunnery in Dharamsala, picking our way through the more important parts of the *Sūtra*. I used my translation of Dam-pa's *Bsdus don* to choose which sections to read. To supplement his own vast

knowledge, Khenpo used both of the extant word-by-word commentaries (*tshig 'grel*): Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes's late ninth century commentary, the *Mun pa'i go cha*, and Mkhan-po Nus-ldan's massive early twentieth century sub-commentary, the *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa*.

It was from Khenpo Pema Sherab that I first learned of a Spoken Teachings festival held annually at Rnam-grol-gling. I was amazed to hear that the *Sūtra* played a central role in these ten days of rituals, so much so that the event is sometimes called the festival of the "Gathered Great Assembly" (*Tshogs chen 'dus pa*), this being the name of the *Sūtra*'s main mandala. Immediately after finishing my work with Khenpo in early June, I returned to south India to observe the performance of this festival. As the activities reached their climax, I experienced my first real insight into how to conceptualize a tradition I had been studying now for almost two years. As I watched, the whole Rnying-ma pantheon was symbolically returned to their collective origin in the Gathered Great Assembly mandala. I saw this as a defining moment for the Rnying-ma school. The grandeur of the event led me to expand my vision of what I had been studying. Suddenly I recognized the extent of the *Sūtra*'s influence upon the history and the identity of the Rnying-ma school.

For the rest of that summer I continued reading on my own, working through Lo-chen Dharmasri's late seventeenth century history of the *Sūtra* empowerment. This is certainly the richest source for a study of the *Sūtra*'s

changing influence. It answered some crucial questions and bore out many of my new theories. In particular, Dharmasri's discussions of what he and his brother, Gter-bdag Glingpa, sought to accomplish at Smin-grol-gling with their reformulation of the *Sūtra*'s rituals confirmed what I had seen in the festival in June.

This text led me in turn to Dharmasri's empowerment ritual manual, the shortest of all such manuals, which I had already seen in action in the empowerment I had received from Penor Rinpoche. As I plodded through its ritual forms, I compared it to the much longer manual by Padma 'Phrin-las, the author of the lineage biographies I had read earlier.

In October I returned to the United States and established myself in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I had access to the incomparable library and the generous advice of Gene Smith at his new Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC). During my time away, two different editions of a new and greatly expanded Spoken Teachings collection had been published. One edition had just arrived at TBRC and the other was now held by David Germano at the University of Virginia. Both editions included many manuals for the performance of the *Sūtra* empowerment, texts that had been lost in the Chinese invasion. The quantity of new materials was certainly a mixed blessing. Suddenly I had much more work to do, yet it was a timely opportunity to fill a

huge gap in my knowledge—all three manuals dated from between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, a period about which I still knew next to nothing.

I spent that autumn cataloging the TBRC edition while reading through the other four “root sūtras” of *anuyoga*.<sup>30</sup> In late November, thanks to the hospitality of David Germano, I traveled to Virginia to examine a couple of relatively short works that were included in that edition of the Spoken Teachings but missing in the TBRC edition.

The rest of the winter I spent skimming through the newly discovered ritual manuals at TBRC. Finally, in March of 2001, I began writing, though with an extended detour into the background materials necessary to place Padma ‘Phrin-las’s writings in their wider political context.

In May I traveled to eastern Tibet to observe the Spoken Teachings festival as it was performed at Dpal-yul monastery, just south of Sde-dge on the Yangtze river. While there, I met the exceptionally learned Thubzang Rinpoche; finally I had found someone well-acquainted with the *Sūtra* system. As I explored the monastery grounds, I saw that he had ordered murals from the *Sūtra*’s central myths to be painted on the walls of the main temples. In our series of meetings, I confirmed my understanding of the *Sūtra* and its legacy with him, while he recounted its history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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<sup>30</sup> For my discussion of these works, see Appendix Three.

## **V. Conclusions and new directions**

The chapters that follow depict a Rnying-ma school that differs markedly from the traditional characterization of the school. The sophistication of the *Sūtra*'s original organizational system, the codification of Kah-thog's monastic curriculum, the intricate manipulations of the empowerment ceremony, Padma 'Phrin-las's careful reconstruction of the lineage, Smin-grol-gling's consolidation of the entire school through large-scale monastic ritual, and the collection of authoritative anthologies—this is the Rnying-ma school that emerges through the *Sūtra*. The masters of the *Sūtra* empowerment lineage were tied to large monasteries, with close connections to the government. The rituals were practiced by highly educated monks, often large numbers of them.

By shifting attention to the Spoken Teachings, a different Rnying-ma school appears. Questions that seemed so fundamental as to be unanswerable are suddenly answered. For example, this study identifies the source of such basic structures as the nine vehicles, the three transmissions (*brgyud gsum*), and the origin myths that begin every traditional presentation of the Rnying-ma school's history. Clearly, the Spoken Teachings deserve greater consideration than they have received so far.

With the recent publication of the newly expanded Spoken Teachings collections, hundreds of new texts have suddenly become available. These works call out for attention from scholars of Tibetan religions, promising a

wealth of alternative histories. Perhaps the most pressing need is for a history of the so-called (in the tradition's own historical literature) "dark period," the period of 100-150 years that separated the early phase of Buddhism's arrival into Tibet from the later. Our present historical understanding of this time is insufficient to explain how Buddhism could have emerged so suddenly after the dark period as an omnipresent force throughout Tibet. The dark period is often depicted as a time of degeneration for Buddhism. Given the preliminary findings (discussed here in the first and second chapters) of the extent of Gnubs-chen's influence upon the later tradition (via his commentary on the *Sūtra*, aptly named the *Armor Against Darkness*), the dark period begins to look somewhat brighter. Many more works by Gnubs-chen have appeared in the new Spoken Teachings collections, and the tantric literature from Dunhuang has yet to be examined in a systematic fashion. Further research into these materials will shed welcome light on the history of Buddhism's assimilation into Tibetan culture.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

## **TANTRA**

This chapter will examine how the *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions* was deployed in late ninth century Tibet to synthesize the innumerable tantras that had arrived from India into a single, comprehensive system. Leading this project was the Tibetan exegete, Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes (b. 844 CE),<sup>1</sup> whose commentary, the *Mun pa'i go cha*, provides our principal evidence for this project. Before we can understand the *Sūtra*'s role in early Tibet, however, a review of tantra's early development may be in order.

### **I. Introduction to Buddhist tantra**

The *Sūtra* was written around the end of the ninth century of the common era.<sup>2</sup> Emerging at this time, it represented a major stepping stone in the development of Buddhist tantra between the eighth and the eleventh centuries. Tantric creativity was at its peak during this period, but its roots can be traced back much earlier; just how much earlier depends on how the term "tantra" is

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<sup>1</sup> On Gnubs-chen's dates, see see Vitali 1996, 546-7 and Appendix One of this study.

<sup>2</sup> On the *Sūtra*'s dates, see Appendix One.

defined, and this question has provoked considerable debate among traditional Buddhist and modern scholars alike.<sup>3</sup>

In Vedic Sanskrit, a tantra (literally, the “warp” in weaving) was a text that primarily emphasized ritual. Such tantras were juxtaposed to sūtras (the “woof”), which were more concerned with “setting forth basic religious principles.”<sup>4</sup> The historical trend that is commonly referred to as “tantra” gained momentum around the seventh century. It is often said to be more concerned with ritual than with issues of, for example, philosophy, but in actuality this was only generally so. Traditional authors themselves rarely referred to this trend as “tantra,” preferring to save that word for referring to a kind of text.<sup>5</sup> Rather, they would use the terms *mantranaya* (‘the way of mantras’), *vajrayāna* (‘diamond vehicle’), or *guhya-mantra* (‘secret mantra’).

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<sup>3</sup> For some western scholarship on the definition of tantra, see Louis de la Vallée Poussin, “Tantrism (Buddhist),” in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 12 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 193-197; Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esotericism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1980); Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tantra in Tibet* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1987), 105-138; Andre Padoux, “Tantrism” and “Hindu Tantrism,” in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 14 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 272-280; David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambala, 1987), 117-303; Donald Lopez, *Elaborations on Emptiness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 83-104; David White, “Introduction” in *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3-38.

<sup>4</sup> Yamasaki 1988, 11. Given the traditional juxtaposition between tantras and sūtras, it might seem odd that the *Sūtra* is classified as a tantra. In fact, the work’s title marks it as a sūtra, a tantra, and an āgama (*Rdo rje bkod pa'i rgyud / Rnal 'byor sgrub pa'i lung / Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*).

<sup>5</sup> The first documented case of the term *tantric* being used to describe something other than a text appears on a ninth century plaque found in the ruins of Nālandā monastery, on which reference is made to a *tantrikabodhisattva* (Nadou 1980, 80).

As with many historical trends, tantra represents a generally discernable shift in Buddhist thought and practice, but upon closer analysis, its boundaries begin to dissolve. Thus the beginnings of tantra can be seen in many earlier aspects of Buddhism. In a 1978 article, Paul Harrison discusses some practices for evoking the Buddha (*buddhanusmṛti*) that appeared in the early Mahāyāna text, the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi sūtra*, as well as in the even earlier *nikāyas* and *āgamas*.<sup>6</sup> Harrison notes the regret expressed by many Buddhist authors over not being present among the Buddha's disciples. These feelings, Harrison suggests, inspired Buddhists to worship and to pray for the Buddha's return, practices that eventually resulted in the composition of new ritual manuals for evoking the Buddha.<sup>7</sup> While such practices surely cannot be called "tantric," they may well have prepared the soil for Buddhist tantra to flourish. Similarly instrumental were a number of innovations that accompanied the advent of the Mahāyāna, precedents including the extension of the Buddha from historical person to metaphysical concept, the mythological creation of buddha-fields,<sup>8</sup> the philosophical identification of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and, in particular, the development of basic rituals for worshipping the Buddha.

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<sup>6</sup> Harrison 1978, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 37. This point bears some relevance to the King Dza myth as it is set forth in the *Sūtra* (on which, see below).

<sup>8</sup> On these, see Gomez 1996, especially 8-11 and 33-36.

Despite the possible influences of such precedents, the advent of tantric, or proto-tantric, ritual may have met some initial resistance. There is some evidence that certain early rituals provoked debate within Buddhist circles, as attested by passages in such early works as the *Dirghāgama*, where we read the following criticisms:

Other Śramaṇas and Brahmins, while eating the food given in faith by others, cultivate a practice which hinders the Path; they make their living by illicit means. Some of them recite mantras for the curing of others' illnesses, some recite mantras as a curse, some recite mantras as a blessing; some attempt to cure illnesses through the practice of the medicinal arts, through acupressure or moxabustion, or through pharmacy. Now the Śramaṇa Gautama does not do these things... Some recite mantras over water and fire, some create demons through their mantras, some create rāksasas through their mantras, some recite mantras for birds, some recite mantras over the joints of the body, some recite mantras as a protection for homes, some burn fires which cause objects to dissolve as if they were being eaten by mice, some receive texts which give the meaning of dreams, some read the lines in the hand or in the face, some recite the books of astronomy, some recite texts which contain all of the sounds... The Śramaṇa Gautama does none of this.<sup>9</sup>

Anyone familiar with Buddhist tantra will recognize all of these practices, practices that were apparently condemned in at least some early Buddhist communities. Of course, at that time, such practices were not regarded as tantra *per se*. This has been noted by Snellgrove, who has argued that such early rituals may have been retroactively labelled "tantra" by later tantric exegetes seeking to

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<sup>9</sup> As cited in Toganoo 1982, 5-6.

legitimate their own ritual systems.<sup>10</sup> In particular, the “tantric” collections of *kriyā-tantra* and *caryā-tantra*, Snellgrove claims, may have consisted almost entirely of ritual works that were originally not classified as tantras. Most of these works were not titled as tantras but as *sūtras*, and, as Snellgrove points out, they drew upon the same sets of deities found in the standard Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

During the fourth and fifth centuries, still more elements that would eventually be considered tantric continued to evolve. Many were drawn from the Vedic ritual technologies that were already widespread in India. Thus one can look to the *Rgveda* for descriptions of *homa*, the complex fire-offering rite that became so important in Buddhist tantra; the *Yajurveda* deifies the syllables *om* and *svāhā*, which became primary elements of Buddhist mantras; the *Brāhmaṇas* can be seen as forerunners of the *vidhi* genre of tantric ritual manuals.

Distinctly un-Vedic, however, was the ritual identification of oneself with the deity, an uniquely tantric development. Early Buddhist rituals largely had stuck to the Vedic forms, with the devotee worshipping the deity positioned before him or her, whereas in the later tantras, the deity would descend into, and merge with, the practitioner. The earliest known example of this practice appears in the Chinese apocryphal *Consecration Sūtra* (Ch. *Kuan ting ching*, T.

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<sup>10</sup> See Snellgrove 1987, 233-234.

1331), composed around the mid-fifth century.<sup>11</sup> In chapter seven, the meditator is advised to imagine him/herself as the Buddha. The same work also includes the earliest extant case of a Buddhist empowerment ritual (Skt. *abhiṣeka*, Tib. *dbang*). The latter is common throughout tantra, being the ritual through which the disciple is initiated into a given tantric system. The one described in the *Consecration Sūtra* was a relatively simple rite that employs imagery of royal coronation ceremonies that would become typical of tantric empowerments, some two or three centuries later.<sup>12</sup>

Though such earlier instances of particular ritual elements can be identified, they did not appear together as a comprehensive system until after the mid-seventh century. Reports from Chinese pilgrims travelling in India during the late seventh and early eighth centuries indicate a discernable shift around this time. The earliest mention appears in a letter sent back to China by Wu Hsing, who died in northern India in 685 C.E.: “Nowadays, there is what seems a novelty, the doctrine of *mantra* (or *dhāraṇī*), that is in great favor throughout the entire country.”<sup>13</sup>

The *Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi-tantra* (henceforth MV), which dates from around the mid-seventh century, and the *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-samgraha* (STTS),

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<sup>11</sup> Dated by Strickmann 1990, 80. The presence of self-identification with the deity in this work is unusual given that it remains unattested in any other extant materials dating from before the seventh century.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 85.

from the end of the seventh century (though it continued to be expanded through the eighth century), were two of the most influential works in the early systematization of Buddhist tantra. The central development found in these works (particularly in *STTS*) was the introduction of five buddha-families (Skt. *kula*, Tib. *rigs*). These built upon an earlier three-family version—with the families of *buddha* (headed by Śākyamuni or Mañjuśri), *padma* (headed by Amitābha or Avalokiteśvara), and *vajra* (Ratnaketu or Vajrapāṇi)—to which were added those of *ratna* and *karma*.

Snellgrove has suggested that the buddha-families may have been first introduced to provide places for new non-Buddhist deities to be brought into the Buddhist pantheon, an appropriation made necessary by the widening socio-political influence of non-Buddhist groups in early medieval India—Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava in particular, as well as tribal groups.<sup>14</sup> According to Snellgrove, the earlier three families were often ranked hierarchically, with the peaceful buddha family at the top and the new deities, often monstrous in form, arranged safely at the bottom in the vajra family, where Vajrapāṇi kept them subdued beneath his vajra-scepter.

The *MS* and the *STTS* both expanded the three families to five, a number that could be more effectively represented in a *mandala* format, with one buddha

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<sup>13</sup> Li-kouang 1935, p.84n. (My translation from the French.)

<sup>14</sup> Snellgrove 1987, 191.

at the center, surrounded by the remaining four, one in each direction. Both works described maṇḍalas with the buddha buddha-family, represented by Vairocana, positioned at the center to reign over the other four families. Yet certain differences between the *MS* and the slightly later *STTS* suggest that the vajra family and its new wrathful gods may have been on the rise.

In particular, an intensifying competition between Buddhist and non-Buddhist groups seems to be indicated by the *STTS* in its central myth. In this myth, the buddha Vajrapāṇi violently subjugates Maheśvara, the Hindu god, Śiva.<sup>15</sup> It is likely that this literary battle mirrored the wider social realities in India at that time.<sup>16</sup> That Śiva could not be destroyed by the more peaceful buddha-families (and only by Vajrapāṇi, who was himself a representative of the vajra family) would seem to indicate that even as Buddhists were resisting the new influence of the non-Buddhist groups on the socio-political level, they were acknowledging to the increasing necessity for violent rhetoric and practices by incorporating many of their enemies' strategies into their own literary repertoire.

Though many scholars have referred to the rivalries between Śaiva and Buddhist communities during the late medieval period, little has been written on

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<sup>15</sup> For summaries of this myth, see Snellgrove 1987, 136–140 and Davidson 1991, 200–202.

<sup>16</sup> Davidson concludes his discussion of this issue by stating that, “there can be little doubt that the Indic story indicates the real tension between Buddhist and Śaiva factions” (Davidson 1991, 214).

<sup>17</sup> This deficiency is soon to be addressed by Davidson’s forthcoming work—again, I direct the reader to Davidson 2002.

the changing patterns of religious patronage during this time.<sup>17</sup> It is well-known that Buddhism continued to thrive through the Gupta dynasty (ca. 320-550), and during these years, Buddhists received their principle support from the merchant classes.<sup>18</sup> After the fall of the Guptas, however, Indian control of the rich trade routes that had nourished Buddhism began to collapse. Thus the rise of tantra during the seventh and eighth centuries coincided with major changes in the Indian socio-economic terrain, shifts that resulted in the erosion of Buddhism's traditional basis of support.

The period of two hundred years that divides the Gupta from the Pāla dynasties was one of extreme political instability. In any case, by the time of Gopāla (r. 750-770), the founder of the Pāla dynasty, tantric rituals had already gained wide acceptance as legitimate components of monastic Buddhism, so that, "Pāla esoteric Buddhism seems to have been centered in institutions."<sup>19</sup> Regardless, tantric Buddhism had by no means been domesticated at this point in its history. Rather, an uneasy exchange continued, between the institutional tantric forms and those of the siddhas who frequented spaces on the margins of Indian society, dwelling in charnel grounds and other isolated places.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Yamasaki 1988, 9-10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>20</sup> On the interactions between siddhas, tribal groups, and monastic institutions in the formation of Indian tantra, see the forthcoming work, Davidson 2002.

Beginning with the tantric materials of the eighth century, we see a marked increase in the sex-and-violence imagery. This was true in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist tantras. The Buddhist *Candraguhyatilakamahātantrarāja* built upon the Maheśvara-subjugation myth that had appeared in the STTS by introducing intensely violent descriptions of the Buddha's treatment of Maheśvara. This trend was clearly successful, as it continued in the later versions of the myth found in the *Guhyagarbha-tantra* and our *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions*.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the increased sex-and-violence, these new tantras introduced a sixth buddha-family, a *mahāmudrā-kula*.<sup>22</sup> This concept soon merged with that of the primordial *adibuddha* (first seen in the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*), usually represented by the buddhas, Vajradhara, Mahāvairocana, Vajrasattva, or Samantabhadra.<sup>23</sup> All the other five buddhas were emanations of this primordial buddha, each revealing a different aspect.

The differences between these new extreme tantras and those that had come before was apparently obvious enough to warrant a new category. Around the mid-eighth century, the term, *mahāyoga*, or 'greater yoga,' began to be used to distinguish the new tantras from the earlier works, which were classed as *kriyā*,

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<sup>21</sup> As pointed out by Davidson 1991, 203.

<sup>22</sup> Davidson 1981, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Snellgrove 1987, 220.

*caryā*, or *yoga* tantras.<sup>24</sup> All tantras were traditionally regarded by their devotees as compositions by buddhas, who are by nature ultimately timeless and share a single intention. For the devotees, this meant that the new classificatory terms were similarly timeless, and they developed synchronic criteria for classifying the various tantras. Thus any works recommending external ritual forms involving purificatory bathing, offerings, confession and vows, or imagining the deity in front of oneself were *kriyā* or *caryā* (also known as *ubhaya*), while those having the five buddha-families, generation of oneself as the deity, and so forth, were *yoga* tantras. Despite these criteria, the new labels do not in fact appear in the pre-eighth century texts themselves and seem to have been applied only *ex post facto* in order to define and to legitimate the radical new tantras that were suddenly proliferating. In this sense, the various tantric classification schemes that appeared after the seventh century generally mirrored the diachronic developments in tantra, so that the *kriyā* and the *caryā* tantras corresponded to the earliest stratum of tantric materials, the *yoga* tantras corresponded to works from the seventh century (like the STTS), and the *mahāyoga* tantras to those from the eighth century onwards.

The *mahāyoga* tantras' undeniable novelty stood in contradiction to their simultaneous claims to be *buddhavācana* ('the word of the Buddha'), and these new classificatory schemes may have arisen partially in answer to this

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 462-3.

predicament. As new tantras with unprecedented myths and ritual technologies continued to be created, still more categories for classifying them were advanced. Shortly following the advent of the *mahāyoga*, the *yogini* tantras began to appear.<sup>25</sup> There was some overlap between the *mahāyoga* and the *yogini* categories, but generally speaking, tantras of the latter type were even more extreme in their practices and rhetoric and were more explicit about the secret subtle body technologies that were sweeping through late tantra.<sup>26</sup> The new developments in the *yogini* tantras also prompted a number of *mahāyoga* works to be reinterpreted, or even rewritten, to bring them upto date.<sup>27</sup>

By the eleventh century, the still newer label of *anuttarayoga* began to be applied to all the tantras higher than *yoga*, thus subsuming all those previously classified as *mahāyoga*, *yogini*, and so on.<sup>28</sup> This resulted in a four-part scheme (*kriyā*, *caryā*, *yoga*, *anuttarayoga*) that is still used today by followers of the Gsarma ('New') schools of Tibetan Buddhism, who trace their roots back to those tantric traditions that arrived from India after the tenth century, in the *phyi dar*, or 'later spread,' of Buddhism into Tibet.

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<sup>25</sup> Davidson 1981, 8n.

<sup>26</sup> These meditation practices for manipulating the body's energies are often associated with *anuyoga*. For a discussion of their place in the *Sūtra*, see Appendix Five.

<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the most famous example of this is the *Guhyasamāja-tantra*, to which a second half and an eighteenth chapter were later added. See Matsunaga 1978, xx-xxi.

<sup>28</sup> Germano 1994, 213.

The introduction of *anuttarayoga* ('supreme yoga') as an over-arching term and the polemics that accompanied it served to obscure certain earlier doxographical systems that were popular between the eighth and the eleventh centuries. The most well-known of these older systems, the nine vehicles (*theg pa dgu*), continues to be preserved today by the followers of the Rnying-ma ('Ancient') school of Tibetan Buddhism, who trace their roots back to the *snga dar*, or 'early spread,' that entered Tibet during the eighth through tenth centuries. The nine vehicles schema made no use of the terms, *yogini* and *anuttarayoga*; instead it added to *mahāyoga* the two other categories of *anuyoga* and *atiyoga*. Later, when most of the tantras previously classed as *mahāyoga* were accepted under the banner of *anuttarayoga*, many of the *anuyoga* and *atiyoga* tantras were rejected by the *gsar-ma-pa* as Tibetan apocrypha.<sup>29</sup> The tantra that is the subject of our present study is one of these. Today the *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions* is considered the root tantra (Skt. *mūlatantra*, Tib. *rtsa rgyud*) for the entire *anuyoga* class.

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<sup>29</sup> Generally speaking, the trio of *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga*, and *atiyoga* was adopted by the later Rnying-ma school and rejected by the Gsar-ma schools. However, there is evidence of the terms even in some Gsar-ma tantras for which the Sanskrit is extant. An example is found in the *Kṛṣṇa-yamāri-tantra*, where four yogas are listed: *yoga*, *anuyoga*, *atiyoga* and *mahāyoga*.<sup>30</sup> Kṛṣṇa-yamāri-tantra, 123. *Bhāvayed yogamanu'yogam dvitiyakam/ atiyogam tṛtīyam tu mahāyogam caturthakam//.* (Thanks go to Iain Sinclair for bringing this passage to my attention.) Apparently there was a time when these terms were relatively common parlance amongst Buddhist tantric communities both in Tibet and in India.

## **II. The *Sūtra* in early Tibet**

It is difficult to discern precisely how tantra developed during the years between the eighth century introduction of *mahāyoga* and the eleventh century codification of *anuttarayoga*. Much of the obscurity can be blamed on the “dark period” of Tibetan history—over a century of economic and political turmoil extending from the mid-ninth century to the mid-to-late tenth century. These years saw the collapse of the Tibetan empire and the related closing of all Buddhist monasteries in Tibet.<sup>30</sup> The lack of any centralized polity contributed to the dearth of surviving historical documents; when official patronage returned to Buddhism in the late tenth century, many of the Buddhist traditions that had taken root in Tibet were discarded in favor of the prevailing forms arriving from India. The traditional histories unanimously portray the dark period as a time when the local forms of Buddhism, freed from the watchful eye of authoritative Buddhist institutions, went astray. Though the new Gsar-ma schools’ response was to re-import Buddhism from India, the Rnying-ma-pa claimed that their Buddhism was a pure strand that had managed to survive intact since the glory days of the Tibetan empire and Buddhism’s earlier spread. Even so, the general

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<sup>30</sup> While traditional histories of the dark period depict the Tibetan king, Glan Dar-ma, as the evil enemy of all Buddhism, this picture seems to be an over-simplification of events. Recent scholarship has suggested that this king was not the enemy of the Buddhist religion as a whole, but only of its large and expensive monastic institutions, “for by the time of Glang Dar-ma’s reign, they already constituted a wealthy and powerful body totally independent of the state” (Karmay 1988, 8). As the Tibetan empire began to contract and revenues were reduced, this economic and political situation was no longer tenable, and the large monasteries were closed.

idea of the dark period as one of total decay and corruption came to be accepted by both the Rnying-ma and the Gsar-ma schools alike.

The present study of the *Sūtra* calls into question this idea that the dark period was completely dark. In Tibet, the first major representative of the *Sūtra*, Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, was prolific during precisely this time. Gnubs-chen's writings suggest that the dark period was also a time of creativity, when the roots of Buddhism spread throughout the isolated valleys of Tibet. Even the Tibetan tradition acknowledges that tantra continued being practiced under Gnubs-chen's protection. There was creative cross-fertilization between the scattered Buddhist forms of Tibet and those in neighboring areas on a scale unmatched since. A "dark period" thus envisioned puts the reemergence of centralized Buddhism in the eleventh century in a different light; it was only from the old root system that the new schools could flower.

Emerging when it did, the *Sūtra* presents us with an important window onto the rush of tantric innovations that ran from the eighth through eleventh centuries. Tantra in eleventh century Tibet was different in many respects from tantra before the dark period, and the *Sūtra* offers a glimpse of these tantric developments in the transition from the earlier *yoga* and *mahāyoga* to the later *anuttarayoga* tantras.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Most of the evidence regarding the *Sūtra*'s doctrinal place in the development of tantra is presented in Appendix Five. The same evidence also helps to explain how the *Sūtra* sought to build an entire tantric universe for late ninth century Tibetans to inhabit. For better or for worse, it is not included in the present chapter in order not to disturb the narrative flow of the

During the eighth through tenth centuries, tantras were proliferating rapidly throughout India and Tibet. Each was typically focused on a specific deity, whether Vajrakilaya, Yamāntaka, Hayagriva, or Śriheruka, each with its own mandala and its own ritual system. The *Sūtra* stood out from this crowd with its breadth of vision. It sought to integrate and organize all the other tantras, weaving them into a single tantric cosmos, and this was how Gnyabs-chen presented it in his commentary, the *Mun pa'i go cha* ('Armor Against Darkness'). Other attempts to systematize tantra had been made by earlier texts, but few had been so comprehensive in scope, nor as successful in this purpose, as the *Sūtra*.<sup>32</sup>

The *Sūtra* used a number of strategies in constructing its new tantric universe. It was the locus classicus for the hierarchical classification scheme of the nine vehicles (*theg pa dgu*) that eventually gained wide acceptance in Tibetan Buddhism, especially within the Rnying-ma school. Its empowerment ceremony was a particularly elaborate one, in which the initiate was introduced to a nine-storied mandala (each floor representing a distinct vehicle) housing all the deities in the Buddhist pantheon. It reinterpreted in tantric terms some of the most

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dissertation. Still, some readers may wish to consult Appendix Five for a better sense of the tantric universe the *Sūtra* sought to build.

<sup>32</sup> Two examples are the *Guhagarbha* and the *Mañjuśrināmasaṅgiti*. The former work laid some of the groundwork for the *Sūtra*'s own effort. In particular, its 100 peaceful and wrathful deities played a central role in the *Sūtra*'s mandala. And the late eighth century scholar, Mañjuśrimitra, sought to make the latter work, "the center of an entire Vajrayāna system of practice so that every important religious function could be performed by a ritual or a cycle of meditation that was in some way tied in to the [Nāmasaṅgiti]" (Davidson 1981, 5).

well-known doctrines in Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as the five paths and the ten levels of the *prajñāpāramitā*, and the eight consciousnesses of Yogācāra thought. But perhaps most successful were its extensive myths explaining the origin of the tantric teachings. The *Sūtra* wove together many of the most popular myths of the day, using a new exegetical apparatus that organized tantra into three “transmissions” (*brgyud pa gsum*). The result was an entire tantric universe, with defined places for all that had come before in tantra. This tantric universe was tied to the earlier Buddhist sūtras at numerous points. Mythologically, the tantric teachings were intertwined into the Buddha Śākyamuni’s own life-story; doctrinally, tantric doctrines were developed to parallel many of those famous from the sūtras; ritually, the empowerment ceremony could grant initiation into both sūtric and tantric levels of insight and practice. The remainder of this chapter examines the strategies employed by the *Sūtra*.

### III. Tantric origin myths: King Dza

Two myths give the *Sūtra* its structure and focus—the myths of King Dza and of Rudra’s subjugation. Both are narrative descriptions of the origins of tantra, telling how the tantric teachings (and in particular the *Sūtra*, within which all other tantras are gathered) first came into the world. Both were extremely influential in the later Tibetan tradition, especially within the Rnying-ma school,

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and both have received some attention in recent western scholarship. The discussion of the myths will begin with a review of this scholarship. We turn first to the King Dza myth.

In his 1981 article, "King Tsa/Dza and Vajrayāna," Samten Karmay introduces the King Dza myth, noting the controversies generated by tantra's arrival in Tibet.<sup>33</sup> Within this context, Karmay goes on to explain:

The story of King Tsa/Dza is an important element in the growth of the legend about the Vajrayāna. It was a great concern among Tibetan Buddhist historians to prove the validity of the tantric teachings, for they were the object of criticism time and again. Tantric literature has been the focus of investigation and polemic. The sūtras that have been accepted as authentic hardly suggest that the tantric teachings are the doctrines of the Buddha. The need to prove this was therefore extremely important. One of the most effective ways of solving this problem seems to have been the creation of prophetic lines containing allusions to the advent of the Vajrayāna and the names of its adepts in the distant future, and attributing these prophecies to the Buddha himself.<sup>34</sup>

Reference is found in many tantras to a legendary Indian king who, as first prophesied by Śākyamuni, was the first human to receive the tantric teachings. In most versions of this myth, particularly those followed by the Tibetan Gsarma schools, the king's name is Indrabhūti and he lived in either Za-hor (Bengal) or Uddiyāna.

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<sup>33</sup> Karmay points to the restrictions (*bkas bca'*) imposed on the translations of the tantras by the King Khri Lde Srong-btsan (b.776). See Karmay 1981, 193.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 197.

The passages referring to this king are generally quite short.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the earliest example of this myth is mentioned by the fourteenth century historian, Bu-ston. It is said to have appeared in the *Dpal sdom pa'i 'byung ba'i rgyud phyi ma*, a tantra closely associated with the influential *yoga* tantra, the STTS. Therein, the Buddha makes the following prophecy:

112 years<sup>36</sup> after I have gone from here the very essence of the doctrines, which is known in the Three Heavens, will be revealed by Vajrapāṇi to King Tsa, through the harmonious blessing of compassion, on the mountain called dPal...<sup>37</sup>

Bu-ston goes on to explain that according to this tradition, at the appointed time, Vajrapāṇi appeared to King Tsa and taught the STTS for the first time. What interested Bu-ston was that in this early version of the myth, the king's name was not King Indrabhūti, as was common in many later tantras, but King Tsa (*rgyal po*

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<sup>35</sup> One of the longest of such passages is found in the *Śrī-tattvapradipa-tantra*, 142b.1-3: *gsang ba chen po'i rgyud 'di ni/shes pa dang ni bshad pa su/bcom ldan 'das kyis ba' stsal ba/byang phyogs su dpal rdo rje'i gnas orgyan du rgyal po indra bhū ti zhas bya bas shes pa dang bshad pa dang/sems can la gsal par byed do/lha mos gsol pa/kye bcom lcadrn 'das rgyal po chen po indra bhū ti zhes bya ba des du'i dbang phyug lags/bka' stsol cig/bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa/dpal yes shes thig le'i rgyud kyi rgyal po las gang zhig ngas bstan pa'i phyag na rdo rje'i rgyal po de nyid indra bhu ti sprul pa'i skus sa bcu'i dbang phyug ye shes kyi sku sa bcu bzhi'i dbang phyug go/bcom ldan 'das kyis de skad ces bka' stsal pa dang.* See also *Śrī-Sahajāndapradipam-nāmapañjikā* (To.1202), 165a.5.

<sup>36</sup> The literature on the King Dza myth occasionally exhibits some confusion over whether this should be one hundred and twelve or twenty-eight years later. This is obviously due to the similarly between the Tibetan words for 'eight' and 'one hundred'—*brgyad* and *brgya*. Perhaps the *Sūtra* can be blamed for the confusion because the number appears as a strange mixture of the two readings (*Mdo*, 347.3: *lo brgyad dang bcu gnyis*). Gnubs-chen then used twenty-eight years (*Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 14.4: *lo nyi shu rtsa brgyad*). However, it seems that 112 represents the earlier and more common number that was later misread by Gnubs-chen and others.

*tsa*). Bu-ston thus tried to determine which name is historically accurate—Indrabhūti or Tsa. Unfortunately Bu-ston could not locate the *yoga* tantra in which the above passage appears, so he ended up settling on the name, Indrabhūti, pointing to the next earliest source, the *Śri-Prajñāpāramitā-nayaśatapañcāśatakaṭikā* (ascribed to Jñānamitra)<sup>38</sup> for justification.

Traditional scholars of the Rnying-ma School, on the other hand, have preferred the name King Tsa (or Dza). For a possible antecedent for this name (apart from Bu-ston's unconfirmed reference), Karmay points to the early Dunhuang work, Pelliot tibétain no.840, where King Tsa was identified with the famous Tibetan King, Khri-srong Lde-btsan. Regarding this odd claim, Karmay writes, "It is fairly certain that King Tsa was known to the author to be connected with the tantric tradition and therefore the reason for identifying him with King Khri-srong Lde-btsan may have been an effort on the part of the author to glorify the latter's patronage of Buddhism in Tibet."<sup>39</sup> Thus it seems that the King Tsa myth was widespread in early Tibet and was put to a number of uses.

Despite this fact, only one version of the King Tsa myth actually survived—that found in the *Sūtra*. In the *Sūtra*'s version, the king's name is King Dza, a minor variation on *Tsa*. In his musings over possible origins for this strange name, Karmay does not notice that in the *Sūtra* the full name of this king

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<sup>37</sup> From Bu-ston's *Yo ga gru gzings*, as translated in Karmay 1981, 197-8.

<sup>38</sup> Tohoku Catalog No. 2647, Bstan-'gyur, rgyud ju, ff.272b7-294a5.

is supplied as Kuñjara (*ku nydza ra*).<sup>40</sup> Monier-Williams glosses this term as, "anything pre-eminent in its kind (generally in compound, e.g. *rāja-kuñjara*, 'an eminent king')."<sup>41</sup> The *Sūtra* places this King Kuñjara in the region east (of Bodhgāya),<sup>42</sup> and on this point it agrees with the other early versions of this myth, which all place King Tsa or Indrabhūti in Za-hor/Bengal.

In later sources, King Tsa/Dza came to be identified with King Indrabhūti of Oddiyāna, well-known in other tantric histories. This can be seen in both Rnying-ma and Gsar-ma works. The twelfth century Sa-skya scholar, Bsod-nams Rtse-mo (in his *Rgyud sde spyi rnams*) is an early exemplar of this trend. O-rgyan Gling-pa makes the same identification in his fourteenth century *Rgyal po bka' thang*, though later Rnying-ma historians are equivocal on whether this is legitimate. In any case, the King Dza myth with which the *Sūtra* opens became the source for all later Rnying-ma versions, as Karmay recognizes.<sup>43</sup>

The *Sūtra* wove the King Dza myth into the larger tantric structure it was building. It was precisely the cohesion of this weave that made it so successful.

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<sup>39</sup> Karmay 1981, 194-5.

<sup>40</sup> *Mdo*, 13.4 and 34.5.

<sup>41</sup> Monier-Williams 1899, 288. This raises the possibility that *Rāja Kuñjara* originally may have been an epithet for King Indrabūti.

<sup>42</sup> *Mdo*, 347.4. It may be worth mentioning that Dharmasrī (*Spyi don*, 35.2) names King Dza's father as the Za-hor King Utajāna (*za ho ra'i rgyal po u ta dzā na*).

<sup>43</sup> The *Sūtra*'s myth has appeared in the *Vairo 'dra 'bag*, the *Mani bka' 'bum*, Klong-chen-pa's *Sgrub mtha' mdzod*, the *Klong chen chos 'byung*, the *Mdo sde gdams ngag*, and many others. Karmay also considers the issue of whether the last of these is the same as the *Sūtra*. He is unable to reach any

In order to understand how this was accomplished, one must first have some sense of the work's overall narrative structure. The *Sūtra* is divided into two parts, what later exegetes called the *root tantra* (*rtsa rgyud*) and the *explanatory tantra* (*bshad rgyud*), corresponding to the first three chapters and the remaining seventy-two respectively.<sup>44</sup> The root tantra unfolds at the scene of Śākyamuni's *parinirvāṇa*, with King Dza at his side. The Buddha prophesies that he will return 112 years later to teach secret mantra at the peak of Mt. Malaya in Sri Lanka. The explanatory text begins with the five excellent ones (*dam pa Inga*), named in the prophesy as the future recipients of the tantric teachings, assembling at the appointed time and praying for the Buddha to fulfill his promise. Then in chapters four through five, the Buddha emanates as Vajrapāṇi and descends onto the peak of Mt. Malaya, and from chapter six onwards, "the meaning of the tantra" is taught. The meaning of the tantra, covered in chapters six through seventy-five, thus makes up most of the text's 617 pages. Theoretically then, according to the above outline, the *Sūtra* is contained *in-toto* within Śākyamuni's death bed prophesy as the "root tantra," which is then elaborated into the remaining seventy chapters of the "explanatory tantra." In this way the King Dza myth was not only a fundamental part of the *Sūtra*'s content; it was also

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conclusion because it is no longer extant. I can only add that I have seen no evidence of this as an alternative title for the *Sūtra*.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Dam-pa Bde-gshegs's *Bsdus don*, 62-71.

basic to the work's own narrative structure. The complexity of this weave may be easier to appreciate in the following review of its details.

Chapter one of the *Sūtra* relates how the text was first taught according to the “thought transmission of the conquerors” (*rgyal ba dgongs brgyud*). Here, the *Sūtra*, as “the essence of secret mantra, the mirror of all phenomena,” is transmitted within the non-dual *dharmakāya*. Simultaneously, the same transmission occurs within the *sambhogakāya*, in the buddha-fields of the five buddha-families: *vajra*, *ratna*, *padma*, *karma*, and *buddha*. In each case, the clear-light maṇḍala of mind is revealed at the peak of a mountain by the ruling buddha to a million *bodhisattvas*, who understand it completely and effortlessly. Also at the same time, the thought transmission takes place within the *nirmānakāya*. In Śākyamuni’s buddha-field, Vajrapāṇi (the tantric form of Śākyamuni) reveals the clear-light maṇḍala of mind, and meanwhile it is likewise being taught in the various parallel worlds of gods, demons, ghosts, animals, hell-beings and *nāgas*.

Chapter two brings us to the death scene of Śākyamuni. Having decided to pass away, the Buddha tells Maudgalyāyana to call his disciples to him. All the disciples assemble except for five excellent ones, who remain happily absorbed in meditation—specifically the “great mantra-meditation” (*sngags gi bsam gtan chen po*) within which the Buddha is known to be without birth or death. From his death bed, the Buddha tells his assembled students that he is

soon to die and instructs them to ask their last questions. At this point King Dza makes his entrance:

Then he who was the king of those lineage-holders gathered in that assembly, the one called Kuñjara, arose from his seat. With a lion-like gaze he regarded the teacher's face and offered these words: 'You are the very nature of the sky. You are completely without passing away or not passing away. However, adapting to the world, you are passing away, by which you intend to completely discipline [your followers]. You shine as the lamp of the world. Clearing off all the darkened mandalas in all the worlds of gods and humans, you have illuminated the mandala of mind. The three vehicles for leading to the attainment of enlightenment you have arranged in stages through the practice of the levels and the liberations.'<sup>45</sup>

'Yet you have not set forth the supreme means which, with equality, neither accepts nor rejects and does not seek enlightenment elsewhere, the immeasurable definitive great vehicle. If you do not formulate into instructions and precepts the third utterance<sup>46</sup> that is the intention of the conqueror, how will the awareness of certainty be established in those of little intelligence, obscured by ignorance? How will the three vehicles to liberation be [completely] gathered? On what [basis]? And by whom? After the sun that lights the world sets, who will light the lamp? And who will put an end to the threat of enemies who would destroy the teachings?'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The three vehicles referred to here are "the vehicle leading to the source," "the vehicle of awareness through asceticism," and "the vehicle of overpowering means," all of which are discussed below, in section six of the present chapter.

<sup>46</sup> I.e. the third set of three vehicles listed in the previous footnote. As explained below, this third set corresponds to the inner yogas of *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga*. Later writers such as Dharmasrī (*Spyi don*, 28.2) and Nus-l丹 (*Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 53, 77.2-4) insisted that King Dza must be asking about all six of the tantric vehicles, but this is clearly not the case in the *Sūtra*, nor in Gñubs-chen's commentary.

<sup>47</sup> *Mdo*, 13.3-14.3. 'khor der 'dus par gyur pa'i rigs 'dzin gyi rgyal por gyur pa kun dza ra zhes bya ba de rang gi stan las langz ste/seng ge'i lta stangs kyis ston pa'i zhal la bltas nas 'di skad ces gsol to/khyod ni nam mkha'i rang bzhin te/ 'da' dang mi 'da' yongs mi mnga'/ 'jig rten pa la mthun 'jug tu/ 'da' bas yongs su 'dul bar dgongs/khyod ni 'jig rten sgron mar shar/lha mi 'jig rten thams cad kyi/ mun pa'i dkyil 'khor kun bsal nas/sems kyi dkyil 'khor gsal mdzad de/sa dang rnam thar la spyad pas/byang chub thob par

To the first of these five questions the Buddha answers that the teachings of the secret mantra arise in twelve ways. The Buddha then lists the “twelve ways of arising” (*byung tshul bcu gnyis*). These are twelve ways in which secret mantra will always arise in the world in each aeon. The *Sūtra*’s commentators emphasize repeatedly that there are of course far more ways of arising than just these twelve, but only these are taught for pedagogic purposes.<sup>48</sup>

Each way of arising is discussed in detail by the *Sūtra*, so that each corresponds to a certain number of chapters as follows:

1. Clearing the ignorant longings: ch. 6.
2. Establishing the lamp: 7-8.
3. Finding certainty: 9-14.
4. Ascertaining the heart of enlightenment: 15.
5. Definitively explaining the intention: 16-19.
6. The teachings descend for the disciple: 19-31.<sup>49</sup>
7. Appearance through blessings: 32-35.

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'gyur ba yi / 'dren pa'i theg pa rnam gsum la / gang dag rim par bkod lags na / mnyam pas blang dor med spyod cing / byang chub gzhans mi tshol ba'i / thab mchog dpag gis mi lang ba'i / nges pa'i theg chen yongs ma gsungs / rgyal ba'i dgongs pa tshig gsum po / gdams ngag lung du ma gzhag na/ blo chung mun pas rmongs pa rnams/ nges pa'i blo gros gang la gzhag/ rnam par thar pa'i theg pa gsum/ gar bsdu gang la gang gis bsdu/ 'jig rten gsal ba'i nyi nub na/ sgron ma gang gis byed par 'gyur/ bstan pa 'jig pa'i log sde ba'i rgol ba gang gis tshar gcod 'gyur.

<sup>48</sup> These twelve ways of arising seem to be based on a similar set found in the root tantra, *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo* (380.5-7). Though the two lists are quite different, Mkhan-po Nus-ldan, at the end of his commentary, argues that they can be read as equivalents. (See *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 56, 697.6-700.1.)

Nus-ldan, working off some early notes I would assume, also aligns these twelve ways of arising with the twelve deeds of the buddha (*mdzad pa bcu gnyis*), in a reading that is thought-provoking if a bit rough. If we accept that this latter correspondence was originally intended by the authors of the *Sūtra* (not necessarily a safe assumption), then the entire structure of the work can be viewed as another tantric re-reading of a doctrine found throughout the earlier non-tantric literature.

<sup>49</sup> This entire way of arising is constituted by the Rudra subjugation myth.

8. Proclamation of the lineage: 36-38.
9. Enacting the purposes: 39-42.
10. Teaching the great prophesies: 43.
11. Severing the karmic continuum: 44.
12. A complete discussion of the intention: 45-75.<sup>50</sup>

In addressing the next two questions, the Buddha says that the teachings should be decided through discussion and practice, and that his teaching is always present. Finally, in answer to the two remaining questions (Who will light the lamp? And who will put an end to the threat of enemies?), the Buddha calls King Dza closer:

Oh Vidyādhara, brother of the dharma, listen well. The lighter of the lamp, as well as those previously prophesied heroes of embodied beings, will arise and will clarify [the teaching] and refute any errors.<sup>51</sup>

The Buddha here tells King Dza of a prophecy that the king himself, along with five other ‘heroes,’ will be the lighter of the lamp and teach the highest vehicle.

Gnubs-chen adds,

<sup>50</sup> These ways of arising are listed with slight variations in many places. They can be found in chapter two of the *Sūtra* itself (*Mdo*, 14.5-15.2) as follows: *gang du rmongs pa gdung pa sel ba, gang 'jig rten gyi srgon ma yongs su bkod pa, gang gi nges pa rnyed pa, snying po byang chub nyid du nges pa, dgongs pa nges par 'grel pa, gdul ba'i thabs la bab pa, byin gyis rlabs las snang ba, brgyud pa thabs kyis grags pa, gang gi ched du mdzad pa, lung chen nges par bstan pa, las rgyud yongs su gcod pa, dgongs pa rnam par bgro ba.*

<sup>51</sup> *Mdo*, 16.3-5. *chos kyi spun du byas pa yi/ rig pa 'dzin pa khyod nyon cig/ sgron ma byed pa'i bya ba yang/ sngon du byung bar lung bstan pa'i/ 'gro ba lus kyi sems dpa' dag/ byung nas gsal byed log sun 'byin.*

Summoning Kuñjara forward, [the Buddha] instructed him. Although the mantra was taught after the teacher's body had passed away, it was due to this prophecy of the secret mantra's appearance made [by the Buddha] before his passing, that the secret mantra will arise in the future.

Vajrapāṇi will appear to the heroes of lesser beings, the five lineage-holding excellent ones. He will teach them, and they will in turn activate the teaching in their respective realms, spreading and then clarifying it. They will refute and finally put an end to the enemies.<sup>52</sup>

These five excellent ones are precisely those who remained happily meditating while the Buddha gave his last testament. Each represents a different race of beings: Vimalakirti (of *Vimalakirti-nirdeśa* fame) for the humans, the king of the *nāgas*, Brahmā for the gods, Ulkāmukha of the *yakṣas*, and, most importantly, the ten-headed *rāksasa*-demon, Rāvaṇa, the Lord of Lankā.<sup>53</sup>

To find the actual wording of the Buddha's prophecy, one must turn to a later part of the *Sūtra*. Chapter forty-three is a crucial chapter for the *Sūtra*'s myth-making. In it, six prophesies are listed, each made by a different buddha in a certain aeon and each describing how the secret mantra will arise in that aeon. Taken together, these prophesies drive home the point that secret mantra is an exceedingly rare teaching that appears only once every few aeons and always according to the same structure. In each of these aeons, a buddha makes the

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<sup>52</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 57.3-5. *kunydz ra la bos nas gdams te/ston pa sku mya ngan las 'das pa'i log tu sngags gsung ba yang sku ma 'das pa'i gong du phyis gsang sngags 'byung bar lung bstan pas gsang sngags kyi bstan pa 'byung ste/phyag na rdo rjes dman pa'i lus can gyi sems dpa' dam pa'i rigs can Inga la sogz pa dag kyang byung nas de dag la ston cing de dag gis kyang so sor rang rang gi mthun pa'i gnas ris su ston par mdzad cing spros nas gsal bar byed pa dang/log pa'i sde pa sun 'byin cing tshar gcod do.* Here one sees quite clearly in Gnubs-chen's wording the concern pointed out by Karmay to legitimate the tantric teachings by tying them to the Buddha through prophecy.

prophecy that the secret mantra (specifically, “*kun gi dgongs pa ’dus pa nyid*” or “The *Gathering of the Intentions of All [the Buddhas]* itself”, a clear reference to the *Sūtra*)<sup>54</sup> will be taught some time after he dies, when he returns in the form of Vajrapāṇi. In our aeon, this prophecy was made by the fourth buddha of the aeon, Śākyamuni, in these words:

In accordance with the great prophesies made by all [the buddhas], 112 years after I have ceased to appear in this [world], to a worthy lineage-holder of the human realm named King Dza and living in the eastern direction of the world,<sup>55</sup> will appear first dreams and then the excellent essence of the teaching already renowned in the three divine realms. At the ferocious peak, Vajrapāṇi will appear to the Lord of Lankā, a friendly *bodhisattva* in the lesser body [of a demon], and others.<sup>56</sup>

Chapters three through five are brief and transitional, moving us to a new setting (*gleng gzhi*).<sup>57</sup> Chapter three tells how during the years following the

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<sup>53</sup> These names are provided by *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 46.6-47.1.

<sup>54</sup> *Mdo*, 344.7-345.1.

<sup>55</sup> i.e. east of Bodhgaya.

<sup>56</sup> *Mdo*, 347.3-5. *kun gyi lung chen bstan pa bzhin/ nga ni ’di mi snang nas/ lo ni brgyad dang bcu gnyis na/ lha gnas gsum du grags pa yi/bstan pa'i snying po dag pa zhig/’dzam gling shar gyi phyogs mtshams kyi/ mi las skal ldan rigs can te/ rgyal po dza zhes bya ba la/ sngon du ltas snang snang ’gyur pa/ drag shul can zhes bya ba'i rtser/ grogs kyi sems dpa' dman pa'i lus/ larika'i bdag po la sogs la/ lag na rdo rje snang bar 'gyur*. Note that this prophecy alone constitutes an entire way of arising, which implies that merely by prophesizing secret mantra, the buddha is teaching it.

<sup>57</sup> The somewhat unusual fact that the *Sūtra* has two settings receives much discussion in the commentaries. The first setting, in which the Buddha makes his prophecy, is called “the setting of the transmission prophecy” (*lung bstan brgyud pa'i gleng zhi*), and the teaching atop Mt. Malaya is called “the setting in which the blessings arise” (*byin rlabs ‘byung ba'i gleng gzhi*). Both are discussed at length by Gnubs-chen in the introduction to his commentary (*Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 6-27).

Buddha's death, the world descended into confusion. People became filled with longing for the Buddha. Finally, after one hundred and twelve years, the five excellent ones arose from their meditation to discover that the Buddha has died and the world has plunged into misery:

Having marvelously and involuntarily wept, they each clairvoyantly perceived all. Through acts of magic they truly and completely gathered upon the peak of the thunderbolt Mount Malaya, on the ocean island of the realm of [Śri]-Laṅka. Thus gathered together, the whole assembly, with one voice let out a wail of extreme desperation.<sup>58</sup>

In chapter four, this cry of yearning is heard by the buddhas, who rouse Śākyamuni and send him, in the form of Vajrapāṇi, down to the peak called "Ferocious," otherwise known as Mt. Malaya, on the island of Sri Lanka, to fulfill his own prophecy. Chapter five describes his entrance, followed by the five excellent ones' request for the teaching.

With chapter six begins the "symbolic transmission of *vidyadhāras*" (*rigs 'dzin brda brgyud*). This is the first of the twelve ways of arising, the beginning of 'the meaning of the tantra.' The Buddha's response to all the longing for his presence constitutes chapter six. His message is basically that everyone is already enlightened, that the teaching is everywhere present, and that those who long for the Buddha are ignorant and creating problems needlessly.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Vol. 50, 17.5-7. Here we may be seeing a mythological instance of a real anxiety felt by the Buddhist community over the absence of the Buddha. See Harrison 1978, 37.

This succinct teaching is enough to enlighten the five excellent ones, who, after all, already understood this. But as chapter seven opens, one of the five, the Lord of Laṅka, asks a question. He points out that the Buddha had prophesied to King Kuñjara twelve ways of arising and that the teaching just given was only one. This provokes the second way of arising. The remaining chapters of the *Sūtra* are addressed by Vajrapāṇi to the Lord of Laṅka primarily. All five excellent ones continue to be present, but Rāvaṇa is the interlocutor for the rest of the teaching.

The *Sūtra* itself never explains exactly what King Dza is doing during the teaching atop Mt. Malaya. This may be because this part of the myth was already well-known, possibly from the earlier *yoga* and *mahāyoga* tantric materials. Though not fully spelled out, the details are implicit in the *Sūtra*'s wording of the Buddha's prophecy, where he predicts that the king will have a series of dreams (see the passage translated above). For the complete story, Lo-chen Dharmāśri turned to a no longer extant commentary, the *Mdo 'grel ye shes snang ba rgyan*.<sup>59</sup> According to this work, the teaching at Mt. Malaya ends with the Lord of Laṅka committing to writing all that had been taught. Thus for the first time this aeon, the *Sūtra* is put into writing. The Lord of Laṅka writes with

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<sup>59</sup> Dam-pa Bde-gshegs also seems to have been aware of some of the details of this myth—see his *Yang khog dbub*, 47.5. Dam-pa was probably just repeating the myth as it was told in the early Zur tradition. Sgro-phug-pa is cited on this story by 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba in the *Blue Annals*—see Roerich 1976, 158–9. King Dza is also mentioned in another of the four root sūtras of *anuyoga*, the *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa'i rgyud*, 315.6. There, in a long prophecy, Vajrapāṇi is told, “For he who has

ink made from refined lapis lazuli upon paper of gold, and when finished, he hides it in the sky in front of him. At that same moment, "through the blessings of the dharma wheel being turned at Mt. Malaya,"<sup>60</sup> King Dza has a series of seven dreams. In the king's fifth dream, he receives a tantric text: "From a sun-disc blazing with light-rays appears a casket containing volumes with golden pages beautifully inscribed with refined lapiz ink."<sup>61</sup> The conclusion is obvious. According to this tradition at least, King Dza is receiving the *Sūtra* just as it is compiled by the Lord of Lanka on Mt. Malaya. Over the years following his dreams, King Dza elaborates his beautiful visionary text (i.e. the *Sūtra*) into all the various tantras that were taught separately from that point forward.<sup>62</sup>

The *Sūtra* tells us in chapter thirty-six<sup>63</sup> that King Dza's reception and redaction of the tantras inaugurated the third of the three transmissions, the *hearing transmission of persons* (*gang zag snyan brgyud*). We have seen that the perfect, undifferentiated teaching between buddhas, described at the beginning

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gathered the accumulations and will be named King Dza, these [textual] compilations of yours will be activated to appear as holy scriptures."

<sup>60</sup> *Spyi don*, 35.1-2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 37.1. Note that these dreams were mentioned in the Buddha's prophecy cited from *The Sūtra* above.

<sup>62</sup> This myth has interesting parallels to the Tibetan revelation (*gter-ma*) tradition, in which a vision or a small text acts as the basis for much longer works. Whether or not there was some kind of an Indian precedent for King Dza/Indrabhūti, the details of the myth that accumulated in the centuries following the *Sūtra*'s composition were almost certainly of Tibetan origin. The myth also has strong resemblances to the tale of the early Tibetan king, Lha-tho-tho-ri, who received upon his palace roof Buddhist texts from the heavens that he could not understand (all motifs seen in the King Dza myth). On these early myths, see Dudjom 1991, 508 or Stein 1972b, 51.

of chapter one, was the thought transmission of buddhas, and that the teaching of the *Sūtra* at Mt. Malaya was the symbolic transmission of knowledge-holders. The King Dza myth, when presented in this way, within the scheme of the three transmissions, became one of the central myths for the Rnying-ma school. The extent of its influence is clear from the fact that any modern-day presentation of the school picked off the shelf will almost always begin with a summary of it.<sup>64</sup>

#### IV. Tantric origin myths: Rudra's subjugation

The *Sūtra* not only provided the version of the King Dza myth that would spread throughout the later Tibetan tradition; it also provided the most well-known version of the Rudra myth. And again, the way the *Sūtra* wove the Rudra myth so deeply into its own fabric contributed heavily to its success. The *Sūtra*'s Rudra myth enjoyed particular popularity in the Rnying-ma school, where it was incorporated into most, if not all, of the demon taming myths found in the later

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<sup>63</sup> Mdo, 288.1-289.2.

<sup>64</sup> Later Rnying-ma-pa writers on the *Bka'-ma* lineages often made the claim that only the *anuyoga* tantras were transmitted on Mt. Malaya, while the *mahāyoga* tantras were received by King Dza, and *atiyoga* was received by Dga'-rab Rdo-rje directly from Vajrasattva. This view even appears in some other Rnying-ma tantras, which for this reason may date from after the tenth century. (Chapter five of the *Kun tu bzang po ye shes gsal bar ston pa'i thabs kyi lam mchog 'dus pa'i rgyud* is cited by Lo-chen Dharmasri [*Spyi don*, 38.4-5] as such a work.) This partition into three distinct lineages can only have taken hold after the *Sūtra* had been classified as *anuyoga* only. As the *Sūtra*'s authors would have it, however, all three, *mahā-anu-ati*, were transmitted together at Mt. Malaya and to King Dza. (No mention is ever made of Dga'-rab Rdo-rje.) In the *Sūtra*, the main distinction between the teaching at Mt. Malaya and that received by King Dza is that of the symbolic transmission vs. the hearing transmission. This made King Dza the source to which all human tantric lineages should be traced. On how the *Sūtra* was originally intended as a work of *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga*, see n.43 above and my more extensive discussion of the issue in Appendix Five.

*gter-ma* collections. Each cycle of *gter-ma* would contain an abbreviated retelling of the *Sūtra*'s rendition, but in each the taming buddha would be replaced with the Buddhist deity foremost for that particular system. The most well-known of these revelatory *gter-ma* accounts is in the *Padma bka' thang* of O-rgyan Gling-pa,<sup>65</sup> in which Hayagriva (the wrathful manifestation of the *padma* buddha-family) is the tamer of Rudra.<sup>66</sup>

Aside from the *gter-ma* collections, the myth is best known in Tibet through its ritual reenactments. The preparatory rites to many larger rituals often invoke a claiming, or purification, of the ritual site, and in the popular *chams* dances, the taming myth is acted out through a combination of visualization and dance. In these cases, the taming deity is usually understood to be Vajrakilaya, whereas in the *Sūtra*, it is Che-mchog as Yang-dag (Skt. Viśuddha) Heruka who ultimately tames Rudra.<sup>67</sup>

The *Sūtra*'s Rudra myth may have become the locus classicus for later Tibetan renditions, but it was not the earliest myth of its kind. Demon-taming

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<sup>65</sup> An English translation of this version can be found in Douglas & Bays 1978, *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*. Other *gter-ma* renditions of the myth inspired by the *Sūtra* include that of Mgon-po Ma-ning, the Bon-po *gter-ma*, the *Nyi zer sgron ma*, the golden southern section of the *Dgongs pa zang thal*, the *Gser phreng*, the *Yi dam dgongs 'dus* of Stag-tsams Nus-l丹 Rdo-rje. Such a list is almost pointless however, as so many cycles include the myth. For comparisons between some versions of the myth, see Stein 1972-4.

<sup>66</sup> That Hayagriva specifically fails to tame Rudra in the *Sūtra* came as a surprise to several of the Tibetans with whom I worked, an indication of the popularity of the *Padma bka' thang* version.

<sup>67</sup> This does not mean, however, that Vajrakilaya is irrelevant to the *Sūtra*'s version, as is evident in my summary of the myth below. The role of Vajrakilaya in the *Sūtra* tradition is even clearer

myths have a long history in India, and the figure of Rudra has long been associated with violence:

Fiery power, ascetic frenzy, mobility on the wind, the garment of red are already in the late *R̄gveda* (e.g., 10:136) associated with the outsider god, Rudra, the fierce resident of the mountain wilderness. Later Vedic texts stress his isolation from the prescribed shares of sacrifices, regarding him always with awe.<sup>68</sup>

In the later Vedic texts, beginning with the *Yajurveda*, we begin to see the distinction between Rudra's benign aspect, as Śiva, and his malevolent aspect, as Rudra. In the *R̄gveda*, both aspects were present in Rudra (though his dangerous side was certainly primary), as was reflected in the "beneficent rains loosened by the storm."<sup>69</sup> Later, the non-Aryan Indian god, Śiva, began to merge with the Aryan Rudra, taking on his less fearsome attributes. This amalgamation process became pronounced in the *Atharvaveda*, "which represents a transitional stage between the conception of Rudra in the *R̄gveda* and the systematic philosophy of Śaivism in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*."<sup>70</sup> This *Upaniṣad* was crucial to the development of the Śiva-Rudra cult. It was the principal text to establish the use

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in another of the four sūtras, the *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa'i rgyud*, which demonstrates the strongest connection to Vajrakilaya of the four sūtras. On this work, see Appendix Three.

<sup>68</sup> Knipe 1989, 138. This article is contained in Hildebeitel, which is a good introduction into the variety of demon-taming myths and rituals in India, many of which often derive from Vedic sources.

<sup>69</sup> Keith 1925, 147.

<sup>70</sup> Chakravarti 1986, 9.

of Śiva as a name for Rudra, and it promoted Rudra as a mountain-god, an image that continued to resonate in the Buddhist taming myths. (Though the notion of Mount Kailāsa as Śiva's residence did not arise until the *Purāṇas*.) The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* also contains the earliest reference to Rudra as the Maheśvara ('Great God'),<sup>71</sup> a title used in the earlier Buddhist taming myths like that of the STTS.

Within Buddhist literature, Rudra subjugation tales were apparently popular from at least the end of the fourth century. The art historian Wu Hung has written on the *Xianyu jing*,<sup>72</sup> a collection of Buddhist tales assembled by eight Chinese monks at a Buddhist convention in Yudian, after which the book was taken to Liangzhou in Gansu in 435.<sup>73</sup> This collection of tales contains one of the earliest versions of a story that was to become quite popular in China, a story in which Śāriputra subjugates Raudrākṣa. Wu Hung goes on to describe several Dunhuang paintings of this myth, dating from the Northern Zhou and early T'ang. A surprising number of the myth's key elements were in place by this early date. Already, Raudrākṣa was a powerful magician and a leader of a band of local heretics, who required taming before a site could be claimed for a new Buddhist monastery. Such Rudra-taming stories were probably circulating in

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>72</sup> *Taisho* 202, 418-22.

<sup>73</sup> Wu Hung 1992, 140.

India for some time prior to the above-mentioned “Buddhist convention” that met in early fifth century China.<sup>74</sup>

Despite such antecedents, most western scholars trace the origin of the myth in its tantric form to chapter six of the influential seventh century yoga tantra, the *Sarva-tathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha*. In this version, it is Maheśvara who is tamed,<sup>75</sup> by Vajrapāṇi,<sup>76</sup> and upon Mt. Sumeru. As already noted in the introduction to this chapter, the advent of the *mahāyoga* tantras in the eighth century, with their sex-and-violence, brought increased attention to the myth. Davidson has identified the *Candraguhyatilaka-mahātantra-rāja* as the next step after STTS in this process, which was in turn followed by the *Guhyagarbha-tattvaviniścaya* (where the myth was expanded into a full chapter) and then many other tantras.<sup>77</sup> The details of each version will not be addressed in the present study, as this has already been accomplished elsewhere.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> A history of the Rudra myth in Indian sources has been compiled by the eighteenth century Tibetan scholar, Sle-lun Rje-drun Bzad-pa'i-rdo-rje, in his study of Buddhist protective deities, the *Bstan srung rnam thar* (Thimphu, Bhutan: Kunzang Topgey, 1976), 4-30.

<sup>75</sup> Though it is perhaps worth noting that as Maheśvara's fury increases, he eventually displays his form as Mahāraudra.

<sup>76</sup> On Vajrapāṇi's role in Buddhist literature, see Snellgrove 1987, 134-141.

<sup>77</sup> Davidson 1991, 203. The *Guhyagarbha* rendition, along with Klong-chen-pa's commentary, has been translated in Dorje 1987.

<sup>78</sup> A sizeable number of studies have been made of these myths. See in particular Stein 1972-4 and 1995, Iyanaga 1985, Davidson 1991.

In the *Sūtra*'s account, the scene of the subjugation is not Mt. Sumeru, but Mt. Malaya in Laṅka.<sup>79</sup> This move tied the Rudra-taming myth to the mythological land of Laṅka, already famous from other legends such as those found in the Buddhist historical chronicles. The legend of the Singha people conquering Laṅka appears in chapter nine of the *Dīpavāmsa* (late 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE) and in chapters six through eight of the *Mahāvāmsa* (early 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE). Vijaya, the Singha leader arrives in Laṅka on the day of the Buddha's birth to find the island overrun by *yakṣa* demons. (Throughout Indian literature, Laṅka has been associated with the demonic.) Vijaya defeats the *yakṣa* king by first seducing his

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<sup>79</sup> The precise location of Mt. Malaya has been obfuscated by the existence of Pullira Malaya. The latter is one of the main *pīṭha* sites scattered across the Indian sub-continent and listed in so many other tantras. Tucci tells us that in the *Cakrasaṃvara* system, Pullira Malaya is the *pīṭha* corresponding to the head (Tucci 1989, 38), and according to Snellgrove it appears in the *Hevajra Tantra*, under the alias "Paurnagiri," as the first of the four *pīṭha* (Snellgrove 1959, Vol. 1, 70). Though Snellgrove claims that Paurnagiri and Pullira Malaya are the same, he does not explain why he thinks so. Pathak (Pathak 1973, 15) would seem to disagree, when he suggests that *Hevajra*'s four *pīṭhas* were drawn from the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, in which Pūrṇasaila (or Pūrnagiri) is the southern of the four *pīṭha*, the seat of the goddess Pūrṇeśvari and the god Mahānātha, which might be "in the Bijapur region of the Bombay Presidency..." (*Ibid.*, 94). Meanwhile, Pathak also suggests that Malaya mountain, which appears in the 108 *pīṭha*-system as Rambhā, might be at the southern tip of the western Ghats. Nowhere does he mention that these two places are the same.

Other scholars have suggested that Pullira Malaya was a Buddhist name for the Agastya Malai, located at the southern-most end of the western Ghats, and for this reason some have also located the Mt. Malaya of our Rudra myth in the same place. To do so, however, contradicts the tradition itself. Lo-chen Dharmasrī, in his late seventeenth century work (*Spyi don*, 32.3-5), identified the place as follows: *dzam bu gling gi shar lho bham ga la dang nye ba'i gling chung sngon srin pos bzung bas langka'i yul zhes grags te/... phyis ded dpon seng ges bzung bas ding sang singhala'i gling du grags so/ yul de'i mtshan nyid ni/ rgya mtsho'i do la gnas pa'i gling sa padma 'dab bzhi'i rnam pa can gyi dbus su drag shul can zhes bya ba'i ri bo ma la ya ste.* "To the southeast of Jambuling, near Bengal, there is a small island previously held by demons known as 'the land of Laṅka'... Later this place was held by the lion (singha) leader, and for this reason nowadays it is known as Singhala... Malaya is at the center of the island which is like four petals of a lotus. In the local tongue it is called Sumanakūṭa." (See too Dudjom 1991, 455, where the author locates Mt. Malaya in Sri Laṅka.) The Tibetan tradition's claim is supported by the fact that even today the central

queen, Kuveni. After the defeat, he raises five of his companions to the rank of minister, establishing five colonies on the island bearing their names. Lamotte dates Vijaya's reign to 486-448 B.C. and suggests that the legend is, "a distant echo of the struggle between the native Vedda [who apparently belonged to the same race as the pre-Dravidians] and the Aryan settlers."<sup>80</sup>

Here Lamotte seems to equate the legendary island of Laṅka with Śri Lanka. Whether this is a valid equation is open to question, and in any case it should be recognized that Laṅka functioned primarily as a place of legend in Buddhist literature, and any possible historical events or locations behind these legends were largely irrelevant to this function. That said, it may still be useful to explore some of the myths of Buddhism's arrival in Śri Lanka. The legend to which Lamotte refers itself echoes several other taming/conversion myths that take place in Śri Laṅka. The same two chronicles (*Dpv.*, Ch. 1-2; *Mhv.*, Ch. 1) tell of three visits by Śākyamuni to the island. On his first two visits, the Buddha tames and converts the *nāga*-s of Lanka, and on his third visit, he goes with 500 monks to stay atop Mount Sumanakūṭa, where he leaves his footprint on a rock.<sup>81</sup> This is the Mount Malaya of our Rudra myth, as identified by the later Tibetan tradition. According to many other sources, Śākyamuni's footprint was left

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province of Śri Lanka is called Malaya, and Adam's Peak, otherwise known as Sumanakūṭa, is found in this province.

<sup>80</sup> Lamotte 1988, 133-4.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 135.

when he first descended upon the peak from his flight across the ocean. In a still another conversion narrative, it is Aśoka's son, Mahinda, also with 500 followers, who lands atop a mountain in Śri Lanka, intent upon converting first the king (who is hunting at that moment on the same mountain) and his subjects.<sup>82</sup> Here, however, the mountain in question is Mount Missaka, located to the north of Sumanakūṭa. These two mountains, Missaka and Malaya, were often confused in the local mythology of Śri Lanka, as is evident from the existence of yet another myth in which the king, while similarly hunting deer, though atop Sumanakūṭa, discovers the footprint left by the Buddha.<sup>83</sup>

There are certainly some interesting parallels to be drawn between these legends and the Rudra myth—the seduction of the demon's wife that renders him vulnerable, the flying descent upon the yakṣa king in need of conversion, the sacred mountain, and perhaps Vijaya's five companions (paralleling the *Sūtra*'s five excellent ones who receive the tantric teachings from Vajrapāṇi). The *Sūtra*'s authors surely knew of these legends. They were famous enough to be repeated by both the Chinese travellers, Fa-Hsiang and Hsuan-Tsang, in the latter's case, when he passed through the region of Kaśmir.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>83</sup> The similarities between these two deer-hunting myths are noted by Skeen, 17. The Buddha's footprint atop Mount Sumanakūṭa is still worshipped by Buddhists today.

<sup>84</sup> See Beal 1983, lxxii-lxxvi and II, 235-253.

Furthermore, the seventh century Chinese pilgrim, Hsuan-tsang, also describes a “Mount Laṅka” at the southeast end of Laṅka, which is precisely the location of Mt. Sumanakūṭa. “It was here,” he writes, “that Tathāgata formerly delivered the *Ling-kia-king* (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*).”<sup>85</sup> Beal, in a footnote to his translation of this passage, adds that, “The mountain is spoken of as three-peaked (*trikūṭa*) in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It was the abode of Rāvaṇa.” This is significant because in our *Sūtra*, Rāvaṇa is Vajrapāṇi’s primary interlocutor. He is one of the five excellent ones in the King Dza myth, and also plays a recurring role in the Rudra-taming myth. The ten-headed demon-king, Rāvaṇa, is well-known from the famous epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>86</sup> He appears to have been a popular character in early Tibet too, as is evident from several Rāma stories discovered at Dunhuang,<sup>87</sup> and from his role in the *Me lce 'bar ba'i rgyud*, which, along with the

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<sup>86</sup> Even today, the guardian god of Sumanakūṭa is Lakṣmana, brother of the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. See Skeen, 13.

<sup>87</sup> See De Jong 1989.

<sup>88</sup> See Stein 1972, 501. Rāvaṇa’s role in the *Me lce 'bar ba* has been recounted by both Tucci (Tucci 1949, 218) and Stein (Stein 1974, 516). Tucci has noted that the spelling of the ten-headed demon ('Dar-sha 'Gri-ba) and many other names in the *Me lce 'bar ba* myth mirror those found in the Dunhuang manuscripts. Though this particular name for the Lord of Laṅka is absent in the *Sūtra* itself, Gnubs-chen uses a similar one in his commentary. His spelling, however (*Mgrin-bcu*—see *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 14.4 and 29.5), does not match that of the *Me lce 'bar ba*. Thus these two canonical works, the *Me lce 'bar ba* and the *Sūtra*, were probably not directly related at their inception, despite the fact that in later centuries they were woven together in many mythic, ritual, and iconographic settings, perhaps most famously in the 14<sup>th</sup> c. *Bka'-thang* literature of O-rgyan Gling-pa. Stein (Stein 1974, 517) points out that the 'Dar-sha 'Gri-ba spelling resurfaced once more in the *Lha 'dre bka' thang* section of this work. It is also perhaps significant that Vajrapāṇi (a major figure in both *Me lce 'bar ba* and the *Sūtra*), Dud-gsol-ma (from *Me lce 'bar ba*), and Legs-ldan Nag-po (who is none other than Rudra after he has been tamed in the *Sūtra*) all appear together in a late 13<sup>th</sup> c. depiction of the protector, Gur-gyi Mgon-po. (On this iconographic trio, see Heller 1997, 286.) Finally, note that Stein viewed Rāvaṇa as a key figure in the early Bon-po legends.

*Sūtra*, has been identified by Khetsun Sangpo as a key source for later Tibetan Buddhist mythological themes.<sup>88</sup> In any case, for our Rudra myth's authors, the figure of Rāvaṇa also carried with it many associations. Together, Rudra and Rāvaṇa represent two of the most well-known demons in Indian literature.

Lanka and its inhabitants evoked in the minds of Buddhists across India images of demons and mythic subjugation. The *Sūtra*'s myths should be seen against this background of wider mythic associations. The evidence noted above suggests that the authors of the *Sūtra* merged the tantric subjugation myth with the popular legends of Lanka. The presence of such legends in so many early Buddhist works gave them wide acceptance, and this may have lent further credence to the subjugation myth, which, like the King Dza myth, sought to legitimate the new Vajrayāna teachings.

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Given that Stein also saw Bon-po influences in the *Sūtra* (via the person of Che Bstan-skyes) and that Tucci saw Bon-po influences in the *Me lce 'bar ba*, it is interesting to consider how early "Buddhist" and "Bon-po" distinctions may have been particularly blurred in the arena of myth.

The Śri Lañkan legends may have been particularly pertinent for the *Sūtra*'s authors for another reason: By the eighth century, principal control of Mount Sumanakūṭa had fallen to the Śaivas of Śri Lañka. The famous footprint was claimed as a print of Śiva, and new legends began to spread, of the Śri Lañkan king being converted once again, this time from Buddhism to Śaivism.<sup>89</sup> The reverberations from this power shift may have been felt by the Buddhists of Kaśmir, who were themselves competing with Śaiva followers for patronage, and led them to move the *Sūtra*'s taming myth to Śri Lañka.

In Tibet, where there were no Śaivites to speak of, these particular social tensions were largely absent. Even so, in the Tibetans' imaginations, the Buddha's triumph over Rudra could only bolster the image of Buddhist tantra. Here again, the myth's function was not necessarily tied to the historical or social realities it may or may not have reflected. The myth also helped to legitimate tantra in Tibet in two additional ways: it explained how the tantras first appeared in the world, and, particularly in the *Sūtra*, it demonstrated how the doctrines and rituals of tantra were inscribed within that original event. Śaiva tantra was flourishing at the turn of the tenth century in Kaśmir, so it is not surprising that the most elaborate Rudra-taming myth came from this region. But what made this particular myth so effective within the Tibetan milieu was how it was woven together with tantric doctrine and ritual. Before turning to an

examination of how this was accomplished, a summary of the myth itself may be in order.

## V. Summary of the Rudra-subjugation myth

The myth is found in chapters twenty through thirty-one. We first meet Rudra in a previous lifetime, in the aeon of the buddha Akṣobhya's appearance in the world. At the time, a Buddhist monk named Invincible Youth (*Thub-dka' Gzhon-nu*) is teaching the doctrine, and Rudra, named Black Liberator (*Thar-pa Nag-po*), together with his personal servant, Dan Phag,<sup>90</sup> become disciples of that monk. It soon becomes apparent, however, that the master and the disciple have completely different understandings of the teacher's words. Black Liberator grows angry with his servant's disagreement, banishes him from the country, and returns to ask the teacher whether he or his servant had understood correctly. Invincible Youth tells him that the servant, Dan Phag, had been right all along, at which point Black Liberator becomes absolutely furious and exiles the teacher as well. He soon plunges into "an ocean of errors," and spends the rest of his life wearing human skins and eating human flesh, living in charnel grounds, conducting massive orgies, and performing terrible asceticisms.

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<sup>89</sup> Skeen 1997, 35-6, for an example of this shift, points to the chapter entitled, "The Vanquishing of the Buddhists in Disputation" that appeared in the eighth century *Tiruvathavar Purāṇa*.

<sup>90</sup> On various scholars' attempts to make sense of these strange names, see Stein 1972, 504-5.

After that, he descends into thousands of violent and terrible rebirths that reach their nadir in the Āvici hell, where he is tortured incessantly. During a brief moment of reflection on why this was all happening to him, the buddha Vajrasattva appears to him and explain that it is all because of his own karma. This engenders an instant of remorse for his past, which transports him out of the Āvici hell, though only into other hells that are almost as bad, where he remains for more millions of lifetimes. Finally the end of the aeon arrives in a great conflagration, but even this is not enough to pierce the thick fog of ignorance surrounding Black Liberator, and he continues to take rebirth. Gradually he rises up the ladder of rebirths, usually as one kind of demon or another, and ultimately he is born into our world, on the island of Laṅka.

His prostitute mother dies in childbirth, and the locals leave the illegitimate child on his dead mother's breast in the cemetery. There, the child subsists by devouring his mother's corpse followed by all the other corpses there, growing stronger and gaining power over the demonic beings inhabiting the cemetery. He soon becomes leader of all the evil beings there, and gruesome descriptions of his appearance and lifestyle close the first chapter of the myth.

The next chapter, twenty-one, is a teaching on karma in terms of nine mistaken views and the terrible rebirths to which each leads. Chapter twenty-two returns to Rudra, who continues to grow in strength by defeating increasingly powerful opponents. Having already overpowered the demons and

the animals of Laṅka, the first target of his jealous fury is the demon-king of the island, Rāvaṇa, who is a Buddhist teacher with many followers. Rāvaṇa (who, it should be remembered is hearing this myth from Vajrapāṇi atop Mt. Malaya) understands that he cannot defeat Rudra but foresees that the fearsome Heruka Buddha will be arriving soon for a final battle, during which tantra will be taught for the first time. Perceiving this, Rāvaṇa instructs his disciples to indulge the demon, and they all surrender to Rudra's wrath. Rudra turns next to the various Hindu gods and their wives, followed by the Buddhist śrāvaka monks, who are unable to withstand the terrible asceticism Rudra demands. Finally, Rudra dismisses even Hayagrīva, the wrathful delegate of the *padma* family, who apparently represents the remaining Buddhist vehicles up through *yoga* tantra. The chapter ends with the information that the teacher, Invincible Youth from the previous aeon, is now the ultimate "thusness" (*de nyid*) Vajrasattva, and that the servant, Dan Phag, is now Vajradhāra, the "regent" (*rgyal tshab*) Vajrasattva. It becomes apparent in the following chapter that these two forms of Vajrasattva correspond respectively to the head of the sixth buddha family and the head of the *vajra* family, as well as to the *dharma**kāya* and the *sambhogakāya*.

Chapter twenty-three is a detailed description of the emanation process by which the buddha families arise out of emptiness to prepare the ground for the taming activities. Chapter twenty-four brings us to the first of the four activities that were standard in the later tantric ritual materials—pacification, expansion,

overpowering, and wrath (*zhi ba*, *rgyas pa*, *dbang gis*, *drag po*).<sup>91</sup> First an emanation of Śākyamuni is sent out, to no avail. Then Hayagriva is again dispatched, to perform the expanding activity. This time Hayagriva only pretends to retreat from Rudra's threats, while in fact transforming into a desireable snack that Rudra quickly devours. From within Rudra's belly, the Tathāgata expands his body immensely, bursting out through the top of Rudra's head and through the soles of his feet. This causes Rudra such agony as to purify him, to prepare him for his eventual subjugation. Yet Hayagriva himself is not able to perform this final deed, so he withdraws.

Once again, a meeting is called by the buddhas to discuss the need to perform the last two activities. The discussion ends with the emanation of the menacing Che-mchog (Skt. *Mahottara*) Heruka for this purpose. Thus for the *Sūtra*, Che-mchog is the wrathful aspect of the sixth family of the ultimate Vajrasattva. Within him are contained all the other wrathful buddhas.

In chapter twenty-six, the buddhas transform the servant-of-old, Dan Phag, into Vajrapāṇi, to direct the proceedings. Vajrapāṇi appoints Hayagriva to go to Laṅka to act as the witness for what is to come. Then all the buddhas focus their attentions into a single point (the *rdzogs-pa chen-po*, explains Gñubs-chen),

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<sup>91</sup> This foursome certainly draws upon the similar set of three activities found in Vedic ritual. The *Atharva-veda* classifies rituals into those of *sānti* (for removing illness-causing beings [*bhuta*]), *abhicāra* (for subduing enemies and evil spirits), and *pauṣṭika* (for increasing wealth, happiness, and so forth.)

and Vajrapāṇi creates clouds of Vajrakilaya emanations, who descend upon the mountain in Lāṅka.

With chapter twenty-seven, the taming begins in earnest. It opens with a description of Rudra's palace, which is an anti-maṇḍala with Rudra and his queen, the goddess of desire, Krodhiśvarima, at the center surrounded by all his terrifying minions. When Rudra leaves home with his male retinue, the buddhas emanate forth the buddha, Vajrakumāra Bhurkumkūṭa ('Heaping Moles'), for the activity of overpowering. The emanation begins by eating all the sea of filth and blood surrounding Rudra's palace, thus purifying the ground. He then copulates with all the demonesses and goddesses remaining there, and they give birth to Buddhist emanations—the *gauris*, *piśacis*, and so forth—who later will replace them in the newly purified maṇḍala. Finally, the buddha takes on Rudra's likeness and appears before the queen, seduces her, and implants the seed-syllable *om* in her womb. All the clouds of Vajrakumāras also dissolve into her womb, and then Vajrapāṇi teaches the now overpowered queen and her servants the *Sūtra*. This completes the activity of overpowering.

Eventually Rudra returns home and senses that something has changed. His queen soothes his agitation with the news that his own son is soon to be born. With three resounding "hūṃ!"s, the great Yang-dag Heruka of the *vajra* family is born from the queen. Rudra gathers his army to him with threats and exhortations to fight. The hosts of Hayagriva, who are still watching from above,

perform their nine dances to empower Yang-dag Heruka, and the three herukas of body, speech and mind (*buddha*, *padma* and *vajra*) thunder their exhortations to defeat the demonic horde. This alone is enough to overwhelm the entire retinue, and Rudra is left alone, faced with Yang-dag.

Rudra makes a series of increasingly desperate attempts to fight, each of which is matched and surpassed by Yang-dag, until Rudra collapses in a stupor. The Heruka plunges a trident into Rudra's chest and swallows him whole. Inside, Rudra is purified and experiences the bliss of the *Gandhavyūha* buddha field and sees all the suffering he has caused. Then he is ejected through the Heruka's anus, and he pleads for the buddha to liberate him once and for all. He swears allegiance to the buddha and offers his entire retinue up to him.

In the short chapter twenty-eight Rudra tells his followers the errors of his ways and prays to the buddha for forgiveness. In chapter twenty-nine, Yang-dag teaches Rudra about his karma, and finally destroys him, "liberating" him into emptiness with a mantra. He then reconstitutes Rudra once more, now in a completely purified state.

Rudra is finally ready to receive the *Sūtra* empowerment, and this ritual is described in chapter thirty. At the end, Rudra is given his new name, Legs-Idan Nag-pa, and appointed as the main protector of the Gathered Great Assembly mandala (*tshogs chen 'dus pa*). In chapter thirty-one, the final chapter, all of Rudra's followers are also granted the empowerment. Each is raised to the level

of tantric realization appropriate to his/her capabilities and then given vows to remain stationed at the mandala's periphery as its protectors.

## VI. Weaving a tantric universe

Many of the tantric doctrines developed by the *Sūtra* were woven into the narrative of the Rudra myth. The most successful of these doctrinal systems was that of the nine vehicles. The image of a vehicle (Skt. *yāna*, Tib. *theg pa*) derives from much earlier Indian sūtras, in which a vehicle is a system of teachings that carries one along the path to enlightenment. Perhaps the most famous discussion of the image appears in chapter three of the *Lotus Sūtra*, where the question of whether there are one or three vehicles is addressed.<sup>92</sup> Kapstein has recently written that, "Though the metaphor of the vehicle as a spiritual path is certainly derived from Indian Buddhism, it is likely that the ninefold enumeration was a Tibetan innovation."<sup>93</sup> Other presentations of the nine vehicles had been attempted in Tibet before the *Sūtra*'s, but none was quite like it, neither structurally nor in its influence. Karmay, in his book *The Great Perfection*, was the first scholar to present some of these earlier Tibetan lists of the

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<sup>92</sup> Kern 1989 [1884], 72-92.

<sup>93</sup> Kapstein 2000, 13. Kapstein makes this statement at the beginning of a helpful study of various early presentations, though the *Sūtra*'s is not discussed. The question of whether or not the *Sūtra* and its circle of related tantras were of Tibetan origin is addressed in Appendix One of the present study.

nine vehicles that appear in the Dunhuang literature.<sup>94</sup> None of these attempts agreed on how these nine vehicles should be listed; the *Sūtra* may have been the first source to present them as they appear in the later tradition.<sup>95</sup> The Rnying-ma-pa later adopted the *Sūtra*'s version, and their discussions of the nine vehicles almost always cite the *Sūtra* as the source for their scheme.

Karmay, in the same study, suggests that the earliest presentation of any sort may be the one found in the Dunhuang text, Pelliot tibétain 489. As evidence of its antiquity, he points to its unique classification structure. He notes two elements in particular—its peculiar subdivision of the last three categories into four elements each<sup>96</sup> and its inclusion of the vehicles of humans and of gods—and he adds that PT 489's vehicles of humans and gods "have no parallels in other versions of the *theg pa dgu* of the rNying ma pa tradition."<sup>97</sup> In fact, these worldly vehicles do appear throughout the *Sūtra* empowerment literature.<sup>98</sup> In

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<sup>94</sup> Karmay 1988, 146-151.

<sup>95</sup> Namely, the vehicles of *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, *bodhisattva*, *kriyā*, *caryā*, *yoga*, *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga*, and *atiyoga*.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 172, "Diagram I".

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 148. Karmay does point to one Bon-po source dating from the fourteenth century that combines humans and gods into a single vehicle. That similar nine vehicle schemes can be seen in the early Bon-po tradition (see Snellgrove 1988, 1356) is yet another clue to possible links between the early *Sūtra* tradition and Bon-po circles.

<sup>98</sup> Usually they are included as the non-Buddhist vehicles and are thus not counted as one (or two) of the nine vehicles. Sometimes, however, ten (see *Mdo dbang gi spyi don*, 242.4) or eleven (see *Rin chen phreng ba*, 442 and *Dkyil 'khor rgya mtsho*'s *'jug ngogs* 41, 27, both of which add the gods and humans vehicle to the nine vehicles and distinguish the Mādhyamika and Cittamātra within the bodhisattva vehicle), or occasionally, to make room for a humans and gods vehicle,

this regard at least, it seems that the *Sūtra*'s ritual tradition has remained more conservative than its doctrinal tradition (though in a somewhat chaotic way), retaining this aspect of the earliest nine vehicles prototypes. The tradition attributes the structure of the empowerment ritual to Slob-dpon Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, the teacher of Dharmabodhi.<sup>99</sup> If we accept this attribution, it may be that the empowerment ritual forms were settled before the *Sūtra* was written (or at least before it was widely adopted), at a time when the nine vehicles were still flexible.

The *Sūtra* presents its nine vehicles system in chapter forty-four. The description begins:

The objectives of arrogant beings always appear as three: craving for desireable objects, certain release, and being extremely difficult to tame; thus there are three [types of] disciples. The three energies of these arrogant types are natures that have appeared since the very beginning: the continuous wheel, ascertaining the ultimate meaning, and the magical display arising obviously. Three inconceivable means manifest for these arrogant types. They are in total: natural forces, the means of antidotes, and cutting the karmic continuum.<sup>100</sup>

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two Buddhist vehicles are combined (as in the early Kah-thog tradition's *Sūtra* empowerment rituals—see *ibid.*, 234.1) or one of the Buddhist vehicles is simply removed (as is the case in the apparently early but unattributed *Mdo dbang gi lag len zab mo*, 395-396, where *ubhaya tantra* disappears).

<sup>99</sup> The history of the empowerment ritual will be addressed more fully in Chapter Three.

<sup>100</sup> *Mdo*, 348.5-7. *gang zhig 'degs pa'i yul rnams la/gsum du nges par snang ba ni/dod la zhen dang nges par 'byung/gdul dka' drag pos gdul bya gsum/gang gis 'degs pa'i rtsal gsum ni/khor lo rgyun dang don dam nges/cho 'phrul mingon par 'byung ba gsum/rang bzhin ye nas snang ba yin/ji ltar 'degs pa'i thabs rnams ni/bsam gyis mi khyab gsum nyid du/snang ba de nyid gang yin pa/rang bzhin shugs dang gnyan po'i thabs/las rgyud gcod pa 'ba' zhig go.*

Thus we are told there are three kinds of disciples, for whom three kinds of vehicles manifest, which use three means for training those disciples.

The first type of vehicle is that of the *continuous wheel* ('*khor lo rgyun*), which appears for those who are attached to the objects of the desire realm ('*dod la zhen pa*). It uses natural forces (*rang bzhin shugs*) to tame the desires for momentary pleasures. What follows is a discussion of how nature provides the disciple with three things that satisfy his/her needs to progress towards enlightenment: birth, sustenance, and support (*skye, 'tsho, rten*). This works simultaneously on five levels, listed by order of increasing subtlety. First, because all things come from the five physical elements, the buddhas are arising all the time as whatever is wanted. Second, space provides the opening for everything else. Earth gives a firm ground for beings and plants. Water is pliant, clear, constantly flowing and quenching. Fire is warm, bright, and rising upwards. Wind is unobstructed, unabiding, formless, powerful and scattering. Third, each element brings beings to enlightenment: Space is the all-pervading opening for appearance and emptiness. Earth is everywhere in the sphere of Mahāyāna. Water is pure calm-abiding. Fire is insight. Wind scatters the objects of consciousness. Fourth, these five elements can also be experienced as the five primordial buddhas. And fifth, the discussion ends with the final characteristic that is most useful in all five elements: Nothing is really happening, so

everything is already enlightened.<sup>101</sup> In the Rudra myth, this natural vehicle seems to be what Invincible Youth was teaching in the previous aeon. Though such a reading is not made explicit, it is consistent with how the rest of the myth carries Rudra through all the other vehicles.

Rudra's mythic journey next brings us to the third kind of vehicle, that of the *magical display arising obviously* (*cho 'phrul mngon par 'byung ba*), which manifests for those disciples who are extremely difficult to tame (*gdul dka' drag po*).<sup>102</sup> This vehicle is designed to cut the karmic continuum of those benighted beings (*las ngan las rgyun gcod pa*) who are intensely engrossed in the three poisons of desire, ignorance and anger. This is accomplished by means of the apocalyptic aeons leading up to the final conflagration at the end of the universe. The crescendo of suffering experienced in these apocalyptic aeons cause many to reflect upon, and feel regret for, their earlier misdeeds. In this sense, these aeons are the buddhas' final effort to help those who are so stubbornly benighted that they have not been liberated before this late date. Since everything is "liberated" (i.e. destroyed) in this final destruction, these aeons can be understood as the wrathful emanations of the five buddha families. First comes a series of three

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<sup>101</sup> Nus-Idan (*Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 54, 475.2-476.4) ends his commentary on this by pointing out that each of these five levels brings the disciple further up through the vehicles as follows: (1) ordinary beings and tirthikas, (2) śrāvakas and *pratyekabuddhas*, (3) *kriyā yoga*, (4) *Mādhyamika* and *Cittamātra*, (5) *mahāyoga* and *anuyoga*. But he adds that this way of thinking is not found anywhere below *anu-ati* (of the triad, *anu-mahā*, *anu-anu*, and *anu-ati*) and will not be understood by those who adhere to the teachings on karma.

aeons: one of famine, one of plague, and one of war (*mu ge bskal pa, nad bskal pa, mtshon cha'i bskal pa*). These last respectively for three years, three months, and three days, as time speeds up to the vanishing point and the final aeons of fire, water, wind and space.

All this is exactly what Rudra underwent at the end of his extended sojourn in the hells. In his case, however, he was so evil that "even when all the others had been destroyed, he continued to take rebirth."<sup>103</sup> Apparently even the experience of apocalypse was insufficient, though it was apparently enough to shock him out of the hells and into rebirth as a demon.

From this low rung on the ladder of rebirths, Rudra climbs up and eventually takes birth in Lanka. From this point, the story can be seen to represent the last of the three types of vehicles mentioned above, the vehicle of *ascertaining the ultimate meaning* (*don dam nges pa*), which manifests for those who are renunciates (*nges par 'byung ba*). It works by means of antidotes (*gnyen po'i thabs*), and here are found the more well-known nine vehicles.

It is significant that at this point in the narrative, after Rudra's birth on Earth but before his climb to power, chapter twenty-one is inserted, which introduces the various kinds of mistaken views. Here we see the influence of another system for presenting the vehicles, one that is described in chapter sixty-

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<sup>102</sup> Discussing the third vehicle second like this not only matches Rudra's progress; it is also how Kah-thog Dam-pa Bde-gshegs presents them in his *Theg pa spyi bcings*.

eight of the *Sūtra*. This alternate system arranges all the vehicles, from gods and humans through *atiyoga*, according to corresponding mistaken views.<sup>104</sup> Because it is relevant to the nine vehicles, which are gathered under the larger vehicle of ascertaining the ultimate meaning, this system of mistaken views is introduced at this point in the mythic narrative, just as Rudra is born into the human realm.

With chapter twenty-two, we return to Rudra's deeds. Next Rudra has to defeat the vehicles of gods and humans. As he does so his power continues to grow, and he is faced with the occupants of the nine vehicles of Buddhism. The *Sūtra*'s presentation of the nine vehicles in chapter forty-four arranges them into three groups of three. First, the vehicle leading to the source of suffering (*kun 'byung 'dren pa'i theg pa*), or the second noble truth, contains the *śravaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *bodhisattva* vehicles. The vehicle of awareness through asceticism (*dka' thub rig byed theg pa*) contains the outer yogas of *kriyā*, *ubhaya*, and *yoga*. And the vehicle of methods of overpowering (*dbang bsgyur thabs kyi theg pa*) has the three inner yogas of *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga*. These are not all represented individually in the myth. Instead, Rudra defeats the *śravakas*,

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<sup>103</sup> *Mdo*, 159.4. 'jig pa de dag gis dde dag gang stongs na yang/gzhan dag gang 'jig pa'i dus su yang der skye ba len par 'gyur ro.

<sup>104</sup> According to Gnubs-chen (*Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 261.3) there are eight mistaken views listed together with their respective karmic effects. The myth as it stands in the root text, however, seems to list nine (*Mdo*, 163.1-5). Nus-Idan (*Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 53, 652.4), when quoting Gnubs-chen here, simply changes his "eight" to "nine". This discrepancy may well relate to the difference between two classification systems, one that appears in chapter sixty-eight of the *Sūtra* and one in chapter thirteen of the *Guhagarbha-tantra*. This disagreement is discussed at length in chapter two of this dissertation. It also should be noted that the interruption by chapter twenty-

personified by monks—"little children," as he calls them, "slaves to slinging their robes over their shoulders."<sup>105</sup> The next five vehicles, presumably through *yoga tantra*, are represented by Hayagriva in his first, unsuccessful visit. The *Sūtra's* presentation of these first six vehicles in chapter forty-four is consistent with subsequent nine vehicles literature.

Finally Rudra reaches the highest three vehicles of secret mantra (*gsang sngags*)—*mahāyoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga*—with their four activities of pacification, expansion, overpowering, and wrath.<sup>106</sup> Thus the entire story of Rudra's subjugation can be seen as a mythic representation of the nine vehicles as they are presented in chapter forty-four.

The two last chapters of the myth describe the empowerment ceremony. In a certain sense, this can be seen as a continuation of Rudra's ascent from the hells, for the empowerments he receives lift him through increasingly subtle levels of realization. Woven into the narrative description of the empowerment is another of the *Sūtra's* doctrinal systems—the five yogas.<sup>107</sup> These are a tantric

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one here perfectly matches the discussion of the vehicles that appears in Dam-pa Bde-gsherg's 12<sup>th</sup> c. work, the *Theg pa spyi bcings* (see for example, p.152).

<sup>105</sup> *Mdo*, 172. 4. *bu chung gos zu phrag la khol*.

<sup>106</sup> The *Sūtra's* position vis-à-vis the *mahā-anu-ati* triad is an important but complex issue that is not entirely relevant to the purposes of the present chapter. For a discussion of this topic, see Appendix Five.

<sup>107</sup> *Mdo*, 233.6-234.1. The five yogas are as follows: The yoga of aspiration ('dun pa'i sems pa'i rnal 'byor), the yoga of opening the great lineage (*rigs chen 'byed pa*), the yoga of the great confirmation (*dbugs chen 'byin pa*), the yoga of attaining the great prophecy (*lung chen thob pa*), the yoga of perfecting the great dynamism (*rtsal chen rdzogs pa*). The number of yogas can be expanded, for practitioners of high, middling or low capacity, into five, ten or forty. The whole system is most

re-reading of the five paths of the Mahāyāna. Throughout the *Sūtra*, they are associated with a new set of ten levels, which also mirror the standard set in the non-tantric literature.<sup>108</sup> As with the “common” five paths and ten levels, these new, “uncommon” ones mark the tantric practitioner’s progress on the path towards buddhahood. Gnubs-chen explains that, “The uncommon come only on the path of secret mantra, though they do not contradict the teaching on the common stages.”<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, he goes on to explain that these uncommon yogas and levels bring the practitioner higher than the common five paths and ten levels of the *bodhisattva* vehicle which cannot purify the most subtle obscurations. Chapter fifteen tells us that the five buddhas first attained enlightenment by climbing the common levels, then rested for a number of aeons before traversing the uncommon tantric levels. The first set, we are told, was accomplished primarily for their own welfare, while the second set was entirely for others, in order to manifest the tantric teachings.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the highest

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extensively worked out in chapter sixty-one, where all forty yogas are presented according to their correspondence to the ten levels. Dharmāśri (*Spyi don*, 146-8) lists several conflicting opinions on how the various empowerments correspond to the five yogas.

<sup>108</sup> Listed as follows: (i) ‘gyur ba ma nges pa’i sa, (ii) brten pa gzhi’i sa, (iii) gal chen sbyong ba’i sa, (iv) bslab pa rgyun gyi sa, (v) bsod nams rten gyi sa, (vi) brten pas khyad par du ‘gro ba’i sa, (vii) ‘bras bu skye ba’i sa, (viii) gnas pa mi ‘gyur ba’i sa, (ix) brdal ba chos nyid, (x) rdzogs pa ci chibs kyi sa. The correspondence between levels and yogas is also found in chapter sixty-one, *Mdo*, 471. Note that the levels and the yogas appear in all the four sūtras. They are listed at the end of chapter one in the root tantra, *Kun ’dus rig pa’i rgyud*.

<sup>109</sup> Gnubs-chen, Vol. 2, 255.4-5.

<sup>110</sup> *Mdo*, 77.1-78.1. Also see Dam-pa’s explanation of this chapter in his *Dka’ ‘grel*, 238.2-3.

three levels, which correspond to the fifth path, are only attained on the vehicles of *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga* respectively.<sup>111</sup>

The empowerment ceremony performed for Rudra and his followers is described in some detail; it was regarded as the same ritual as that performed by Tibetans in the tenth century. Every performance of the ceremony is thus a reenactment of this primordial ritual performed for Rudra and his demonic horde. In this way, the *Sūtra*'s empowerment ritual was also woven into the myth.<sup>112</sup> The “*Sūtra* empowerment” (*mdo dbang*), as it came to be known, was the third crucial element in the *Sūtra*'s central project to systematize all of Buddhist tantra, the other two being the myths and the nine vehicles scheme.

In the empowerment ritual we begin to see the extent of the *Sūtra*'s vision for its grand tantric system. The *Sūtra* divides its presentation of the empowerments into two parts—the previously arisen empowerments (*snong byung*) and the subsequent empowerments (*rjes 'jug*). The previously arisen empowerments are those that took place in the buddha-fields in timeless time, while the subsequent empowerments are the ordinary ones received by us latter

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<sup>111</sup> Of all the *Sūtra*'s major doctrines, these two sets seem to have had the least influence upon the wider Tibetan tradition. Yet for most of today's traditionally-trained scholars, they constitute the entirety of what is known about the *Sūtra*. In today's Rnying-ma monastic colleges (*bshad grwa*), these ten levels and five yogas are taught in the context of the *Sdom gsum* by Mngā'-ris Paṇ-chen. One recent graduate of the Rnying-ma Institute in Bylakuppe, South India told me that the impression left upon him was of a strange system bearing no resemblance to the rest of Rnying-ma doctrine. It seems that the *Sūtra*'s extensive influences upon the Rnying-ma school have been on a level so basic to have been forgotten. Today's rote study of these levels and paths (*sa lam*) categories amounts to a strangely empty tribute. More will be said of this in Chapter Three.

day humans. The former are described in chapter thirteen in order to engender faith in the *Sūtra* empowerment system.<sup>113</sup> Gnubs-chen tells us that these empowerments were also what the prince Siddhārtha received at the moment of his enlightenment.<sup>114</sup>

The subsequent empowerments are presented in chapter seventy. The discussion is organized according to eight topics.<sup>115</sup> Concern focuses on ensuring that the appropriate empowerments be given to each disciple. Gnubs-chen points out, for example, that a disciple on the first yoga (of aspiration) should not be granted any empowerments other than one for basic study. Thus the disciples are to be assessed in terms of the five yogas and ten levels outlined above.

Each empowerment also corresponds to one of the nine vehicles. The *Sūtra* empowerment ceremony was (and remains today one of) the most

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<sup>112</sup> Chapter Three of this study will address the details of the empowerment ceremony.

<sup>113</sup> Dharmāśri, *Spyi don*, 139.3. Dharmāśri notes an opening prayer from an unspecified empowerment ritual manual (*dbang chog*) that links the previously arisen empowerments to the subsequent empowerments: “Just as the great beings of the highest level made offerings and requests to the Buddha Vajradhāra,...” (Ibid., 141.6. *Sangs rgyas rdo rje dzin pa la/sa mtha'i sems dpa' chen po yis/ji ltar mchod cing zhus pa ltar.*)

<sup>114</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 158. *Guhyasamāja* tells a similar story of the Buddha’s enlightenment in terms of the four empowerments (see Wayman and Lessing, 35-9). It is interesting to note that *Guhyasamāja* also has, in a sense, both the “previously arisen” and the “subsequent” empowerments. There, Śākyamuni actually receives the four empowerments prior to taking birth on Earth and then he goes through the motions of becoming enlightened and receiving the same four again on Earth. In both cases, there seems to be a need for an original or archetypal performance of the empowerment ceremony in the buddha-fields, upon which the subsequent historical performances are based.

<sup>115</sup> (1) the causes, (2) the time for receiving the empowerment, (3) assessing which empowerments should be received, (4) the proclamations of what can be attained, (5) potential hindrances to the ritual, (6) signs of attainment, (7) methods for attaining, (8) the mistake of teaching without first receiving the empowerment.

elaborate of its kind. Eight hundred and thirty-one “branch” empowerments are typically granted, gathered into thirty-six “root” empowerments, which are, in turn, gathered into four “empowerment streams” (*dbang gi chu bo*). The first, “outer” empowerment stream grants initiation into the first six vehicles, from *śrāvaka* up through *yoga* tantra. Then the “inner” stream grants empowerment for *mahāyoga*, the “accomplishment” stream for *anuyoga*, and the “secret” stream for *atiyoga*. Thus disciples could be initiated into any or all of the nine vehicles, depending on their abilities.

At the center of the empowerment ceremony stands (literally a construction of) the main *maṇḍala* for the *Sūtra*’s tantric system. The Gathered Great Assembly is a highly unusual *maṇḍala*, for it has nine stories,<sup>116</sup> representing the nine vehicles. In this way disciples could be led upwards through the *maṇḍala*’s levels as far as their abilities warranted.<sup>117</sup> The *maṇḍala* too is woven into the Rudra-subjugation myth. In the closing scene of the myth, at the end of the empowerment ceremony, Rudra and his followers take vows to remain as the protectors to this *maṇḍala*. Thus every piece of the *Sūtra*’s system is reflected in the others.

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<sup>116</sup> The *maṇḍala*’s structure is described on *Mdo*, 554.4-7.

<sup>117</sup> See *Mun pa'i go cha* 51, 451.4 and 453.1, where Gnyen-chen points this out.

## VII. Conclusions

The scale of the *Sūtra*'s accomplishment is difficult to appreciate. Whichever of its strategic threads one follows, one is quickly lead into the intricate weave of the entirety, left dazzled by its complexity. Only after some time is spent delving into each of the details does the larger picture start to emerge. The King Dza myth and the Rudra myth were tied together as two visions (*byung tshul*) of a single event—Che-mchog/Vajrapāṇi's original transmission of tantra atop Mt. Malaya. Inscribed within these myths were all the basic elements of tantra—the nine vehicles and their corresponding empowerments, configured into a series of initiations into the nine-leveled mandala. And within the mandala were placed Rudra and his followers, all the buddhas and *bodhisattvas* arranged on each floor for each vehicle, and Che-mchog atop the entire mountain-palace of the Gathered Great Assembly.

This impressive tantric universe represents a significant attempt on the part of early Tibetans to make sense of the flood of tantras arriving from India. The success the system enjoyed is attested by its ubiquity within the Rnying-ma school, the one Buddhist school that traces its roots back to this early period of Tibetan Buddhism. The *Sūtra* became the authoritative source for some of the Rnying-ma-pa's most fundamental forms of self-understanding. Yet today this influential work goes almost entirely unread, and its lineage is in danger of dying out. The *Sūtra*'s paradoxical mix of success and failure can only be

understood through an examination of its metamorphosis over the past 1000 years. We have seen that the *Sūtra*'s initial function placed it at the center of a tantric universe. Over the ensuing centuries, its influence spread forth from this center, as its vision pervaded the Rnying-ma school. But this process also entailed a diffusion of its singular value. As we turn to the evolution of the *Sūtra*'s role in Tibet, the manner of this dissipation should become clearer.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

## **CODIFICATION**

After Gnubs-chen there is an unfortunate gap in our available sources; from the early tenth century until the mid-twelfth nothing survives. Only with the writings of Kah-thog Dam-pa Bde-gshergs (1122-1192) do we discern the *Sūtra*'s progress. Dam-pa Bde-gshergs was the founder of Kah-thog monastery, and he used the *Sūtra* to organize his new institution's monastic curriculum. Of all the extant literature on the *Sūtra*, Dam-pa's writings are the most systematic. They consist of outlines (*bsdus don*), structural analyses (*khog dbub*), doxographies (*theg pa spyi bcings*) and clarifications of difficult points (*dka' grel*). In this chapter, what remains of Dam-pa's works will be examined for what they tell us about the *Sūtra* during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and about its function in the early Kah-thog tradition.

### **I. Codification in eleventh century Tibet**

Dam-pa's systematization of the *Sūtra* must be understood within the context of his time. The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw a second wave of Buddhist teachings arrive from India. Hundreds of new tantras, replete with the latest

ritual technologies, were being imported, and within Tibetan society, they brought with them unprecedented power and prestige. The new tantras became highly valued commodities that Tibetans would go to great lengths and expense to procure and control. Whoever held exclusive rights to a given ritual system would receive offerings of gold or favors from those seeking to gain access to their secrets. Competition over these new ritual systems was fierce. Hagiographic sources depict Tibetans vying for exclusive control over particular teachings, resorting to slander, bribery or even violence to achieve their aims.<sup>1</sup>

Tensions often arose between the translators of the new tantras and the older families whose reputations were still deeply tied to the tantric systems dating from the earlier spread of Buddhism into Tibet. Accusations began to fly that many of these older tantras were apocryphal Tibetan compositions.<sup>2</sup> It became crucial to a tantra's legitimacy, and thus to its success, that no Tibetan be associated with its composition; the best proof of authenticity was the existence of a Sanskrit original. Of course, in India the modes of producing "genuine" tantras attributed to the Buddha—whether by direct composition or revelatory vision—were similar to those used in Tibet, but when the authors or visionaries

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<sup>1</sup> For one example of a Tibetan ensuring his exclusive control of a given system, see Stearns' translation of 'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba's biography, in which the Tibetan translator pays 500 ounces of gold to the Indian master, Gayadhara, so that the latter would never transmit the *Lam 'bras* teachings to any other Tibetan (Stearns 2001, 93).

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the two most well-known examples of such accusations are those made by Mgos-khug-pa Lhas-btsas and by Zhi-ba 'Od. Both date from the eleventh century and are discussed in my analysis of the four root sūtras of *anuyoga*, found in Appendix Three of this work.

were Indian, the results were deemed legitimate. India had become the sole source for authentic Buddhism.

This is not to say there were no Tibetan standards for authenticity before the eleventh century; they were simply less uniformly applied. Post-tenth century Tibet experienced a tightening of standards, reflecting an increased centralization and public awareness of Buddhism in Tibet. During the imperial period, and even more so in the dark period, Tibetan compositions tended to be deemed authentic as a result of a lack of central control (despite the court's attempts to the contrary) and because the popular understanding of Buddhism was still widely variable and relatively undeveloped. By the end of the dark period, Tibetan society had been converted to Buddhism at the level of everyday discourse, and promoting one's own composition in a remote valley was no longer so easy. As Tibetans emerged from the dark period, earlier works were often reformulated as canonical tantras, with all the ("Thus did I hear...") rhetorical requirements of such a work.<sup>3</sup> But such tactics were not enough. With the heightened standards of legitimacy, Tibetans needed a new strategy for justifying their literary innovations. Enter revelation.

Tibetans began to match the newly translated tantras with their own, equally creative, revelations of *gter-ma* cycles. These teachings, usually tantric in character, were revealed to the discoverer (*gter ston*) thanks to his karmic

connections to a certain great Buddhist personage of the past, usually Padmasambhava or some other figure from the imperial period.<sup>4</sup> *Gter-ma* offered those Tibetans who maintained strong ancestral ties to the earlier periods with a response to the new innovations coming from India. Here was a technology with which Tibetans could update their spiritual inheritance to include the new ritual techniques appearing in the new *anuttarayoga* tantras, and even sometimes to surpass the Indian innovations with their own creations.

Those who adhered to the new *gter-ma* shared with the followers of the early translation tantras a certain nostalgia for the imperial period. This was their common ideology, and it was the primary factor that united them under the banner of the Rnying-ma-pa ('ancient ones'). It is important, however, to distinguish the followers of *gter-ma* from those of the early translations, for their respective responses to the new developments in tantra were quite different. While there was certainly overlap between the two groups, the early translation adherents' approach was generally more conservative and remained suspicious of the innovations in both the new translation tantras and the *gter-ma* discoveries.

At the forefront of this conservative faction was the famous Zur clan, headed by a series of three great figures—Zur the Elder (Zur-che), his nephew,

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<sup>3</sup> Germano notes that such a process seems to have led to the famous *rdzogs-chen* tantra, the *Kun byed rgyal po* (Germano 1994, 219).

<sup>4</sup> Occasionally other figures might be used. Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, for example, was purported to have hidden certain wrathful *gter-ma* for later discovery. For a list of *gter-ma* concealers, see Gyatso 1993, 98n.

Zur the Younger (Zur-chung, 1014-1074), and his grandson, Zur Shākya Seng-ge (also called Sgro-phug-pa, 1074-1134). Zur the Elder, considered the founder of the line, is said to have studied directly under Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes and Gnubs-chen's closest disciple, Gnubs Yon-tan Rgya-mtsho, and he became the principal holder of our *Sūtra* lineage. He also studied many of the important early tantras, including the *Guhyagarbha* and the *Kun byed rgyal po*. Under the stewardship of the early Zurs, these three tantras—the *Sūtra*, the *Guhyagarbha* and the *Kun byed rgyal po*—were gathered together as a triad that became known as the *mdo-rgyud-sems-gsum* ('sūtra-tantra-mind triad'). The Zurs established these three works as the root tantras of *anuyoga*, *mahāyoga*, and *atiyoga* respectively, so that in their newly codified system, the *Sūtra* became one of the fundamental early translation tantras. The Zurs also referred to the early tantras collectively as the "Spoken Teachings" (*bka' ma*), which they juxtaposed to the new revealed teachings (*gter ma*). The Spoken Teachings were so closely linked to the Zur clan at this time that they even became known as the "Zur spoken class" (*bka' sde zur pa*).

In codifying the Spoken Teachings, the early Zurs seem to have prided themselves on conservation. They not only focused on the older tantras of the Spoken Teachings, but they resisted applying new interpretations to these works.<sup>5</sup> The most well-known disagreement of this sort surrounds the

interpretation of the *Guhyagarbha-tantra*. Later Rnying-ma exegetes came to distinguish two lines of thought in relation to this issue—the way of Zur (*Zur-lugs*) and the way of Rong-Klong (*Rong-Klong-lugs*). The former represented the Zurs' conservative reading of the *Guhyagarbha* from a *mahāyoga* standpoint, and the latter the creative re-interpretations of the tantra through the lens of later *rdzogs-chen* developments.

Unfortunately, no writings by Zur the Elder or the Younger are currently available, so at present our knowledge of their activities must be deduced from other materials such as later commentaries and hagiographies. In any case, it is clear that the *Sūtra* played a central role in their codification of the Spoken Teachings. When Zur the Elder founded the clan seat in central Tibet at 'Ug-palung, for example, he had the *Sūtra*'s maṇḍala painted on the front wall of the main temple.<sup>6</sup> He also seems to have been the first to identify the Spoken Teachings as a distinct set. Dharmaśri tells us that in creating the Spoken Teachings, Zur the Elder “distinguished the root tantras and the explanatory tantras for the various teaching cycles, collected the root texts and the commentaries, bound together the tantra and *sādhana*s, and wrote down the

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<sup>5</sup> The Zurs conservative outlook, for example, probably motivated Lha-rje Yang-khyed's criticisms of Rong-zom Paṇḍita, who was known for his *rdzogs-chen* re-readings of the *Guhyagarbha-tantra*. More will be said of this debate below, in section three of the present chapter. It is also worth noting that Zur the Elder may well have inherited some of his conservatism from Gnubs-chen himself. On Gnubs-chen's resistance to the new developments in *rdzogs-chen* thought, see Appendix Five.

<sup>6</sup> *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 201.6.

*sadhanas* and ritual manuals.”<sup>7</sup> In order to understand more precisely the *Sūtra*’s role in the codification of the Spoken Teachings, however, we must turn to the writings of one of the most famous inheritors of the early Zur tradition, Kah-thog Dam-pa Bde-gshegs.

## II. Dam-pa Bde-gshegs

Dam-pa was born Dge-ba ‘Phel, in eastern Tibet in the water tiger year of the second *rab byung* cycle (1122). His father was a tantric specialist named Gtsang-pa Dpal-grags<sup>8</sup> of the Sga clan, and his mother was Gtsang-mo Rin-chen Rgyan; apparently both were from the central Tibetan region of Gtsang. He had three brothers and one sister, the eldest of whom was none other than Phag-mo Grub-pa Rdo-rje Rgyal-po, one of the three great Bka'-brgyud students of Gam-po-pa. Some works, including Dudjom Rinpoche’s recent history,<sup>9</sup> have Phag-mo Grub-pa and Dam-pa Bde-gshegs as cousins, but this seems to be a mistake.<sup>10</sup> In any

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<sup>7</sup> *Spyi don*, 67.5-6. *rtsa rgyud bshad rgyud du phye/ rtsa ba dang 'grel par bsdebs/ rgyud dang sgrub thabs su sbrel/ sgrub thabs dang chog yig tu bsdebs nas bshad sgrub gyi bstan pa rgyas par spel.*

<sup>8</sup> Here I am following the biography found in ‘Jam-dbyangs Rgyal-mtshan’s (born 1929) recent work, *Rgyal ba Kah thog pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus*. Dudjom Rinpoche provides the slightly different spelling for Dam-pa’s father—*Sga-rigs Gtsang-pa Dpal-sgra*.

<sup>9</sup> Dudjom 1991, 689.

<sup>10</sup> A discussion of this discrepancy appears in the above-noted *history of Kah thog*. There (*Kah thog lo rgyus*, 20), the author concludes that, “In some earlier histories Phag-mo Grub-pa is said to be [Dam-pa’s] maternal cousin. However, on this point I take as the authoritative source the *Grub mchog rjes dran*, a biography by Dam-pa Rin-po-che’s direct disciple, Dge-slong Lding-poba.” *Sngon gyi lo rgyus rnams las rje phag mo grub pa dang yum spun du gyur tshul bshad kyang/’dir*

case, theirs was a close relationship, for at nine years of age Dam-pa went to live with Phag-mo Grub-pa at the island monastery of Dpal-gyi Chos-'khor. While there, he took the bodhisattva vows and studied various topics, with particular emphasis given to Mahāyāna works like the *Samādhirāja*, *Samdhinirmocana*, *Laṅkāvatāra*, and the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. He also received some tantric empowerments and instructions, most notably for *Cakrasamvara*. Kah-thog monastery would eventually become a Rnying-ma institution, but Dam-pa studied widely, even for his day, and *Cakrasamvara* appears to have been particularly influential for him. This is perhaps not surprising given his close Bka'-brgyud ties to both Phag-mo Grub-pa and the first Karma-pa, Dus-gsum Mkhyen-pa.

Even in their teens, Dam-pa and Phag-mo Grub-pa were involved in the politics of the region. We read that during this time, "Together with Lama Phag-grub, through directly wrathful intervention, he decisively 'liberated' an enemy of the teachings, the king of Me-nyag."<sup>11</sup>

As he continued in his education, Dam-pa turned to the tantras, studying under Byams-pa Rnam-dag for several years before finally leaving Khams for central Tibet at nineteen. There he received teachings from the greatest masters of his time, including the *Lam-'bras* and *Hevajra* from Bsod-rnam Rtse-mo and

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*chos rje dam pa rin po che'i dngos slob dge slong lding po ba'i mdzad pa'i rnam thar grub mchog rjes dran 'di khungs btsun du byas te bris pa'o.*

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 21. *bla ma phag grub dang lhan du drag po mn̄gon spyod kyis bstan dgra me nyag rgyal po mn̄gos su bsgral*. I have been unable to determine just what event this passage refers to, but around this

*Cakrasamvara* both from Rwa Lo-tsā-ba's direct disciple, Kam Lo-tsā-ba, and from Ras-chung-pa. At twenty-four he took ordination under the Rnying-ma-pa, Byang-chub Seng-ge, receiving the name Shes-rab Seng-ge. It was soon after this that he met 'Dzam-ston 'Gro-ba'i Mgon-po, one of Zur Shākyā Seng-ge's main disciples, from whom he received the Spoken Teachings triad of *Guhyagarbha*, the Great Perfection Mind Class (*sems-sde*), and the four root sūtras (*rtsa ba'i mdo bzhi*).<sup>12</sup> During these years, Dam-pa's fame began to spread through central Tibet.<sup>13</sup>

At the age of twenty-nine, Dam-pa is said to have received a prophecy from 'Dzam-ston that would change the course of his life. In this prophecy, 'Dzam-ston told him that he could take one of two paths: If he went into solitary

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time the Mi-nyag (Tanguts) were the under attack from all sides, from the Tibetans, the Chinese and (ultimately) the Mongols. On the Mi-nyag (or Xi-xia) dynasty, see Sperling 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>13</sup> In his *Gsan yig*, the fifth Dalai Lama makes the claim that Dam-pa also studied directly under Zur Shākyā Seng-ge himself. This contention may be supported by the fact that Dam-pa often cites Shākyā Seng-ge's oral teachings (e.g. *Lha rje sgro phug pa'i zhal nas...*) as the final arbiter on various points of controversy. However, if the commonly held dates for the two lamas in question are accepted (1122-1192 for Dam-pa and 1074-1134 for Shākyā Seng-ge, according to Gyurme Dorje's index in Dudjom 1988, Vol. 2), a direct relationship seems unlikely, particularly given that Dam-pa supposedly spent his youth studying in Khams. The Great Fifth's suggestion also contradicts the lineage traced by Dam-pa himself, in which he states that he studied under Sgro-phug-pa's two students, Lha-rje Smar and Rtsang pa. (*Yang khog dbub*, 49.5). Thus it is doubtful that Sgro-phug-pa taught Dam-pa directly, though his opinions clearly held considerable weight with the Kah-thog founder.

As discussed in Appendix Three, Lha-rje Smar appears to be the same as 'Dzam-ston, though I only think this because both are said to be Dam-pa's main teacher for the *Sūtra*. As for Dam-pa's other teacher, whom he calls Rtsang-pa, it could be Rtsang-pa Byi-ston, who is named as one of Sgro-phug-pa's disciples in Dudjom 1991, 649. The problem is that neither Lha-rje Smar/'Dzam-ston nor Rtsang-pa appear in Padma 'Phrin-las's *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*. In fact, the Kah-thog tradition is completely omitted from this much later work, an omission that is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

retreat, he would attain the highest level of enlightenment. If he returned to his birthplace in Khams and established a monastery in a place called Kah-thog, he would benefit many beings.

Dam-pa chose the latter path and soon left his teacher to make his way gradually back east. This journey included a particularly long stay at the newly established seat of the first Karma-pa, Dus-gsum Mkhyen-pa. While there, Dam-pa received the main Bka'-brgyud teachings and soon became an important disciple of the Karma-pa.<sup>14</sup> This relationship was surely helped by the fact that Dam-pa came from the same region as the Karma-pa and that his brother was Phag-mo Grub-pa. Together, these three lamas, travelling back-and-forth between their native Khams and central Tibet, brought an unprecedented influx of Buddhism into eastern Tibet. That Dus-gsum Mkhyen-pa was also active in Khams is evident from the monastery he established there called Karma Gdansa. Even so, compared with his two Bka'-brgyud associates, Dam-pa's activities were more focused in Khams. His importance to the region is clear from standard histories of Buddhism in Khams, which begin with Vairocana's exile to the region at the end of the eighth century, followed immediately by Dam-pa's founding of Kah-thog, some three and a half centuries later.

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<sup>14</sup> *Kah thog lo rgyus*, 23. *rje de'i slob ma gdugs thog stong gi gtso bor gyur*. This must be taken with a grain of salt however; compared to the Bka'-brgyud school's own lists of Dus-gsum Mkhyen-pa's students, Rnying-ma-pa claims of Dam-pa's importance to the first Karma-pa seem exaggerated. (My thanks to Andrew Quintman for this information.)

Dam-pa spent his mid-thirties travelling around Khams, acting as the court priest for the local kings, and ordaining hundreds of Buddhist monks. Eventually he gained particular favor from the Hor-po chieftain, Dpon Dge-lu,<sup>15</sup> who sent down some hundred Hor-po orphans (*kha lhags?*) to be ordained, agreeing also to sponsor the building of a temple, which would become Kah-thog monastery.

Thus Kah-thog was founded in Dam-pa's thirty-eighth year, in 1159 (the earth rabbit year of the third cycle). The account of its founding includes a battle between Dam-pa and the local Bon-po deity. It is interesting to see that Dam-pa used rituals deriving from Cakrasamvara to subdue this spirit.<sup>16</sup> When the central temple was complete, the statues were filled with relics, the nature of which provide some idea of how Dam-pa was positioning Kah-thog within the larger Tibetan Buddhist tradition. These included scriptures by Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra found at Bsam-yas, Sgro-phug-pa's robe, a tooth of Zur the Elder, Atiśa's hat, Gnubs-chen's waist dagger (*rked phur*), along with other more generic items such as a copy of the canon (*bka' 'gyur*) written in gold ink,<sup>17</sup> a golden vase, and so forth. If this story is to be believed, then Dam-pa's new

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<sup>15</sup> Hor is a term used to designate any number of northern peoples, whether Turks or Mongols. In any case, the person in question likely came from the regions to the north of Khams, around the border of Mongolia and northern A-mdo.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>17</sup> What the *bka' 'gyur* meant at this early date is unclear as such collections were not definitively gathered until the fourteenth century (Harrison 1996, 74).

tradition was focused on the Rnying-ma lineages right from the start, in particular those passing through the Gnubs and Zur families.<sup>18</sup>

The first major monastery in the region, Kah-thog seems to have enjoyed immediate success. Within two years, we are told, 1,000 monks were living nearby, and a summer college (*bshad-grwa*) and winter meditation center (*sgom-grwa*) were founded. Apparently linked to the establishment of these new institutes, it was right around this same time that a large ceremony was performed for the *Sūtra* tradition (*shin tu gsang ba 'dus pa mdo'i sgrub chen*).<sup>19</sup> Thus right from the beginning, the *Sūtra* played a central role in the establishment of the Kah-thog institution. It is likely that this was also the period when Dam-pa composed the works relevant to our present study.

### III. Analysis of the texts

The five extant works of Dam-pa are relatively short compared to the *Sūtra* and Gnubs-chen's massive commentary:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The question of whether Kah-thog was originally conceived of as a Rnying-ma or a Bka'-brgyud institution has yet to be addressed by western scholars. As noted above, Dam-pa was closely associated with other major Bka'-brgyud luminaries of his day and used Cakrasaṃvara rituals (which are famously associated with the Bka'-brgyud school) in subjugating the local spirits around Kah-thog. Upon closer inspection, one may well find that the Rnying-ma and Bka'-brgyud schools were not as clearly distinct as they came to be after the twelfth century.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>20</sup> The first four of these five works are collected in volume fifty-two of Dudjom Rinpoche's *Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, while the fifth, Dam-pa's *Theg pa spyi bcings*, has only recently resurfaced, appearing as an independent publication (along with a commentary by Kah-thog-pa

1. *Mdo phran khog dbub*—7 folio sides.
2. *'Dus pa mdo'i khog dbub legs bshad nyi ma'i snang ba*—47 folios sides.
3. *Mdo'i bsdus don*—146 folio sides.
4. *'Dus pa mdo'i dka' 'grel rdo rje'i tha ram 'byed pa'i lde'u mig*—72 folio sides.
5. *Theg pa spyi bcings*—32 pages (with 385 page commentary).

In all five texts, Dam-pa worked to consolidate the various commentaries that had proliferated over the previous two and a half centuries. In doing so, he drew heavily upon the Zur tradition from which his teacher, 'Dzam-ston/Lha-rje Smar, came. At the end of his longer *khog dbub* ('structural analysis')—#2 above, henceforth referred to as *Yang khog dbub*), Dam-pa traces what he considers the authoritative lineage out of the tangle of early *Sūtra* transmissions.

As we have seen, the eleventh and twelfth centuries brought intense competition between various Tibetan groups vying for religious authority. One's connection to an Indian master was of particular importance. Such a connection was relatively easy to prove for those following the new tantric systems that had arrived from India only recently, but for adherents of the old tantras whose ties to India had weathered the dark period, proof was more difficult. Thus around this time we begin to see an increasing concern among Tibetans to construct lineages tying them and their teachings back to India. This development mirrored precisely what was taking place among Chinese Buddhists to the east.

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Ye-shes Rgyal-mtshan). The latter work can also be found in volume fifty-eight of *Bka' ma rgyas pa* 2.

Griffith Foulk writes that, “It was in the late tenth and eleventh centuries... that the concept of the ch’an-tsung [lineage] first gained widespread acceptance in China and first had a major impact on the organization and operation of the Buddhist monastic institution.”<sup>21</sup> He goes on to explain that these lineages were, “intrinsically historical. That is to say, the very idea of the ch’an-tsung entailed a consciousness of history, and the means by which the idea was spread was the publication of quasi-historical records.” All of the above can also be said of Tibetan Buddhism during this same period. Thus it was crucial for Dam-pa, and the Zurs before him, to establish an unbroken lineage leading back to India, and he did so by writing a “quasi-historical record” of the *Sūtra*’s past.<sup>22</sup>

Dam-pa begins his lineage with King Dza, about whom we have learned in Chapter One. Dam-pa describes the king’s seven miraculous dreams and how Vajrapāṇi appeared before the king, to grant empowerment and to explain the tantras. Eventually King Dza teaches everything to his son, Indraputri, after whom the teaching passes to Nāgaputri, to Guhyaputri, and then to the Dog-King, Kukkurāja.<sup>23</sup> The latter teaches Ro-langs Bde-ba (a.k.a. Dga’-rab Rdo-rje), an important figure in the later Rnying-ma school, considered the first human

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<sup>21</sup> Foulk (undated), 86.

<sup>22</sup> The role of lineage in the *Sūtra* will be examined further in Chapter Four.

<sup>23</sup> The later tradition has Kukkurāja closer to King Dza. For example, see Dudjom 1991, 460, who is following Dharmasrī’s *Spyi don*. In fact, much of the Indian section of Dam-pa’s lineage was changed in the later tradition. One suspects the sway here of other lineages, though more research is required to work out the precise influences.

recipient of the *atiyoga* teachings. This contention clearly contradicts the *Sūtra*'s own claim for itself as, at least in part, an *atiyoga* work.<sup>24</sup> It seems that two competing narratives of *atiyoga*'s origin in the human realm were put forth in early Tibet—the *Sūtra*'s version, in which *atiyoga* was included with the other inner tantras of *mahāyoga* and *anuyoga* in the teaching atop Mt. Malaya, and the probably later but ultimately successful version, in which Dga'-rab Rdo-rje receives the *atiyoga* teachings directly from Vajrasattva. The latter was already known in Dam-pa's day, as it was used in the early *snying-thig* revelations and other twelfth century *atiyoga* traditions.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, Dam-pa does not explain his position on this potential contradiction.

From Dga'-rab Rdo-rje, Dam-pa traces the lineage through the king of Zahor, Prabhahasti, to the threesome of Shākya Seng-ge, Shākya Mu-tra, and Shākya Prabha. Shākya Seng-ge teaches Dhanarakṣita, after whom it passes

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<sup>24</sup> Again, on the early relationship between the *Sūtra* and *atiyoga*, see Appendix Five.

<sup>25</sup> This is a topic deserving further research. It is tempting to align the Dga'-rab Rdo-rje narrative with the newer *gter-ma* systems and the Malaya narrative with the Zurs' Spoken Teachings. However, the early *Rdo-rje zam-pa* commentaries follow the Dga'-rab Rdo-rje narrative, and the *Rdo-rje zam-pa* is widely considered part of the Spoken Teachings. Moreover, Dam-pa includes the *Rdo-rje zam-pa* in his list of *Sūtra*-related systems (*Khog dbub*, 8.4). This suggests that the *Rdo-rje zam-pa* may have been associated with a distinct community that was absorbed by the early Zurs into their Spoken Teachings canon, a conclusion that is supported by my research into the formation of the *klong-sde* section of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. Still, more research is required before such speculations can be anything but just that. The topic is also touched upon in a long quotation from Dharmāśri's *Spyi don* discussed, and partially translated, in section two of Chapter Five of the present work (see note 14 in particular).

through a small circle of Indian, Nepalese, and Tibetan teachers (a group discussed in Appendix Two), finally falling to Gnubs-chen.<sup>26</sup>

In Tibet, Dam-pa tells us, the *Sūtra* remained under the control of the Gnubs clan, passing from Gnubs-chen to Gnubs Yon-tan Rgya-mtsho, who then taught his own son, Gnubs Ye-shes Rgya-mtsho. From here, two separate lines emerge, converging again only in the person of Zur Shākya Seng-ge, the third of the early Zurs. The first line is the main Zur lineage;<sup>27</sup> the second is a little stranger, passing through the Mar-pa clan of Lho-brag.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dam-pa's presentation of this Indian section of the lineage appears in *Yang khog dbub*, 47.5-48.4.

<sup>27</sup> Gnubs Ye-shes Rgya-mtsho taught Rgya Blo-gros Byang-chub, who in turn taught Tho-gar Nam-mkha'. The latter's teaching career was divided into three phases. Early in life he taught the *Sūtra* to four brothers from Lho-brag, in mid-life he taught Zhu Bsod-nams Shākya, and in late-life he taught Zur-che, Lha-rje 'Ug-pa Lung-pa. Zur-che teaches Zur-chung (Lha-rje Bde-gshes Rgya-bo-pa), who teaches his "four pillars and eight beams," but especially Zur Shākya Senge (Sgro Phug-pa).

Regarding the names the four brothers taught by Tho-gar early in life, Dam-pa only writes, "Sna nam zhang yon la sogs pa...", but in Padma 'Phrin-las's *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar* (185) the full list can be found: (1) Sna-nam Zhang-yon, (2) Shangs kyi Stong-tshab 'Phags-pa Rgya-mtsho, (3) Sna-nam gyi Gar-chung Tshul-khrims Bzang-po, (4) 'U-yug-pa Dbyar Gsal-ba'i Byang-chub. However, according to this later work, these four studied directly with Rgya Blo-gros Byang-chub, with no Tho-gar in between, and it is Rgya's teaching career that is divided into three parts. As in Dam-pa's three parts, the four brothers make up the early period, but Tho-gar comes in the middle, and Zhu Bsod-nams Shākya, the king of Nyang-smad, moves to the later period. This bumps Zur-che off the list, and he studies under that latter, Zhu-pa. For a map of this lineage, see Appendix Four.

<sup>28</sup> Here Gnubs Ye-shes Rgya-mtsho teaches Khu-lung-pa Sna-nam Tshul-khrim Byang-chub (I add the Khu-lung-pa from Padma 'Phrin-las's *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 254.2), who in turn transmits to Dge-shes Mar-chung Lho-brag-pa. The latter also receives teachings from Zur-chung, though according to Padma 'Phrin-las these were limited to *rdzogs-chen* mind class transmissions (*sems phyogs rgyud sde*, ibid., 254.4). Dam-pa then tells a short story in which one Lha-rje Shangs-chung-ba Dar-ma Bsod-nams (called Shangs-nag lang-za bsod-nams dar by Padma 'Phrin-las [*Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 254.3] and Lang-ston Dar-ma Bsod-nams of Shangs-lha-phu by 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba [Roerich 1976, 126]) meets Mar-chung who is lying terribly ill at an old monastery (*grwa swa snying pa*). Shangs-pa nurses him back to health, for which he receives the *Sūtra* according to

In these two early lineages, one line focused on the *Great Commentary* ('*grel chen*) of Gnubs-chen, the *Mun pa'i go cha*; this was primary for the early Zur tradition, i.e. Zur-che, Zur-chung, and their circle. The other lineage focused on a competing commentary, the '*Grel pa lung bstan ma*, a commentary ascribed to King Dza himself. Given the latter work's importance in the early *Sūtra* tradition, it is most unfortunate that it is now lost. Dam-pa's is the earliest reference to the work I have found.<sup>29</sup> In any case, early on the *Lung bstan ma* was apparently an important commentary that was transmitted quite apart from the *Mun pa'i go cha*.

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the commentarial tradition of the '*Grel pa lung bstan ma* (*Lung bstan gyi skor*), along with some mind class teachings. Then Shangs-pa passes these on to Zur Shākyā Senge.

<sup>29</sup> Our knowledge of it can be supplemented if we resort to Padma 'Phrin-las, who mentions a lineage that is specifically associated with the *Lung bstan ma* (*Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 253.5-255.2). He begins by pointing to a lineage of *rdzogs-chen* transmissions that stemmed from the eighth century Tibetan, Vairocana, during his exile in Khams. It is well-known that while in Khams, Vairocana taught the later mind class tantras to his well-known disciple, Sbam Mi-pham Mgon-po. According to Padma 'Phrin-las, these teachings then passed to Rba Rakṣi, and then to both Ya-zi Dar-ma Shes-rab and Zer-mo Dge-slong-ma Bde-gnas. From these two, the teaching split into the *rdzogs-chen* of mother tantra and father tantra, so that Zer-mo taught the former to Mar-pa Khrom-rgyal, while Ya-zi taught the latter to Ya-zis Nyang-ston Pra-bha. Ya-zis Nyang-ston then gave the father tantra transmission to Mar-pa Khrom-rgyal as well, so he ended up with both. Mar-pa then taught Mar-chung Shes-rab 'Od, whom we have already seen above as the student of Sna-nam Tshul-khrim Byang-chub. (This same lineage is described by 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba [see Roerich 1976, 171], although there Ya-zis Nyang-ston Pra-bha and Mar-pa Khrom-rgyal as not mentioned.)

What this has to do with the *Lung bstan ma* is never quite made clear. Apparently Padma 'Phrin-las is suggesting that the *Lung bstan ma* might be somehow associated with this early *rdzogs-chen* lineage. It may well be that he only wishes to point out the intersection of two different lineages (this one and the second line described above) in the person of Mar-chung, though his language suggests a more significant connection.

It may be significant that the other major *rdzogs-chen* lineage stemming from Vairocana's time in Khams is that of the *Rdo-rje Zam-pa* of the *rdzogs-chen* expanse class (*klong sde*). Elsewhere, in listing the pith instructions associated with the '*Grel pa lung bstan ma*, Dam-pa includes "the hearing lineage of the *Rdo-rje Zam-pa*" (*Khog dbub*, 8.4). As mentioned above in note 24, the *Rdo-rje zam-pa* does seem to have played an important role in the early Kah-thog tradition, though this observation needs further research.

This was not the only text that appeared during the years between Gnub-chen and Dam-pa Bde-gshegs. In his *Khog-dbub*, Dam-pa lists a number of shorter works that had surfaced. He distinguishes two kinds of commentarial works: theoretical works on the tantra as a whole, and practical works addressing specific sections of the tantra. Dam-pa then divides the general theoretical works into four genres. The first group includes the major commentaries such as *Mun pa'i go cha* and *'Grel pa lung bstan ma*.<sup>30</sup> The second genre is the structural analyses (*khog dbub* and *don bsdus*), of which there are seven. Most of these are attributed to the Indian master, Dharmabodhi, with two to King Dza.<sup>31</sup> In general, a large number of the works Dam-pa lists are attributed to Dharmabodhi, whose importance to the early tradition is indicated by the fact that Dam-pa sometimes refers to him simply by the title, "the master" (*slob dpon*).<sup>32</sup> The third genre is the outlines (*sa gcod*), of which only one is mentioned, the *Gser gzong*, and the last of the four kinds of general theoretical

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<sup>30</sup> The full title of which is *'Grel pa lung bstan ye shes snang ba rgyan*. Five other commentaries are listed here: (1) *Dka' spyod*, (2) *Gser gzong*, (3) *Lcags 'grol ba*, (4) *Rgya mdud 'grel*, (5) *Rnam bshad chen po*. I have only been able to identify the author of the last of these, which Dharmasri (*Spyi don*, 51) says is by Hūmkara.

<sup>31</sup> *Khog dbub*, 6.5-7.1. (1) *Don bsdus che ba* by King Dzah, (2) *Don bsdus chung ba* by Dharmabodhi, (3) *Byung tshul bsdus pa* by King Dzah, (4) *Tshul gsal byed*, (5) *Me long gsal byed* by Dharmabodhi, (6) *Skol mdo rgyas bsdus* (Dharmasri (*Spyi don*, 51) attributes this to Dharmabodhi ), (7) *Man ngag spyi gcod*.

<sup>32</sup> e.g. *Yang khog dbub*, 27.4. Some of the Dharmabodhi works Dam-pa mentions have recently resurfaced, appended at the back of the *Glan chog*.

commentaries are those works that clear up any problems (*gtar ka'am gegs sel*).

Again, only one is cited—the *Pe re ka rtsa 'grel*.

In the same *Khog dbub*, Dam-pa turns next to those works that address more specific topics. He cites a list from the '*Grel pa lung bstan ma* of eight main topics in the *Sūtra*: view, practices, the mandala, empowerments, vows, accomplishment, activities, samādhi,<sup>33</sup> and then he uses these topics to group the remaining literature. According to these lists, predating Dam-pa we have seventy-six texts of lengths varying from two volumes to short sets of notes or oral instructions.<sup>34</sup> Given the obscurity of the *Sūtra* tradition today, it is

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 7.4-5. "Vows" is actually missing from the list but it is provided later, on 8.5.

<sup>34</sup> Nine works focus on the issue of view: (1) *Gding chen bcu pa*, (2) *De kho na nyid dris lan Inga bcu pa*, (3) *Gegs sel brgyad pa*, (4) *Lam rim stod*, (5) *Mdo bsres*, alternatively titled, *Me long bstan pa* (Dam-pa later (9.2) ascribes this to Dharmabodhi), (6) *Me long gsum pa*, (7) *Byung tshul snying po*, (8) *Mtshan nyid gsal sgron*, (9) *Mdo bzhi'i bye brag*.

Dam-pa lists four texts concerned with the ritual practices for the *Sūtra*: (1) *Spyod pa bsdus pa'i sgron ma*, (2) *Bsnyen bkur gsal byed*, (3) *Mdo sde dri med*, (4) *Bla ma'i rim pa*.

Seven are listed on the arrangement of the mandala: (1) *Rang bzhin dkyil 'khor bstan pa*, (2) *Dal gsum pa*, (3) *Rin chen phreng ba'i stod*, (4) *Dal bdun pa*, (5) *Thig don bskul ba*, (6) *Lung gi rdo rje las rim*, (7) *Dal gyi mngon rtogs*.

Eight are listed on the stages of empowerment: (1) *Rin chen phreng ba'i smad*, (2) *Rna rgyud rdo rje zam pa*, (3) *Dhang gi lde'u mig*, (4) *Dhang don bsdus pa*, (5) *Dhang don rgyas pa*, (6) *Dhang don rgya cher bshad pa*, (7) *Dhang gi man ngag gsang ba* (heavily cited by Dharmāśri, who (on *Spyi don*, 21.2) seems to say it is by Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad), (8) *Sa tha dang dbang gi rim pa*.

Five are listed on the vows: (1) *Dam tshig gcan 'phrang chen mo*, (2) *Rgyun bshags chen mo*, (3) *Dam tshig spyi khrus bshags pa*, (4) *Dam tshig gi gter*, (5) *Khrus lung rgyal mtshan*.

Six are listed on the mundane (*thun mong*) accomplishments and four on the supramundane accomplishments: (1) *Tshe grub*, (2) *Pra*, (3) *Ro langs*, (4) *Rkang mgyogs*, (5) *Mngon shes*, (6) *Gzungs ma 'gugs pa*. And (1) *Lam rim chen po* by Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, (2) *Mdo bsres* by Dharmabodhi, (3) *Skabs 'grel* by Sthiramati, (4) *Rgyu rta lam rtsa(l) 'grel* by King Dzah. It is hard to believe the first six were independent texts; they do not sound like titles, nor are they cited elsewhere in the *Sūtra* literature. They may have been oral instructions or perhaps abbreviated sets of notes. Note that *Mdo bsres* also appeared under the 'view' heading. Finally, the *Skabs 'grel* is discussed in Appendix Two as one of the few extant works attributed to an Indian author.

remarkable to see how extensively it spread through the tenth and eleventh centuries. By the late twelfth century the tradition had become so complex that if it were to be widely taught at Kah-thog, it needed to be categorized and organized, and this is precisely what Dam-pa can be seen doing here in his short *Khog dbub*.

In his slightly longer *Yang khog dbub*, Dam-pa continues his project of organizing the tradition, but now he focuses directly upon the doctrinal content of the *Sūtra* rather than the various systems of commentary. On the whole, he does not add much to what Gnubs-chen had laid out two and a half centuries earlier. It is a more convenient summary of the major doctrinal terms—the nine vehicles, the variously numbered sets of yogas, the three doors, six tantras, four sūtras and three roots,<sup>35</sup> the twelve ways of arising and the three transmissions<sup>36</sup>—presented in a manageable outline format. Such a work was clearly part of Dam-pa's curriculum for his new monastic college (*bshad grwa*).

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Five are listed on the activities: (1) *Ye shes mtshon chen* by Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, (2) *Ro bsregs bcu bzhi* by Vimalamitra, (3) *Mdo yi dngos po gnyis pa* also by Vimalamitra, (4) *Dpe chung rang gnas*, (5) *Drag po 'dus byed*.

Three are listed on samādhi with signs and eleven on samādhi without signs: (1) *Zhi khro rtogs pa lha rgyud kyi man ngag* by Vimalamitra, (2) *Khro bo las phreng* by Hūmkara, (3) *Bsam gtan cho ga'i sgron ma* by The *Sūtra* scholar Dharmabodhi. And (1) *Thugs kyi sgron ma*, (2) *Sems don byed pa*, (3) *Rig pa'i sgron ma*, (4) *Ljong shing*, (5) *Le lag gsum pa*, (6) *Bsam gtan rig pa'i nyi ma*, (7) *Gsam gtan mig sgron rtsa 'grel*, (8) *Bsam gtan me long snang ba*, (9) *Bsam gtan spu gri snang ba*, (10) *Bdud rtsi lung gi bsam gtan*, (11) *Bsam gtan sgron ma*.

<sup>35</sup> On the doors, tantras, sūtras and roots, see Appendix Five.

<sup>36</sup> The lineage notes discussed above are found in the section on the hearing transmission of persons.

With it, Dam-pa sought to provide his students with a manageable introduction to the key terms of the *Sūtra*.

Perhaps the most useful of Dam-pa's works on the *Sūtra* is his *Bsdus don*, which he actually attributes to his teacher, Lha-rje Smar, almost certainly the same person as 'Dzam-ston 'Gro-ba'i Mgon-po. This work is a detailed outline of the *Sūtra* in its entirety. In 144 folio-sides it allows the reader to access the otherwise unwieldy *Sūtra* and retrieve whatever information is required. Mkhan-po Nus-ldan, writing in the early twentieth century, used the *Bsdus don* to structure his four-volume sub-commentary.

The fourth extant text by Dam-pa listed above is the *Dka' 'grel*. In this work, Dam-pa moves through the *Sūtra*, stopping at each point of possible difficulty. Again, on many points he does not add much to Gnubs-chen's commentary, but we do learn something of Dam-pa's own concerns; for the most part they are scholastic in nature. Thus Dam-pa gives much attention to laying out the ten tantric *bhūmis* and the corresponding yogas, visualizations, and signs of accomplishment. He also works to bring together the different commentarial traditions, in particular the *Mun pa'i go cha* and the *'Grel pa lung bstan ma*.

Dam-pa's solutions to the various "difficult points" also reveal whom he regarded as his principal authorities. He often cites two authors: Jo-bo Lha-rje and Lha-rje Yang-khyed. The former is probably Zur-che: Lha-rje was a title much-used by the early Zurs and their circle, and Zur-chung was usually called

Lha-rje Bde. Lha-rje Yang-khyed was one of Zur-chung's 'four pillars' (the student specializing in the *Sūtra*).<sup>37</sup> He also appears in Dudjom's history as a critic of Rong-zom Chos-kyi Bzang-po who later converted to become Rong-zom's student.<sup>38</sup> This would all seem to place Lha-rje Yang-khyed in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, only a generation or two before Dam-pa.<sup>39</sup> Whenever possible however, it is the word of Zur Shākyā Seng-ge, otherwise known as Sgro-phug-pa, who decides any disagreements. It seems quite clear that Dam-pa saw himself as part of the early Zur tradition.

The codification of the Spoken Teachings may have begun with Zur-poche, but many important lineages were probably not gathered into one stream until Sgro-phug-pa. Regarding the *Sūtra* system, we have already seen that one major commentary—'*Grel pa lung bstan ma*'—was transmitted outside the Zur clan until Sgro-phug-pa received it from Shangs-pa. Then, writes 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba, "from that time on the Lineage of the mDo was handed down through the Lineage of the Māyā (sGyu-'phrul)."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 231-2 and *Spyi don*, 75.6.

<sup>38</sup> Dudjom, 708.

<sup>39</sup> His relationship to Rong-zom may also mean he received the commentarial lineage of Sthiramati, since Rong-zom is said to have received this transmission from his childhood teacher, 'Gar-ston Bzang-po. (See *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa*, Vol. 56, 704.3, in a passage discussed in Appendix Three.)

<sup>40</sup> Roerich 1976, 160.

We have seen that the Spoken Teachings consisted foremost of the *mdo-rgyud-sems-gsum*. The process of unifying the systems of the *Guhyagarbha* (*rgyud*) and the *Sūtra* (*mdo*), as well as the *rdzogs-chen* mind class, continued in Dam-pa's works. In this respect, perhaps the most interesting of his works is one that has only recently resurfaced—his *Theg pa spyi bcings*. Here we can see how Dam-pa used the *Sūtra*'s nine vehicles scheme to organize the tradition as a whole, but also how he wove this system together with *Guhyagarbha*'s own distinct doxographical contributions.

While these two tantras certainly came out of the same matrix of eighth and ninth century Indian tantra, they had some differences that had to be reconciled before they could be neatly fit together into a single system. Their distinct doxographies presented Dam-pa with his greatest challenges. Dam-pa was forced to perform a hermeneutical balancing act, which required a creative conservatism. The Zurs' reputation had been built on their conservation of the old tantras, and yet here Dam-pa had to reinterpret these tantras to fit with one another. He set forth his vision in the *Theg pa spyi bcings*.

The work begins by simply following the *Sūtra*'s presentation of the nine vehicles as found in chapters forty-four and sixty-eight. Thus he introduces the three general vehicles seen in the *Sūtra*'s Rudra myth, of the continuous wheel, ascertaining the ultimate meaning, and the magical display arising obviously. He begins with the first and then turns briefly to the third. He next focuses in on

the second, the vehicle of ascertaining the ultimate meaning, within which the nine Buddhist vehicles are found. It is at this point that his innovation becomes clear.

Here Dam-pa distinguishes two types of views—the incidental and those of the Buddhist vehicles (*zhar las byung dang theg pa*). The incidental views are basically the mistaken, non-Buddhist positions that inevitably arise alongside the correct ones. Each correct vehicle needs an incorrect one against which it is defined, so that each brings with it specific dangers. Dam-pa clearly derived this concept of the incidental from chapter sixty-eight of the *Sūtra*.<sup>41</sup>

In that chapter, the various views are presented as a hierarchy, beginning with the lowest of worldly views and culminating in the highest of the transcendent views, that of *atiyoga*. The *Sūtra* divides the worldly views into two—those of no understanding at all (*mi shes*) and those of misunderstanding (*log shes*).<sup>42</sup> The first, no understanding, is further sub-divided into the apathetic (*phyal ba*) and the materialists (*rgyang 'phen pa*). Both types are so fixated upon

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<sup>41</sup> There is significant (and confusing) disagreement over how widely the category of the incidental vehicles should be applied. Thus Dudjom Rinpoche (Dudjom 1991, 63) applies it only within “no understanding,” so that the “apathetic” are the actual holders of no understanding and the “materialists” are incidental. Nus-ldan (*Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa*, Vol. 56, 407.5) applies it only to those nine *mu stegs pa* views that arise through reification of the nine Buddhist vehicles (described in the next paragraph). And Gnubs-chen (*Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 227.1-2) applies it to all “mistaken understandings,” so that all mistaken philosophical positions are incidental. Finally, Dam-pa (*Theg pa spyi bcings*, 7 and 14) seems to apply the “incidental” more widely than any, using it to refer to all the worldly views, including those of no understanding and of misunderstanding.

samsaric concerns that they do not even reflect upon why they do so; hence “no understanding.” The second, wrong understanding, is also sub-divided into two—the nihilists (*mu stug pa*) and the eternalists (*mu stegs pa*). Then the latter is sub-divided to include the standard Hindu views and those mistaken views that can arise when one who is engaged in a given Buddhist vehicle reifies that particular view (*gang de dag bdag tu lta ba la gnas te*); thus there is a mistaken *śrāvaka* view, a mistaken *pratyekabuddha* view, and so on up to a mistaken *atiyoga* view.

Just as Dam-pa begins to present these worldly views however, he suddenly introduces another scheme, this one from the *Guhyagarbha-tantra*. This work has been noted as another member of the *mdo-rgyud-sems-gsum* triad, alongside the *Sūtra*. From an early date, the *Guhyagarbha* played an important role in Tibetan Buddhism. Like the *Sūtra*, though on a lesser scale, it sought to systematize the numerous tantric deities proliferating during eighth century into a large mandala of one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities. In later centuries, the *Guhyagarbha* became the most heavily studied and contested tantra in the Rnying-ma school. As such, it was a crucial part of the Zurs’ Spoken Teachings. The *Sūtra*’s authors had clearly been aware of the *Guhyagarbha*, as they had built upon its mandala, its myths, and its doctrines, and yet their own system went beyond the earlier *Guhyagarbha*, so that the two works differed on many points.

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<sup>42</sup> Note that these are the same mistaken views we saw discussed in chapter twenty-one of the Rudra-subjugation myth.

The most conspicuous difference of all was between their respective doxographical schemes, a discrepancy that was particularly awkward for Dam-pa, who sought to systematize the Spoken Teachings within a unified curriculum that could be taught at Kah-thog's new monastic college.

Having introduced the incidental views and the Buddhist vehicles, Dam-pa is forced to draw attention to the problem because the terminology used in his source—the *Sūtra*'s sixty-eighth chapter—so obviously recalls that used in the *Guhyagarbha*'s own thirteenth chapter:

Also, in the *Guhyagarbha-tantra* it lists, "Those who are of no realization and of mis-realization, those of partial realization, those with misrealization of the genuine, and those of discipline, the intention, the secret, the natural, the secret meaning."<sup>43</sup>

Dam-pa then proceeds to explain this passage. The first two components mirror the *Sūtra*'s no understanding and misunderstanding, and accordingly Dam-pa uses chapter sixty-eight of the *Sūtra* to unpack them over the following few pages. After those two, he continues with the *Sūtra*'s presentation of the nine Buddhist vehicles, apparently leaving the remainder of the *Guhyagarbha* passage unexplained.<sup>44</sup> Only at the very end do we learn that it is precisely this nine

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<sup>43</sup> *Theg pa spyi bcings*, 7. *gsang ba'i snying po'i rgyud las kyang/ma rtogs pa dang log par tog/phyogs rtog yang dag nyid ma rtog/ 'dul ba dgongs pa gsang ba dang/rang bzhin gsang ba'i don mams te.* On this scheme, see also Karmay 1988, 152-163 and Kapstein 2000, 104.

vehicles presentation that Dam-pa considers his explanation of “those of mis-realization” through “the secret meaning.” “Therefore,” he concludes, the nine vehicles “are just like the passage in the tantra.”

It is not quite clear how Dam-pa saw the nine vehicles as an explanation of the terms, “partial realization, mis-realization of the genuine, discipline, the intention, the secret, the natural, the secret meaning.” But with the help of a later commentary to the *Theg pa spyi bcings*, we can find out. First, however, we should review how the *Guhagarba* passage was understood by other exegetes, for only against this background will we be able to evaluate what is unusual in Dam-pa’s presentation.

The passage has been read unanimously as a doxography, with a majority of commentaries breaking down the passage as follows (I provide both Tibetan and English/Sanskrit equivalents):<sup>45</sup>

*ma rtogs pa:*

-*phyal ba*  
-*rgyang 'phen pa*

no realization:

-apathetic  
-materialists

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<sup>44</sup> Dam-pa analyzes each vehicle in terms of seven aspects: how to begin ('jug sgo), view (*lta ba*), samādhi (*ting 'dzin*), practice (*spyod*), ethical conduct (*tshul khrim*), path duration (*lam gyi yun*), result ('bras bu). These seven later reappeared in the later empowerment liturgies.

<sup>45</sup> The commentaries following this system include: Klong-chen-pa's *Phyogs bcu mun sel* (see Dorje 1987, 982-997), G.yung-ston's *Gsal byed me long* (432-436), and Dharmasrī's *Gsang bdag dgongs rgyan* (326-328).

In translating *phyal ba* and *rgyang 'phen pa* as “apathetic” and “materialists,” I am following the translation found in Dudjom 1991, 62-69. The latter discussion of mistaken views closely follows that of Dharmasrī's *Dgongs rgyan* (including even Dudjom Rinpoche's mention of the variations found in the *Spar khab* and the *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*). The subdivisions, however, all derive from the *Sūtra*. Thus what Dorje (Dudjom 1991, 64) translates as “a great sūtra” (*mdo chen po*) is in fact *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions*; *Mdo chen* being a common way for referring to the *Sūtra*.

<i>log par rtogs:</i>	<i>wrong realization:</i>
- <i>mu rtug pa</i>	-nihilists
- <i>mu stegs pa</i>	-eternalists
<i>phyogs rtogs:</i>	<i>partial realization:</i>
- <i>nyan thos pa</i>	- <i>śrāvakas</i>
- <i>rang sangs rgyas</i>	- <i>pratyekabuddhas</i>
<i>yang dag nyid ma rtogs:</i>	<i>mis-realization of the genuine:</i>
- <i>dbu ma</i>	- <i>Madhyāmika</i>
- <i>sems tsam</i>	- <i>Cittamātra</i>
<i>'dul ba:</i>	<i>discipline:</i>
- <i>kriyā</i>	- <i>kriyā tantra</i>
- <i>upa</i>	- <i>ubhaya tantra</i>
<i>dgongs pa: yoga</i>	<i>intention: yoga tantra</i>
<i>gsang ba: mahāyoga</i>	<i>secret: mahāyoga</i>
<i>rang bzhin gsang pa'i don: atiyoga</i>	<i>natural secret meaning: atiyoga</i>

For the most part, this system agrees with the influential and much earlier (possibly late eighth century) *Spar khab* by Vilāsavajra (Tib. *Sgeg-rdor*), though there are some differences. First, under those of no realization, Vilāsavajra describes the apathetic (*phyal ba*) but makes no mention of the materialists (*rgyang 'phen pa*).<sup>46</sup> Second, he places *cittamātra* under those of partial realization. Third, and most importantly for our purposes, in his treatment of the tantric vehicles he writes:

Regarding “those of discipline, the intention, the secret, and the natural secret meaning:” While certainly a correct teaching, those who through their practice control the three doors [are practicing] *kriyā*, and those practitioners who primarily perform the inner yogas [are practicing] *yoga*[-tantra]. By abiding in the uncommon view and practice, one is “secret.” Then even though one abides in the natural fruition of the two inner [yogas] and of all things, there is *atiyoga*, which is taught as the mere obscurations of the various stages of craving after imputations.<sup>47</sup>

This presentation is unusual in several ways. It is safe to assume that the “secret” is meant to correspond to *mahāyoga*. This means that Vilāsavajra understood *yoga* and *mahāyoga* as the two vehicles of inner yoga, which is unusual; *yoga* is usually considered to be outer by the later tradition. Then, according to Vilāsavajra, when one abides in the fruition of these two inner yogas, ordinary experiences are the *atiyoga*, so that the “natural secret meaning” corresponds to *atiyoga*.

Despite certain differences between Vilāsavajra’s reading and the later ones mapped out above, they do share one point in common—none see the *Guhyagarbha* passage according a separate category to *anuyoga*. Vilāsavajra does not even mention the vehicle, and the later commentators are split on whether *anuyoga* should be thrown in with *mahāyoga*, under those of “the secret,” or with *atiyoga*, under those of “the natural secret meaning.”<sup>48</sup> On whether or not to grant *anuyoga* its own category, then, *Guhyagarbha* did not fit with the *Sūtra*’s nine vehicles.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Spar khab* 556.2-4. ‘dul ba dgongs pa gsang ba dang/ rang bzhin gsang ba’i don rnam ni/ zhes bya ba ni/ yang dag par bstan mod kyi spyod pas sgo gsum ‘dul ba kri ya dang/ spyod pa bas nang gi rnal ‘byor gtsor byed pa yo ga dang/ phal la med pa’i lta spyod la gnas pas gsang ba ste/ nang pa gnyis po dang/ dngos po thams cad kyi rang bzhin ‘bras bur gnas kyang/ brtags pa la zhen pa’i rim pa sna tshogs kyi bsgrub pa tsam du ston pa’i a ti yo ga’o.

<sup>48</sup> G.yung-ston opts for the former model, Dharmāśri for the latter. Klong-chen-pa does not mention *anuyoga*, though one could perhaps say he opts for the former model because divided *mahāyoga* into father and mother tantra (given that many see *anuyoga* as primarily focused on mother tantra).

Having gained the necessary background, we can now return to Dam-pa's solution to this potential problem. We have seen that Dam-pa was concerned to create a single cohesive system out of the Spoken Teachings he inherited from the early Zurs. That the doxographical schemes of the *Sūtra* and *Guhyagarbha* did not fit together was thus unacceptable. How did Dam-pa bring them into line? In his commentary to the *Theg pa spyi bcings*, Kah-thog-pa Ye-shes Rgyal-mtshan (b.1395) explains Dam-pa's creative reading.

"Those of the secret" primarily perform the profound view and the transgressive practices, thus they are of *mahāyoga*. "Those of the nature" are free of contriving and altering—*anuyoga*. "Those of the secret meaning" are those of *atiyoga*.<sup>50</sup>

Thus what Dam-pa did was to split the final element—"those of the natural, the secret meaning"—into two: those of the natural, and those of the secret meaning. This added a vehicle, providing *anuyoga* its own place within the doxographical system of *Guhyagarbha*.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Significantly, this implies that *anuyoga* may have been the last of the nine vehicles to be properly formulated. If so, this may well explain why the *Sūtra* tradition, with its nine vehicle system, came to be labeled as *anuyoga*: Even though the *Sūtra* and its circle of texts may have considered been intended as all three, *mahā-anu-ati*, they were, after all, the only early tantras to mention the *anuyoga* vehicle.

<sup>50</sup> *Spyi don*, 152. *Gsang ba dang zhes pa ni lta ba zab mo dang spyod pa brlang po gtsor byed pas ma hā yo ga yin/ rang bzhin bcos bslad dang bral ba a nu yo ga yin/gsang pa'i don rnams zhes pa ni a ti yo ga yin.*

<sup>51</sup> That it was *anuyoga* in particular at stake may well relate to the fact that around this time the *Sūtra* was becoming more closely associated with the *anuyoga* class of teachings. It remains difficult, however, to say with any certainty whether Dam-pa's concerns were part of the cause or the result of this shift in how the *Sūtra* was viewed. On how the *Sūtra* came to be classed as *anuyoga*, more will be said in the following chapter.

That this was indeed Dam-pa's own reading, and not Ye-shes Rgyal-mtshan's, is supported by the fact that the only other *Guhyagarbha* commentary to use this creative reading is the one by Kah-thog Si-tu Chos-kyi Rgya-mtsho which claims to follow Dam-pa's *Guhyagarbha* explanation tradition (*bshad srol*).

Regarding 'the natural, secret meaning:' The suchness of things abides originally as the indivisibility of the three truths explained above, as *the natural fruition*, yet within the perspective of space and wisdom one realizes instantaneously that which has been obscured by the various stages of craving after imputations—this is *anuyoga*. The sheer *meaning*, howsoever it is, is illuminated immediately as the vibrancy of self-awareness—this is *atiyoga*.<sup>52</sup>

While not clearly spelled out, Dam-pa's reading is implied by Kah-thog Si-tu's use of the key terms (in italics) "the natural" and "the meaning."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Nyi ma snying po*, Vol. 2, 237.5-238.1. *Rang bzhin gsang ba'i don ni dngos po rnams kyi de kho na nyid gong du bshad pa'i bden pa gsum dbyer med par rang bzhin gyi 'bras bur ye nas gnas kyang/ [.]6] brtags pa'i zhen pa'i im pa sna tshogs kyiis bsgribs pa dbiyings ye shes kyi cha nas skad cig mas rtogs pa a nu yo ga dang/don ji lta ba nyid skad cig ma dang bral bar rang rig pa'i mngon sum du gsal ba a ti yo ga'o.* Here Kah-thog Si-tu is obviously working off not only Dam-pa's comments, but also the *Spar khab* passage cited above. In the colophon to this *Nyi ma snying po*, we learn that Kah-thog Si-tu based his composition upon a work that he discovered in his travels, by Dam-pa's direct disciple and heir, Chos-rje Gtsang-ston Rdo-rje Rgyal-mtshan. (See *Nyi ma snying po*, Vol. 2, 602.5-603.2.) Unfortunately, I been unable find the latter work.

<sup>53</sup> Kah-thog Si-tu weaves corresponding passage from the *Spar khab* commentary into his own, thereby easing any possible criticisms of Dam-pa's departure from the earlier Indian source. As we have seen, Dam-pa's rereading was not widely adopted by later Tibetan exegetes. The reason may well have been the authority *Spar khab* wielded in Tibet, causing later Tibetans to hesitate in following Dam-pa.

Here it should be noted that Gnubs-chen may have (very obliquely) referred to this same *Guhyagarbha* passage in *Mun pa'i go cha* 51, 428.3-5.), and if so, he too drops *anuyoga* from his discussion. Nus-l丹 (Dgongs 'dus 'grel chen 56, 257) adds it in with *atiyoga*.

The attention with which Dam-pa approached these details of interpretation is remarkable, but the import of his project can be understood if it is seen within the wider context of the consolidation of the Spoken Teachings as a cohesive set. Through his writings, Dam-pa mediated a common ground between the two different doxographies found in the *Sūtra* and the *Guhyagarbha*. This was a significant contribution to the codification of the Spoken Teachings that had been started by the early Zur-s. Dam-pa effectively treaded the narrow path between creative reinterpretation and conservative maintenance of the tradition he had inherited, a path made all the more perilous by the competitive atmosphere of twelfth century Tibet.

#### IV. Conclusions

Thanks to Dam-pa's work, Kah-thog became one of the most successful monasteries in Tibet. Over the next centuries, Kah-thog-pa exegetes continued to specialize in the nine vehicles system.<sup>54</sup> In the early sixteenth century, the Kah-

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<sup>54</sup> Kapstein (Kapstein 2000, 242n) cites Sog-zlog-pa as claiming that Karma Pakshi may also have composed his own commentary on the *Sūtra*. Kapstein notes the influence the *Sūtra* exerted upon the second Karma-pa, Karma Pakshi's *Rgya mtsho mtha' yas skor* (Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1978). This great master grew up around the Kah-thog educational system. Given what we have seen of the *Sūtra*'s prominence in this environment, we may not be surprised at Kapstein's suggestion that, "We may say summarily that Karma Pakshi's view of the general architecture of the path is derived from the *Mdo dgongs-pa 'dus-pa* (The *Sūtra* Gathering All Intentions) and other fundamental works of the anuyoga" (Ibid., 105). This quotation comes just after Kapstein's preliminary analysis of Karma Pakshi's treatment of the non-Buddhists, which follows the same *Guhyagarbha* passage we have been examining.

thog master, Bsod-nams Rgyal-mtshan (b.1466),<sup>55</sup> wrote another famous nine vehicles study entitled the *Mdo sngags theg pa'i dgongs don gsal byed nyi 'od rab gsal*. The author cited so heavily from Dam-pa's *Theg pa spyi bcings* that his study can practically be viewed as a commentary on that earlier work.

Bsod-nams Rgyal-mtshan was also known for introducing the Spoken Teachings into Sikkim and Bhutan.<sup>56</sup> For all intents and purposes, after Dam-pa Bde-gshegs, Kah-thog was the home of the Spoken Teachings. The Kah-thog-pa continued to be famous not just for the *Sūtra*, but for how they integrated it with the wider Spoken Teachings triad of *sūtra*, tantra, and mind (*mdo-rgyud-sems-gsum*). In the fifteenth century, for example, another great master of Kah-thog, Rmog-ston Rdo-rje Dpal-bzang-po (a student of Ye-shes Rgyal-mtshan, the author of the *Theg pa spyi bcings* commentary) composed an extensive new ritual manual. This manual expanded the *Sūtra* empowerment ceremony to include, for the first time ever, many other empowerments from the *mahāyoga Guhyagarbha-tantra* and the *atiyoga* mind class. The manual became renowned as the *River of Honey, a Ritual Manual for the Empowerments of Sūtra, Illusion and Mind* (*Mdo sgyu sems gsum gyi dbang chog sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun*).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> I derive Bsod-nam Rgyal-mtshan's date of birth (the fire-dog year of the 8<sup>th</sup> *rab-byung* cycle) from the *Kah thog lo rgyus*, 74.

<sup>56</sup> *Kah thog lo rgyus*, 73-5.

<sup>57</sup> See *Kah thog lo rgyus*, 64. Note that *sgyu* ('illusion') and *rgyud* ('tantra') are used interchangeably in this triad. The former, *sgyu*, simply refers to the larger *Māyājāla* tantras within

The codification of the Spoken Teachings may have been started by the early Zurs, but the process was completed at Kah-thog. Even after the revelation teachings had swept the Rnying-ma school, the Kah-thog-pa continued to focus their attentions on the Spoken Teachings. This may have contributed to Kah-thog's waning influence after the fourteenth century, when the revelation teachings became the norm in the Rnying-ma school.<sup>58</sup> Thus, in discussing the Kah-thog regent just prior to Ye-shes Rgyal-mtshan, Dudjom Rinpoche writes that, "He grounded [his teaching] in the transmitted precepts [i.e. Spoken Teachings] of the ancient propagation, but from this time the treasure [revelation] cycles were extensively promulgated as well."<sup>59</sup> But even despite these outside pressures, centuries later the Rnying-ma-pa living around Kah-thog were described by the fifth Dalai Lama as, "adhering exclusively to the long tradition [*ring lugs*, i.e. Spoken Teachings]."<sup>60</sup> Today, the Spoken Teachings are still closely associated with Kah-thog.

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which is included the *rgyud*, i.e. the *Guhagarbha*. More will be said of the developments in the *Sūtra* empowerment ceremony in Chapter Three.

<sup>58</sup> It is often said that Kah-thog suffered a decline during the sixteenth century that ended when Klong-gsal Snnying-po and Bdud-'dul Rdo-rje arrived in the seventeenth century to "revive" the monastery. As noted in the paragraph below, the fifth Dalai Lama saw the Kah-thog-pa's focus on the Spoken Teachings as almost obsessive. Given this criticism and given that the two revivers of Kah-thog were both renowned treasure revealers (*gter-ston*), it may have been that Kah-thog's declining reputation was linked in part to its followers' reluctance to study *gter-ma* and thus keep up with the times.

<sup>59</sup> Dudjom 1991, 696.

<sup>60</sup> *Byang pa'i rmam thar*, 497.1.

This chapter has shown how Dam-pa Bde-gshegs, building on the earlier efforts of the Zur clan, consolidated the *Sūtra* as a key element of the Spoken Teachings and established it as the centerpiece of Kah-thog's educational curriculum. This ensured the *Sūtra* a prominent place within the Rnying-ma school, even as the new *gter-ma* teachings were gaining in popularity. In its early role, the *Sūtra* had provided Tibetans with a complete tantric universe to inhabit. Now, after the eleventh century, it was linked to the stability of the Spoken Teachings. The *gter-ma*, coming out of a non-monastic world of Tibetan visionaries, described radical new practices that could be practiced by individuals living alone or in small communities. Compared to these exciting developments, the *Sūtra*'s was a complex system with cumbersome rituals, tied to the even larger class of Spoken Teachings. While it could thrive at a large monastery like Kah-thog, it was less relevant for the solitary hermit or the village *bla-ma*. Our next chapter looks at how this disjunction of the *Sūtra*'s importance in the Rnying-ma school played out during the politically turbulent years of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

## CHAPTER THREE: RITUAL

Before anyone can study or practice a given tantric system, they must first be initiated into the *mandala* specific to that system. This is almost always done by means of the empowerment ceremony (Skt. *abhiṣeka*, Tib. *dbang*), in which the tantric master purifies the disciples, then ritually introduces them to the *mandala* palace, leading them through its various rooms and describing the symbolic meanings of its architecture. The introduction may involve the master actually showing the disciple a painting or a model of the *mandala*, but the guided tour is usually given in the disciple's imagination, while the master reads the descriptions from the ritual manual.

The *Sūtra*'s empowerment ritual is one of the most complex in the Rnying-ma arsenal.<sup>1</sup> After the twelfth century, the empowerment rose to become the singlemost important aspect of the *Sūtra*, so that by the fourteenth century, the entire system was commonly referred to as the "*Sūtra* empowerment" (*mdo*

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<sup>1</sup> The *Sūtra*'s *mandala*, called the Gathered Great Assembly (*Tshogs chen 'dus pa*), is second in size only to the *Lung rdo rje bkod pa*, which is the *Sūtra*'s *gter-ma* equivalent revealed by Chos-'gyur Gling-pa. Dudjom Rinpoche (Dudjom 1991, 847) tells us that the *Lung rdo rje bkod pa* was first received by Chos-'gyur Gling-pa in his past life as Gnubs Yon-tan Rgya-mtsho, from his teacher, Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, a story that further strengthens the *gter-ma* system's ties to the *Sūtra*.

*dbang*). All of the extant materials dating from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century are manuals for the performance of the empowerment ceremony.

Taking these manuals as its focus, this chapter analyzes the ritual structure of *Sūtra*'s empowerment and how that structure was altered in each successive manual to better reflect the wider concerns of the day.

### I. The canonization and decline of the *Sūtra*

Chapter Two noted that during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the principal factor determining the identity of the Rnying-ma school seems to have been its followers' nostalgia for the early imperial period. The centuries following Dam-pa Bde-gshegs saw the codification of the Rnying-ma school continue, and by the end of the fifteenth century, the fundamentals of the school's identity had been established. The mythologization of the past was secure; the canonical collections were closed (with the *Sūtra* inside),<sup>2</sup> and normative renditions of the Indian and early Tibetan portions of most lineages were fixed. After the fifteenth century, the Rnying-ma-pa became less concerned with the questionable origins of their tantras or the dubious gaps in their lineages, and began to focus more on other questions.

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<sup>2</sup> Tradition usually credits Ratna Gling-pa (1403-1478) with the first comprehensive edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. Though earlier prototypes of the Rnying-ma canon certainly existed, Ratna Gling-pa's collection does seem to have been pivotal; none of the editions produced since has included any tantras written after the fifteenth century. On the different editions of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, see Ehrhard 1997 and David Germano's website at <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/tibet/>.

Thus, as the Rnying-ma school's eleventh through fifteenth century period of codification progressed, it brought with it a rhetorical shift from past to present. Rnying-ma-pa concerns moved from the school's suspicious origins in the distant past to the legitimacy and the efficacy of its present-day doctrines and practices. This shift in focus from past to present occurred on several levels. At the level of lineage, the Rnying-ma-pa became less concerned with the origins of a given lineage and more with the legitimacy of the recent lineal transmissions.<sup>3</sup> In the arena of texts, later rivalries involving Rnying-ma communities came to focus less on the origins of their tantras and more on the recent doctrinal and ritual interpretations of those works. Rnying-ma-pa scholars began to argue over how the tantras were to be understood *now*, whether *today's* rituals were efficacious. This meant that the original tantras were studied less and less, as their Tibetan commentaries became increasingly central. Even when a canonical tantra was cited, the quotations used were almost invariably stock ones cited in earlier commentaries.

This was certainly the case with the *Sūtra*; by the fifteenth century, the *Sūtra* had been sealed in its canonical tomb. But the *Sūtra*'s fate was particularly bleak, for its commentarial tradition also declined; no major commentaries on the *Sūtra* were composed between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. Now a

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter Four, "Lineage," will deal more specifically with this aspect of the later tradition.

canonical tantra, the *Sūtra* became a kind of sepulchre that was worshipped only through the empowerment ritual.

In Chapter One, we explored how in late ninth century Tibet the *Sūtra* functioned to organize Buddhist tantra through a sophisticated weave of myth, doxography, doctrine, and ritual. In these early days, the *Sūtra*'s various organizational strategies worked together as relative equals, each playing a significant role within the larger system. Gradually however, many of the *Sūtra*'s strategies, many of these characteristics that once had made the *Sūtra* so unique, faded into the background that was common to all Rnying-ma tantric systems. Now the *Sūtra*'s strategies could thrive independently. The Mt. Malaya and Rudra-taming myths were being retold in so many new *gter-ma* works that the *Sūtra*'s once crucial versions had become immaterial. As observed in Chapter Two, each *gter-ma* cycle would have its own origin myths and its own rendition of the Rudra-taming myth, with the Buddhist deity specific to that cycle playing the central role. The nine vehicles doxographical schema that led the *Sūtra* to such success at Kah-thog became so ubiquitous within the Rnying-ma school that its historical origin—the *Sūtra*—was forgotten. The nine vehicles were so basic to the Rnying-ma school's presentation of itself that they became primordial principles that had always structured the Buddhist teachings.

Meanwhile, due to a number of factors including the lack of a Sanskrit original, the *Sūtra*'s tantric doctrinal systems faded into obscurity. The discovery

of a Sanskrit original for the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* lent the Rnying-ma school some much needed legitimacy and helped to elevate the *mahāyoga* root tantra over the *Sūtra* during the contentious years of the eleventh through fourteenth centuries. The *Sūtra*'s tantric reinterpretations of earlier sūtric doctrines may also have been objectionable to the Gsar-ma-pa for doctrinal reasons. Gsar-ma-pa exegetes, for example, typically chose to subordinate tantra to the rules of monastic conduct and to construe the tantras as expedient complements to the earlier sūtras, rather than as leading to qualitatively higher levels of realization.<sup>4</sup>

The decline in vitality within the *Sūtra* tradition must also be seen in terms of its changing position vis-à-vis the wider Rnying-ma school. The period leading up to the fourteenth century had seen Buddhism in India destroyed by Muslim invaders. Meanwhile, Tibetans' confidence in their own comprehension of the Buddhist religion had matured. In the field of Rnying-ma tantra, and within *atiyoga* in particular, many innovative new practices had appeared; the technologies of *gter-ma* revelation and the sophisticated systems of mystical vision (*thod rgal*) are only two examples. At the same time, within *mahāyoga*, the perfection phase and subtle body practices had grown in popularity and were

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<sup>4</sup> The *Sūtra*'s presentation of tantra differed on a number of levels from those often put forth by the Gsar-ma-pa. For example, the *Sūtra* held that the tantric vehicles can carry the Buddhist practitioner higher than the sūtric vehicles, while the Gsar-ma-pa argued that both kinds of vehicles lead to the same result (see Hopkins 1977, 57-65). Another illustration would be Atīsa's warnings to eleventh century Tibetans that they must not forsake monastic discipline for tantric antinomianism (see Snellgrove 1987, 479-484). It should be noted, of course, that such views of tantra were not held by all Gsar-ma-pa.

being read back into the *mahāyoga* tantras. These were practices for manipulating the energies said to flow through subtle channels in the body. New versions of *Guhyasamāja* had arrived from India and new commentaries had been composed on *Guhyagarbha*, all making explicit references to these esoteric practices. This left the category of *anuyoga*, whose original raison d'être had been the perfection phase, appearing superfluous.<sup>5</sup> While the perfection phase was an important stage in the theory of tantric practice, now that it could be found in all *anuttarayoga* tantras, even in those of the *mahāyoga* class; it no longer warranted an entire vehicle.<sup>6</sup> Thus *anuyoga* was being eaten consumed from both sides, losing its creative novelty to *atiyoga* and its distinguishing feature to *mahāyoga*. The diminishing importance of *anuyoga* was particularly unfortunate for the *Sūtra*, which during this same period had been labeled as the root tantra for *anuyoga*, this in spite of the *Sūtra*'s own claims to encompass all nine vehicles.

By the fourteenth century, all these factors combined to leave the *Sūtra* in a much diminished state.<sup>7</sup> As each of the *Sūtra*'s strategic elements receded from the foreground of the tradition, all that remained was the unique and complex empowerment ritual. The ceremony's survival was further ensured by its

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<sup>5</sup> On the perfection phase as presented in the *Sūtra*, see Appendix Five.

<sup>6</sup> And this was precisely the argument leveled against *anuyoga* and the nine vehicles system by opponents within the Gsar-ma schools (see Karmay 1988, 148).

<sup>7</sup> The thirteenth century still saw the *Sūtra* playing an important role in the writings of such luminaries as the second Karma-pa (1204-1283). This, combined with the fact that our earliest extant empowerment manual dates from the early fourteenth century, leads me to mark the turn of the fourteenth century as the turning point in the *Sūtra*'s fortunes.

essential role in transmitting the lineage from one master to another. Thus those communities maintaining strong ties to the *Sūtra* lineage, namely Kah-thog and the Zur clan, continued to use and develop the empowerment ritual, but all the other elements of the *Sūtra* system seem to have disappeared during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

## II. Lineages, 12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries

In the previous chapter, using the writings of Dam-pa Bde-gshegs, the *Sūtra* lineage was traced up through the first three masters of the Zur clan, ending with Zur Shākyā Seng-ge (Sgro-phug-pa). We saw that the latter's student, 'Dzam-ston, taught Dam-pa Bde-gshegs, who then took the tradition back to his home in Khams, in eastern Tibet. In central Tibet, however, another line continued. This lineage passed through a different student of Sgro-phug-pa, one Mgar-ston Zung-nge, and it is around this time we see another major family beginning to play a crucial role in the tradition.

The Glan clan appears to have maintained extremely close ties with the more well-known Zurs, such that between the two families the *Sūtra* lineage was controlled for over four hundred years.<sup>8</sup> The Glan's control of the *Sūtra* tradition

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<sup>8</sup> There seems to be particular confusion between the sources regarding the transmissions within the Glan clan. (See Padma 'Phrin-las' Brgyud pa'i rnam thar, 257-258 and his Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs 41, 23.5.) For this reason I note here all significant differences that appear in still two other sources, namely, the lineages traced by Sog-zlog-pa Blo-gros Rgyal-mtshan in his *Shel gyi me long* (370.2-374.5) and by Lo-chen Dharmāśri in his *Spyi don*, 55-114: Already Zur-chung had taught

culminated in the person of Glan-ston Bsod-nams Mgon-po. The latter remains one of the most famous Glan-s, probably due in large part to his being a prolific writer. Most importantly for our purposes, he was the author of the *Glan chog*.<sup>9</sup> This ritual arrangement came to represent the entire Glan System (*Glan lugs*) of the *Sūtra* empowerment.

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two Glan students—Glan Shākya Bzang-po (one the ‘four pillars’ of Zur-chung’s disciples) and Glan Nya-rtsal-ba Shākya Byang-chub. The latter, together with Mgar-ston Zung-nge, transmitted the *Sūtra* to Sreg-ston Rdo-rje Rgyal-mtshan, who then taught Glan-ban Rdo-rje ‘Od. In turn, he taught several students including his own son, Glan Brtson-grus, as well as Glan Bsod-nams Rgyal-po and Lha-rje Lha-‘bum. (Dharmaśri [*Spyi don*, 88.5-89.5] only mentions the first two, writing that Lha-‘bum received it later from Glan Bsod-rgyal. Lha-‘bum does appear in Dharmaśri [*Spyi don*, 91.2] as the father, and in Sog-zlog-pa [*Shel gyi me long*, 374.4] as the teacher, of the important Glan-ston Bsod-nams Mgon-po [on whom, see below], which would seem to be a way of abbreviating the lineage.) The son, Glan Brtson-grus, was famous for having built the seat monastery of Zhig-po Bdud-rtsi in Bzad Thang-skya. (This is noted by Sog-zlog-pa [*Shel gyi me long*, 374.2] and Dharmaśri [*Spyi don*, 88.6, in which the place name is spelt Gzang Thang-skya], but not by Padma ‘Phrin-las.) On Zhig-po Bdud-rtsi and this place, see Dudjom 1991, 656. Next, Lha-rje Lha-‘bum and Glan Bsod-rgyal passed the lineage on to Glan Dpal-ldan Chos-kyi Seng-ge, who then gave it to Glan-ston Sangs-rgyas Dpal. (Dharmaśri [*Spyi don*, 90.3] points out that the lineage can be traced from Glan Bsod-rgyal to Glan Chos-kyi Seng-ge either through Lha-‘bum or directly.) Glan-ston Sangs-rgyas Dpal seems to have consolidated several of the lines that had proliferated up to that point, receiving the tradition according to Glan, Zur, Se, and Zhang. (See *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 259.4.) As Dharmaśri (*Spyi don*, 91.3) points out, this Zhang-lugs refers to a seal of entrustment (*gtad rgya*) lineage that Padma ‘Phrin-las (*Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 260.3) traces from Glan Rdo-rje ‘Od, to Nyi-ston Sangs-rgyas ‘Bum, to one Zhang-ston Kun-dga’ ‘Bum, after whom Padma ‘Phrin-las drops it. The Se-lugs may be related somehow to the *Atiyoga* tradition of the same name that was connected to the *Byang-gter* and based near Rgyang-mkhar Dben-gnas. On this lineage, see the *Gsang yig gangga'i chu rgyun* by the fifth Dalai Lama.

<sup>9</sup> This manual has only recently resurfaced. See TBRC *Bka' ma rgyas pa shin tu rgyas pa*, vols. 61-62. My date for this work is only approximate. As noted below, Glan-ston taught Sgrol-ma-ba. This meeting is supposed to have taken place around 1318 (as can be deduced by combining two passages on *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 263.1 and 266.2). It seems safe to assume that Glan-ston had written his empowerment manual before he taught Sgrol-ma-ba, which might put his composition around 1300.

According to Dharmaśri (see *Spyi don*, 91.6-92.1), Glan Bsod-nams Mgon-po was also an accomplished treasure-revealer, discovering a scroll from Pe-har-gling at Bsam-yas and entrusting it to Sman-lung Dbus-pa. This Sman-lung-pa (who should not be confused with the later and more famous teacher of Padma ‘Phrin-las and the Great Fifth) is the Sman-lung-pa Shākya ‘Od of Dudjom, 686. He was the student of Skyi-ston Chos-kyi Seng-ge, who studied directly under Sgro-phug-pa. Here we see that all these Glan figures must have followed in quick succession, since in other lineages only two generations span all of them.

Glan Bsod-nams Mgon-po passed the *Sūtra* lineage onto both Bla-ma Nyang-ston Dpal Rdo-rje and, most importantly, Sgrol-ma-ba 'Bro-ston Bsam-grub Rdo-rje (1294-1375).<sup>10</sup> Sgrol-ma-ba, in turn, passed his lineages to Zur-ham Shākya 'Byung-gnas. It was around this time that a notable shift occurred in the empowerment ritual's structure. The shift was represented in the next manual we have at our disposal. The *Rin chen phreng ba* dates from the late fourteenth century and was written by Dmyal-ba Bde-legs, an immediate disciple of Zur-ham.<sup>11</sup> The *Rin chen phreng ba* quickly became the authoritative manual throughout central Tibet, used by Sog-zlog-pa and his associates as well as the E-

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<sup>10</sup> Sog-zlog-pa (*Shel gyi me long*, 374.3) says this Nyang-ston (who he calls Nyang-ston Shes-rab Dpal) received it directly from Ghan Rtson-grus. He then passed it to Rong-gyong Khang-pa Gzi-ston Shākya Bzang-po, who then passed it to Sgrol-ma-ba. Because he organizes the lineage into monks vs. mantrikas, Sog-zlog-pa is particularly unclear on how the Ghan family relates.

For Sgrol-ma-ba's birth-death dates, see *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 261.7 and 266.3 respectively. Sgrol-ma-ba was also one of Zur Byams-pa Seng-ge's two main students, the other being the famous G.yung-ston-pa Rdo-rje Dpal (1284-1365), notably also of the Ghan clan. The latter wrote an authoritative commentary on the *Guhyagarbha* according to the Zur-lugs exegetical tradition and, under the third Karma-pa, was a major figure in the 14<sup>th</sup> c. Rdzogs-chen Snying-thig tradition. He also received the *Sūtra* transmission from Zur Byams-pa Seng-ge, who stood at the end of a completely different "seal of entrustment" (*gtad rgya*) line that is quickly traced by Padma 'Phrin-las.

This seal of entrustment line started from Sgro-phug-pa and passed through Zur Nag-po, A-mes Shes-rab, Bla-chen Ral-phu-ba, Me-ston Mgon-po, Mkhlas-pa Sres Chen-po, Grub-stob Lhun-dpal, Bande Dbang-phyug Rgyal-mtshan, to Zur Byams-pa Seng-ge. See *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 253.1-5. A seal of entrustment is generally required to become an official lineage holder, but Padma 'Phrin-las seems to have named this section of the lineage after the text from which he drew it, namely G.yung-ston's manual for the *Sūtra* empowerment, the *Gtad rgya gsang mtshan ma'i dbang chog* (which I have not located). G.yung-ston, like Sgrol-ma-ba, ultimately passed his lineage to Zur-ham.

<sup>11</sup> This work I date as follows: Since Sgrol-ma-ba (1294-1375) and G.yung-ston-pa Rdo-rje Dpal (1284-1365) taught Zur-ham, we can place the latter in the last half of the fourteenth century, with his student, Dmyal-ba, writing around the same time or a little later.

vam Lcog-sgar community.<sup>12</sup> It also served as the basis for Padma 'Phrin-las's seventeenth century manual, the *Dkyil 'khor rgya mtsho'i 'jug ngogs*.<sup>13</sup>

The next manual to appear after Dmyal-ba's was the famous manual of the Kah-thog tradition, the *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun*, which dates to around the turn of the sixteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Thus during this period, three major manuals were written for the performance of the empowerment ceremony: the *Glan chog* dating from the early fourteenth century, the *Rin chen phreng ba* from the late fourteenth century, and the *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun* from the turn of the sixteenth century. Each manual altered the empowerment ritual in significant ways, and the changes introduced reflected the *Sūtra*'s diminishing influence within the

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<sup>12</sup> This was the case despite the close ties maintained between the Sog-zlog-pa faction and the Kah-thog tradition, so close that the former were often assumed to have followed Kah-thog's *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun*, when in fact they based themselves on the *Rin chen phreng ba*. This is explained in Padma 'Phrin-las' *Dkyil 'khor rgya mtsho'i 'jug ngogs* 42, 8.3-4: 'di'i slob rgyun gong ra ba phyogs su khams lugs sor gnas yin par grags kyang/ bla ma sog zlog pa'i gsan yig dang zin bris/ gong ra lo tsā ba gzhan phan rdo rjes bzhengs pa'i dbang tsaka sogs zur lugs kho nar snang zhing/ khams lugs dang cha tsam las mi mthun par snang ba.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the relationships between these different Rnying-ma-pa factions and on Padma 'Phrin-las, see Chapter Four.

<sup>14</sup> Again, I am not at all sure of this date. The author, Rmog-ston Rdo-rje Dpal-bzang-po's teacher was the famous Ye-shes Rgyal-mtshan (who authored the main commentary on Dam-pa Bde-gshegs' *Theg pa spyi bcings*). Mkhan-po 'Jam-dbyangs of Kah-thog gives Ye-shes Rgyal-mtshan's birth date as 1395 (see *Kah thog lo rgyus*, 51). On this basis I am assuming that Rmog-ston was active during the late fifteenth century, and may have completed his huge new work late in life, around the turn of the sixteenth century.

Rnying-ma school. The sections below will trace in broad strokes how the empowerment ritual formulated in each these manuals.<sup>15</sup>

### III. Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad and the early *Sūtra* empowerment

Before examining the details of the three earlier manuals, a more general introduction to the *Sūtra*'s empowerment ritual may be in order. The *Sūtra*'s empowerment system is unusual in that it initiates the disciple into progressively higher vehicles, starting from the vehicle of gods and humans and culminating with *atiyoga*.<sup>16</sup> Since the *Sūtra*'s very earliest days, this series of empowerments has been divided into four "empowerment streams" (*dbang gi chu bo*). These four streams correspond to the nine vehicles so that the outer empowerment stream of tantra (*phyi dbang rgyud kyi chu bo*) covers the first six vehicles up through *yoga* tantra, the inner empowerment stream of arising (*nang dbang 'byung ba'i chu bo*) grants initiation into *mahāyoga*, the accomplishment empowerment stream of

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<sup>15</sup> All of these early materials based on the empowerment became available only very recently, in the year 2000. For this reason, my comments below are based upon only a preliminary examination of these long and complex texts.

<sup>16</sup> There are indications that some lineage holders may have only granted initiation upto the level appropriate to their disciples' particular abilities. (See the discussions of this in *Spyi don*, 148-153 and 241.) Even so, it appears that empowerment into all nine vehicles, in some form or other, was generally the norm. On a related point, Dharmāśri admits that of course most recipients of these empowerments will not actually be established in the high levels of realization necessary for truly engaging in every vehicle. For ordinary disciples the best that can be hoped for is that the empowerments, "arrange the interdependent conditions for ascertaining what will [only later] be attained" (*Spyi don*, 154.3: *thob par 'gyur nges kyi rten 'brel srig byed tsam ste*).

renown (*sgrub dbang grags pa'i chu bo*) into *anuyoga*, and the secret empowerment stream of perfection (*gsang dbang rdzogs pa'i chu bo*) into *atiyoga*.<sup>17</sup>

At the center of the empowerment ceremony stands the *Sūtra's mandala*, the Gathered Great Assembly (*tshogs chen 'dus pa*). Most unusual about the Gathered Great Assembly *mandala* are its nine stories. Each story corresponds to one of the nine vehicles,<sup>18</sup> so that during the empowerment the disciples are ritually led up through each level, finally reaching the top of the *mandala* palace, where they receive initiation into the highest vehicle of *atiyoga*.

In addition to its nine levels, the Gathered Great Assembly *mandala* is unusual in having two layers at its center. These represent the peaceful and the wrathful aspects of the central buddha, Kun-tu-bzang-po (Skt. *Samantabhadra*) or Che-mchog He-ru-ka (Skt. *Mahottara Heruka*). This state of affairs is further complicated by the fact that two distinct *mandalas* of the Gathered Great Assembly were actually used in Tibet—an uncommon and a common one (*thun min thun mong*).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Each of the four streams of empowerment are then divided and sub-divided as follows: There are ten outer empowerments which are then further divided into 108 coarse branch empowerments. Similarly, there are eleven inner (*mahāyoga*) empowerments which are sub-divided into 606. Then thirteen accomplishment empowerments which sub-divide into 115, and two secret empowerments which remain unelaborated as two. In all, there are thirty-six empowerments that sub-divide into 831 coarse branches. These are all listed and discussed by Dharmaśri in *Spyi don*, 217-238.

<sup>18</sup> This correspondence was assumed by several of my informants and can be seen clearly spelled out in a passage from what looks to be an early commentary, the *Rgya mdud 'grel*, cited by Dharmaśri on *Spyi don*, 187.4.

The basic structure of the empowerment ritual is traditionally credited to Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad. This Indian master did not write any single comprehensive ritual manual, but instead a number of shorter works that were later assembled by Gnubs-chen as a collection of eighteen texts.<sup>20</sup> Even in these earliest materials

<sup>19</sup> Dharmāśri discusses the sources for these mandalas in his *Spyi don*, 186-188. For the two uncommon mandalas, the wrathful mandala is the Supreme Mandala of the Secret Charnel Grounds (*dur khrod gsang ba mchog gi dkyil 'khor*) that is explained in the root tantra of the *Sūtra* tradition, the *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*, specifically in chapter fourteen, "On the System for the Accomplishment of the Gathered Great Assembly" (*Tshogs chen 'dus pa'i bsgrubs lugs kyi le'u*). What looks like the same mandala is also partially described in several other chapters of the *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*, e.g. chapters 16, 18, 22, and 23. The uncommon peaceful mandala comes from chapter five of the *Rngam glog*. (Dharmāśri does not provide the precise chapter involved in this peaceful form, so I assume it to be chapter five on the basis of my own study of the *Rngam glog*. For a discussion of the *Rngam glog*, which is another of the four root sūtras of *anuyoga*, see Appendix Three.) Regarding the common mandalas, the wrathful is taken from ninth chapter of *He ru ka 'dus pa'i rgyud*, the peaceful from the same mandala in the *Rngam glog*, and then both are combined with certain aspects of the wrathful and peaceful mandalas described in the '*Dren pa'i las byang che le*'. The latter work is one of six chapters that are supposed to have been extracted by the Indian master, Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, from the tantra entitled *Rnam par snang mdzad thig le dbang bskur ba rgyal po'i rgyud* (on this claim, see *Spyi don*, 134.6-135.1).

I have been unable to locate any text with this title. Dharmāśri seems to write that the six chapters, having been extracted, were then regathered under the new title, *Kalba dum bu'i rgyud*. (See *Spyi don*, 21.1: *rgyab brten gyi rgyud rnam par snang mdzad thig le dbang gi tantra las le'u drug phyung ba kalba dum bu'i rgyud yin*.) There is one text with a similar title, *Drag po ngan sngags bskal pa'i dum bu'i rgyud*, that appears in volume forty-four of the Mtshams-'brag edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. I have not had the opportunity to look at this text in any detail, but it does not have six, but twenty-seven chapters, none of which have the titles of the six chapters in question.

<sup>20</sup> Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad's writings on the ritual systems of the *Sūtra* were organized into three sets of six texts each, and for this reason they became known as the *Man ngag drug gsum bco brgyad* ('Pith Instructions of the Eighteen in Three Sixes'). The first of these three sets, entitled the *Gab pa'i dbang le* ('Six Chapters on the Hidden Empowerment'), consisted of the six chapters Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad extracted from another tantra (see note 16 above). The second and third sets are expressly stated to be Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad compositions. Gnubs-chen labelled these latter sets the *Dgos pa'i sgrub thabs drug* ('Six Required *Siddhanas*') and the *Dgos pa'i cha rkyen drug* ('Six Kinds of Required Equipment'). The eighteen texts are all clearly laid out by Gnubs-chen in his *Dbang gi tad rgya'i rtsa ba*, which is then quoted by Dharmāśri in *Spyi don*, 20.3-6.

Several of these eighteen works have recently resurfaced, appended to the second volume of the *Glan chog*. Having made only a preliminary analysis, I have been able to identify four of them, all of which belong to the second set of six. These are *Dbang don bsdus* (*Glan chog* 61, 388.2-389.4), *Dbang don rnam par 'byed pa* (389.4-396.1), *Dbang don rgya cher 'byed pa* (396.2-396.5), *Las tho rab gnas* (405.1-410.2). With these four are included an additional five texts that seem closely related if not actually belonging to the *Man ngag drug gsum bco brgyad* collection. These are *Dbang don rgyas par bshed pa* (396.6-402.4), *Dbang gi man ngag gsang ba* (402.5-404.3), *Spyi dbang*

on the empowerment ritual, two distinct systems were represented. Lo-chen Dharmāśri, the great historian of the *Sūtra* tradition who worked around the turn of the eighteenth century, called these the “tantra system” (*rgyud lugs*) and the “pith instructions system” (*man ngag lugs*).<sup>21</sup> The former is the more abbreviated of the two, in which the disciple is empowered into the nine levels of the Gathered Great Assembly maṇḍala (either the common or the uncommon form). The pith instructions system is far more elaborate, granting empowerment into the “fully complete sūtra” (*mdo yongs rdzogs kyi dbang*). Here the disciple is led into separate maṇḍalas corresponding to the various vehicles, with the common maṇḍala of the Gathered Great Assembly used for the *mahāyoga* section and the uncommon maṇḍala used for the *anuyoga*. Thus, for example, the famous *Vajradhātu* maṇḍala might be used for the *yoga* tantra empowerments, a maṇḍala with Śākyamuni at the center for the *śrāvaka* empowerments, and so on. These other maṇḍalas are called the “branch maṇḍalas” (*yan lag gi dkyil 'khor*), while the Gathered Great Assembly maṇḍala is known as the “root maṇḍala” (*rtsa ba'i dkyil 'khor*). This means that in the pith instructions system the disciple might be

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*chan po'i las tho* (404.4–405.6), *Dbang gi thig gdab* (410.3–414.5), and *Dbang gi gtad rgya* (414.6–416.1). When the *Las tho rab gnas* is compared to several passages quoted from it by Dharmāśri, they are in perfect agreement. It is difficult to say with certainty how much of a hand Gnubs-chen had in the composition of these works. For the purposes of this study, I have accepted the tradition’s attribution of them to Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, and I have seen no particular reason to doubt it. This said, it is likely that Gnubs-chen, in collecting, editing and probably translating these works, made certain changes. In fact, the colophon to the *Dbang gi thig gdab* tells us that it was written by Acārya Gsal ba'i rgyan and Jo-bo Sangs-rgyas, the latter being none other than Gnubs-chen.

<sup>21</sup> This figure and his writings are the focus of Chapter Five of the present study.

led through the vehicles twice—once through the branch mandalas, then again through the nine levels of the root mandala.

#### **IV. Zur-ham Shākyā 'Byung-gnas and the growth of the branches**

After Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad's early writings, we have nothing else on the empowerment ritual until well into the Tibetan tradition. This is not to say nothing was written on the empowerment during these intervening years, but none are extant, and none appear to have been of significant length. All writings on the empowerment dating from before the fourteenth century were short lists or notes on the ritual's performance.<sup>22</sup>

The earliest major ritual manual to be composed was the one by Glan-ston Bsod-nams Mgon-po, known simply as the *Glan chog* and dating from around the turn of the fourteenth century. This work marked a turning point in the *Sūtra* empowerment's history. Before this, the scattered notes on how to perform the ritual were enough to ensure the *Sūtra*'s continuous survival. By the end of the thirteenth century, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the *Sūtra* was slipping from regular use. In order to preserve it, a new and authoritative

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<sup>22</sup> Dharmāśri (*Spyi don*, 245) mentions several practice lists (*las tho*) he came across during his own research, including those by Lha-rje 'Gar (Dam-pa Bde-gshegs' teacher), 'Gosrtsis Lung-pa, Lha-rje 'Khun, Lha-rje Shāka Mgon, Glan-ston Bsod-nam Mgon, and various ones from the Skyi-lugs, as well as the practice manual (*phyag bzhes*) of Glan-chen-po Rdo-rje 'Od. None of these are extant.

manual needed to be produced. The resulting *Glan chog* provided the basis for all the ritual manuals that were to follow over the next few centuries.

The *Glan* manual represents what we know of the *Sūtra* empowerment system before it was inherited by Zur-ham Shākyā 'Byung-gnas. It seems that the early tradition, from Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad and Gnubs-chen, all the way through the early Zur and Glan clans, tended to follow the simpler tantra system.<sup>23</sup> Even when they did adopt the pith instruction system, it was in an abbreviated form compared to later, when a much expanded pith instructions system became the norm. The turning point came after Sgrol-ma-ba, with his student, Zur-ham Shākyā 'Byung-gnas and the manual entitled the *Rin chen phreng ba* by Zur-ham's student, Dmyal-ba Bde-legs.<sup>24</sup>

Before this manual, all the *Sūtra* empowerment traditions, including the *Glan chog*, followed a pith instructions system that used only two branch mandalas for the empowerments into all six vehicles, from that of gods and humans through *yoga* tantra. The *Rin chen phreng ba*, and all the manuals after it,

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<sup>23</sup> A certain comment by Dharmāśri makes it appear that the tantra system may have been more commonly used than the pith instructions system. On *Spyi don*, 242.2-4, Dharmāśri seems to describe a separate lineage for the early pith instructions system: "In accordance with the intention of Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad's *Las tho*, the empowerment of the fully complete *Sūtra* was received by Slob-dpon A-Me from the four: So Dpal-ldan gyi yab, Glan Sgyed-kha-ba, G.yu-ston Chos-mgon, and Lce Byams-sras. Then he granted to So Dpal-ldan, him to Rog-ston Kun-dga' Don-grub, and him to G.yung-ston Rdo-rje Dpal in the palace of Snye-mdö. Then he granted it to Byang So-ston Shākyā Dpal, etc."

<sup>24</sup> In Chapter Four it is noted that Sgrol-ma-ba marked a crucial point in the lineage, for it was after him that the three distinct lineages diverged (of Sgrol-ma-ba's son, Zur-ham and Zur-mo), reuniting only three centuries later in the two brothers of Smin-grol-gling. Here, in the ritual manuals, we are seeing additional evidence that something unusual happened after Sgrol-ma-ba.

added many more branch mandalas, using one or more for every one of the first six vehicles through *yoga*. Dharmaśri explains this shift as follows:

Earlier, before Sgrol-ma-ba and his son, in the ritual traditions of the Glan and [Sgro-]phugs-pa, each of the branch mandalas for *yoga* and below were not performed. Then [Zur-ham's] empowerment manual granted [the empowerments] on the basis of an arrangement of certain sections of the Glan-system; however, Zur-ham distinguished the forty-three enumerated vows and other details for the root *Sūtra* and the branch mandalas. Gnyal-ba Bde-legs then composed his ritual arrangements in accordance with that tradition. Those who grant empowerment using that manual, thinking of it as the ritual tradition of Zur-ham, have labelled it the "Zur system."<sup>25</sup>

In expanding the pith instructions system in this way, Dmyal-ba Bde-legs was following the tradition of his own teacher, Zur-ham. That this innovation was not Dmyal-ba's own idea but Zur-ham's is indicated in a passage found in the *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, where Padma 'Phrin-las explains that "the ritual arrangements of Gmyal-ba Bde-legs, a direct disciple of Zur-ham . . . were written in accordance with the teachings of Zur-ham himself."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Spyi don*, 109.2-5. *sngar sgrol ma ba yab sras yan chad glan phugs pa rnams kyi phyag bzhes su yo ga man yan lag gi dkyil 'khor rnams kyang re re las mi mdzad cing/dbang chog kyang glan lugs kyi dum dum khrigs kyi thog nas bskur bar mdzad mod/zur ham gyis mdo rtsa ba dang yang lag gi dkyil 'khor bsdoms pa la grangs bzhi bcu rtsa gsum la sogs par phye ba'i bka' srol ltar gnyal ba bde legs pas chog khrigs su bkod pa nas bzung/yig cha de'i thog nas dbang bskur mdzad pa rnams/zur ham gyi phyag len yin pa la bsams nas zur lugs zhes ming du btags pa yin no.*

<sup>26</sup> *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 269.5-6. *zur ham 'di'i dngos slob gnyal ba bde legs pa'i chog khrigs nyid... zur ham nyid kyi gsung bzhin bris yod pa*. See also *Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs* 41, 13.5-14.1, where Padma 'Phrin-las argues the same point: *zur hwam shāka 'byung phyag len bzhin/ngos slob bde legs gsung rjes 'brangs/gsal byed cho ga khrigs su bya/snyig ma'i gdul bya blo gros zhan/rgyud lung gab dkrugs don mi shes/rang bzo'i dri mas sbags pa yi/blo dman rnams kyi don du'o.*

The two branch manḍalas used in the *Glan chog* are the *Rnam-'joms* for the *kriyā* tantra vehicle and the famous *Vajradhātu* manḍala for *yoga*. That these were the only branch manḍalas to be used for the fully complete *Sūtra* empowerment appears to have been the norm throughout the early tradition. Even in Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad's *Las tho rab gnas* we read, "Next, the outer tantra vehicles: erect the manḍalas of the Twenty-One in Three Families and the *Vajradhātu*."<sup>27</sup> After these two manḍalas were constructed, the first stream of *Sūtra* empowerments, the outer empowerment stream of tantra, would be granted using the ten branch empowerments and the 108 coarse branch empowerments standard to the *Sūtra* empowerment system. These empowerments would thus be granted into the *kriyā* and *yoga* tantra manḍalas. After that, for the three remaining streams of

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Although these new branch manḍalas are thus usually attributed to Zur-ham, there is some evidence to suggest that they may have been added a little earlier. Dharmāśri cites a passage by G.yung-ston Rdo-rje Dpal (1284-1375) in which G.yung-ston appears to be defending precisely such a change in the ritual format: "According to some who do not understand our methods, we admit that the individual manḍalas for both sūtra and tantra are not clearly present, and then, bringing together the inner empowerments and the accomplishment empowerments within the Gathered Great Assembly manḍala, we simply impute [the rest]." (*Spyi don*, 241.3-4. *de lta bu'i tshul ma go ba kha cig na re mdo rgyud gnyis la dkyil 'khor so sor gsal ba med zer nas/ tshogs chen 'dus pa'i dkyil 'khor du nang dbang dang sgrub dbang sbrel nas 'dogs pa.)*

Unfortunately, Dharmāśri does not include G.yung-ston's response to this criticism. G.yung-ston was one of Zur-ham's two main teachers for the *Sūtra* tradition. That he is already referring to criticisms that might be directed against branch manḍalas for all nine vehicles may indicate that this innovation, which is generally ascribed to Zur-ham, may have had its roots one generation earlier. G.yung-ston's admission, "that the individual manḍalas are not clearly present," in the early materials suggests that he was writing during the very earliest days of the new branch manḍalas, when they had not yet gained broad acceptance. No matter who was first responsible for the change, it can still be dated to the last half of the fourteenth century.

<sup>27</sup> *Las tho rab gnas*, 406.5-6. *de nas phyi rgyud theg pa'o/ rigs gsum nyi shu rtsa gcig dang/ rdo rje dbyings kyi dkyil 'khor bzhengs*. Note that *ubhaya* tantra, usually the fifth vehicle, is often excluded in the *Sūtra* empowerment tradition so that the gods and humans vehicle can be included as the first vehicle while still keeping nine vehicles. This meant that including a branch manḍala for *kriyā* and *yoga* was in effect having a manḍala for each of the outer tantric vehicles.

inner tantra, there were two options: In the first option (outlined in the *Spyi dbang chen po'i las tho*), one used the common Gathered Great Assembly maṇḍala for the second stream of eleven empowerments for *mahāyoga*,<sup>28</sup> followed by the uncommon root maṇḍala for the third stream of thirteen *anuyoga* empowerments into. No separate maṇḍala was needed for the two *atiyoga* empowerments, which, insofar as they can be said to require a maṇḍala at all, continued to use the uncommon root maṇḍala. The second option open to someone following the *Glan chog* was to use only one of these two root maṇḍalas for all three streams of *mahā-anu-ati*.<sup>29</sup>

Until the fourteenth century, this was the pattern followed for the vast majority of the *Sūtra* empowerments granted. Then in the fourteenth century Zur-ham complicated the ritual considerably by introducing branch maṇḍalas for *each* of the first six vehicles, even the non-tantric vehicles. To make matters worse, numerous maṇḍalas were used for each vehicle. Thus he had nine maṇḍalas for the gods and humans empowerments, five for the *śrāvaka*, and so on for a total of forty-three in all. According to this “Zur System,” one would

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<sup>28</sup> Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad does not refer to the two forms of the Gathered Great Assembly Maṇḍala as “common” and “uncommon,” but as the “maṇḍala from the *Las byang chen po*” and the “maṇḍala of the Supreme Secret” (*gsang ba mchog gi dkyil 'khor*, see *Spyi dbang chen po'i las tho*, 404.6 and 405.3). Note that in the long passage translated above, Dharmasri wrote that the common maṇḍala first appeared in the *Las byang che le*, one of the six chapters extracted by Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, which explains Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad’s name for this maṇḍala. Then regarding the uncommon maṇḍala, we have already seen that it is also known as the “Supreme Maṇḍala of the Secret Charnel Grounds” (*dur khrod gsang ba mchog gi dkyil 'khor*), and this is certainly the name to which Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad is referring in this passage here.

<sup>29</sup> This is the option described in the *Las tho rab gnas*.

receive the respective empowerments for each of these mandalas one vehicle at a time through *yoga* tantra. Then, for the *mahayoga* and *anuyoga* empowerment, Zur-ham seems to have followed the second option outlined above, with only one root mandala constructed for the remaining streams.

The ritual structure was further altered when Zur-ham moved the ten outer empowerments of the first stream, so they would not be granted for the relevant branch mandalas but for the root mandala along with the other three streams. Thus after the disciple was inducted into each of the branch mandalas, the root mandala would be constructed and then all four streams of empowerments for all nine vehicles would be granted for that root mandala.

So what did all this mean from a larger perspective? Zur-ham modified the ritual structure in two related ways: He added numerous branch mandalas and confined the four streams, which were the essence of the *Sūtra* empowerment, to the root mandala. This addition and contraction combined to occlude the distinctive elements of the *Sūtra* within a larger ritual system, leading, in turn in a reduction of the *Sūtra*'s symbolic standing vis-à-vis the other vehicles. In this way Zur-ham's modifications reflected the *Sūtra*'s waning influence within the Rnying-ma school.

His addition of more branch mandalas granted each of the first six vehicles greater ritual independence from the Gathered Great Assembly mandala, lifting each to a more equal footing relative to the *anuyoga* vehicle. This

independence was furthered by limiting the four streams of the *Sūtra* empowerment to the root mandala. No longer could one be initiated into the *Vajradhātu* mandala by means of the ten outer empowerments of the first stream. In this sense, the *Sūtra* had been exiled from its own ritual. Zur-ham kept the larger ritual structure of the fully complete *Sūtra* empowerment, but restricted the root sūtra to the vehicle of *anuyoga*.<sup>30</sup>

Through his manipulations of the rites, Zur-ham brought the symbolic structure into line with the historical reality of the *Sūtra*'s diminished position within the Rnying-ma school. Given the number of innovations in Rnying-ma tantra over the preceding three centuries, the *Sūtra* could no longer be said to embrace all the vehicles. Now these external circumstances were carried into the *Sūtra*'s own ritual forms.

Even so, Zur-ham did not go so far as to introduce separate branch mandalas for *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga*, and *atiyoga*. The *Sūtra*'s root mandala was still allowed to include all three of these highest vehicles, not just *anuyoga* but *mahāyoga* and *atiyoga* as well (though these were now understood to be *anu-mahā* and *anu-ati*). Soon however, even these would be taken away.

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<sup>30</sup> According to Zur-ham's system, the nine vehicles into which the disciple is initiated during the *anuyoga* section of the fully complete empowerment ceremony were to be understood as merely an *anuyoga* view of these nine vehicles, and not the actual nine vehicles themselves.

## V. The Kah-thog additions

About one hundred years after Zur-ham's student, Dmyal-ba Bde-legs, put into writing the *Rin chen phreng ba*, another manual was composed, this time at Kah-thog monastery in Khams. The *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun* was composed by Rmog-ston Rdo-rje Dpal-bzang-po. His teacher was Ye-shes Rgyal-mtshan, the last of the thirteen generations of Kah-thog masters (*kah-thog bla rabs bcu gsum*) and the author of our commentary on Dam-pa Bde-gshegs's *Theg pa spyi bcings*. Taken together, Rmog-ston and his teacher seem to have brought about the one significant revival of the *Sūtra* at Kah-thog after Dam-pa's ground-breaking work.

*Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun* is the most elaborate of all the *Sūtra* empowerment systems. As we will see in Chapter Four, its complexity caused Padma 'Phrin-las to criticize this Kah-thog tradition. What made it so much more complicated than the already complex *Rin chen phreng ba* was the addition of still more branch mandalas and their attendant empowerments. Specifically, Rmog-ston added mandalas for the *mahāyoga* and *atiyoga* sections. Following the *yoga* tantra empowerments into the *Vajradhātu* mandala he inserted the standard eighteen empowerments of benefit, ability, and profundity (*phan nus zab dbang bco brgyad*) for initiating the disciple into the peaceful and wrathful *Māyajala* mandalas. These would be followed by the usual four streams of *Sūtra* empowerments into the Gathered Great Assembly mandala, and finally the eighteen mind class

meanings of “A” (*sems sde a don*) empowerments for *atiyoga*. Mkhan-po Jam-dbyangs describes the innovations of Rmog-ston’s new manual:

Taking pieces of the Glan tradition’s empowerment ritual manual as his base, he ornamented it with the practice tradition of ‘Gosrtsi Khung-pa and the ritual arrangements of Gro-ston Dpal-l丹 Grags. He also added the teachings particular to the peaceful and wrathful deities of *Māyajala* and the eighteen Sems-sde A-don. Thus it was known as “the River of Honey empowerment manual for the Sūtra, Illusory [Net], and Mind [Class] threesome.” It is also called the “Khams system of *Sūtra* empowerment.” The empowerments of the fifteen common accomplishment substances, that had been excluded in the ritual arrangements of Gnyal-ba [Bde-legs], appear in this [manual], and the teaching of the three profound empowerments of the peaceful *Māyajala*, that were excluded during the intermediate period in central Tibet, are included in this Kah-thog system. Thus had it been enhanced. Moreover, the empowerment streams of the eighteen mind class meanings of “A” were incorporated by this work, whereby it became a means of great benefit for the continuity of the teachings.<sup>31</sup>

The Kah-thog-pa’s reputation for expertise in the Spoken Teachings began with Dam-pa Bde-gshegs, who first brought the triad of *mdo-sgyu-sems-gsum* to Kah-thog. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the popularity of the gter-ma teachings exploded, pushing together the three parts of the Spoken Teachings so that they were increasingly seen and transmitted together as a

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<sup>31</sup> Kah thog lo rgyus, 64-65. *mdo dbang glan lugs kyi dbang chog dum dum khrigs khrigs nyid gzhir byas pa la 'gos rtsi khung pa'i phyag bzhes gro ston dpal ldan grags kyi chog khrigs kyis kyang brgyan/sgyu 'phrul zhi khro dang sems sde a don bco brgyad kyi sgos bka' yang sbyar te/ mdo sgyu sems gsum gyi dbang chog sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun zhes bya ba mdzad/ 'di la mdo dbang khams lugs zhes yongs su grags so/sgrub rdzas thun mong bco lnga'i dbang gnyal pa'i chog khrigs su chad pa 'dir 'byung ba dang sgyu 'phrul zhi ba'i zab dbang gsum gyis bka' dbus gtsang du bar skabs su chad pa kahthog lugs 'di bzhugs pas gso bar mdzad cing/sems sde a don bco brgyad kyi dbang rgyun yang 'dis bzung bas bstan rgyun la phan pa chen po'i sgor gyur pa dang.*

whole. Rmog-ston's new manual must be understood with this in mind, as it fixed the *Sūtra* still more firmly into the larger system of Spoken Teachings.

With these new additions, every one of the nine vehicles had its own set of mandalas. In the *Sbrang rts'i'i chu rgyun*, the *Sūtra*'s empowerment system reached its most elaborate and comprehensive form. Yet simultaneously, the reduction of the *Sūtra*'s power within its own empowerment ritual, begun by Zur-ham in the fourteenth century, was completed by Rmog-ston. The *Sūtra* had lost even more of its power, forfeiting all control over its own nine vehicles empowerment structure and becoming subservient to its own creation. The four streams of empowerment were now limited to the single vehicle of *anuyoga*.

## VI. Conclusions

The changes made to the *Sūtra* empowerment's ritual structure over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries mirrored precisely what was occurring in the outside world. As the *Sūtra*'s influence in Tibetan Buddhism waned, so also did its role within its own empowerment ritual. There are number of possible explanations for this decline.

First, Zur-ham's addition of branch mandalas for each of the lower vehicles reflected the growing influence of the Gsar-ma-pa views of tantra. As noted above in section one, the Gsar-ma-pa were concerned to preserve the Mahāyana sūtras as descriptions of a complete and valid path to full

enlightenment. This view conflicted with the *Sūtra*'s own claim that its empowerments could, in an instant, catapult the recipient over the entire "gradual path" of careful study and meditation on the sūtras. The *Sūtra*'s attempt to "tantricize" all Buddhist teachings was anathema to the Gsar-ma-pa view.<sup>32</sup> By providing the lower vehicles with their own branch mandalas, Zur-ham had bowed, at least to some degree, to popular demand and limited the *Sūtra*'s influence over the early sūtric traditions.

Then came the further changes wrought by Rmog-ston at Kah-thog. His addition of the *Māyajala* and the *sems-sde* empowerments seems to have been less a response to the growing influence of the Gsar-ma-pa than to more specific shifts within the Rnying-ma school. Originally, the *Sūtra* had considered itself as comprising all nine vehicles, including the entire triad of *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga*, and *atiyoga*. But over the following centuries, the highest vehicle of *atiyoga* evolved independently into a completely different creature from what it had been when the *Sūtra* was composed in the late ninth century—so different that the *Sūtra*'s claim to encompass it was no longer tenable. The *Sūtra* had to be demoted to *anuyoga*. Meanwhile, *mahāyoga* had also continued to develop; many of its tantras were rewritten or reinterpreted to include the perfection phase practices that had been the whole *raison d'être* for *anuyoga* as a distinct vehicle. By the

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<sup>32</sup> Note that Zur-ham was active at precisely the same time as the founder of the Dge-lugs school, Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419), whose works on tantra stressed the importance of the distinction between sūtra and tantra.

fourteenth century, the *Sūtra* was being evicted from its own nine vehicle palace by pressures from either side. This is precisely what was reflected within the ritual structure, when the *Māyajala* and the *sems-sde A-don* intitiations for *mahāyoga* and *atiyoga* were added. The *Sūtra*'s entire set of 831 empowerments was now squeezed into the single vehicle of *anuyoga*.

This whole process may also be understood as a ritual reflection of the canonization of the *Sūtra*. By the turn of the sixteenth century, the *Sūtra* had been sealed into the Rnying-ma canonical collection, the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, that was gathered by Ratna Gling-pa. The various changes made to *Sūtra*'s empowerment ritual reflected a jockeying for position as the canon was being settled, with attempts to define the *Sūtra*'s relationship to the rest of the Rnying-ma canon.

In this sense, the canon was not simply an empty repository where texts could be gathered. Rather, it had a shape, a structure, whose form was determined by a number of concerns. The fate of text rested on just factors as its doxographical classification, the prestige of the purported translator, the latest versions of the text's history, and the topical theme identified as the text's main focus.<sup>33</sup> All of these factors were changing over time, and so Rnying-ma canonicity also changed. In this sense, the flexibility seen in the *Sūtra*

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<sup>33</sup> How the internal structures of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* changed between editions is a complex question that deserves to be a separate study in its own right. The groundwork for such a study is being laid by David Germano in his work on the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* at the University of Virginia.

empowerment's ritual format reflected a certain degree of flexibility in the canon itself. Not only was the ritual changing, the perception of the *Sūtra* as a "fixed" entity was also shifting. Each new manual reflected an adjustment in which aspects of the ritual were considered fixed and deemed available for adaptation to fit the conditions of the day. Certain ritual structures, like the need to grant initiation for all nine vehicles, remained unquestioned throughout this period. But other structures that were basic to the identity of the *Sūtra* in the thirteenth century (for example, the number of branch mandalas used) could be, and perhaps had to be altered in the sixteenth century.

By the thirteenth century the *Sūtra* had become a fixture of the Rnying-ma school, but what precisely this meant continued to change for centuries to come. The canon was closed in the fifteenth century, but how this canon functioned in Tibetan society and how, in turn, that society altered the canon remained vital questions. For a number of reasons, most obviously its unwieldy size and complexity, the *Sūtra*'s role after the thirteenth century was more that of an iconic presence than of an active system of study and practice. It continued to be worshipped as a kind of sepulchre by means of the empowerment ritual, passed on as a crucial reliquary of the Rnying-ma school, but the tomb was rarely opened. The next chapter examines how the *Sūtra*, without ever being opened, became the subject of a powerful struggle during the seventeenth century. In

fact, this strange mixture of death and vitality that characterized the *Sūtra* after its canonization will be a theme in each of the remaining chapters in this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: LINEAGE

Lineage—the tracks of a teaching, a text, or a person backward in time to its point of origin—is the Buddhist mechanism for authority. The heir to a direct line of transmissions, leading often back to the Buddha himself, is the legitimate holder of that lineage. Yet surprisingly little has been written on the topic, and then the focus has generally been the formulations of Chan and Tiantai lineages in Tang China. Here, the Chinese fixation on lineage has been linked to ancestor worship: “The patriarchal lineage,” writes Bernard Faure, “is simply another kind of ancestral lineage, which depends on the cult of the ancestors carried on by their descendants.”<sup>1</sup> Recent scholarship has traced the emergence of lineage in Chinese Buddhism to around the turn of the seventh century.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in Tibet, lineage certainly existed in some form during the early imperial period of the seventh through ninth centuries. After the tenth century,

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<sup>1</sup> Faure 1996, 156.

<sup>2</sup> See Linda Penkower, “In the Beginning . . . Guanding (561-632) and the Creation of Early Tiantai,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23.2 (2000), 245-296. For other work on lineage in Chinese Buddhism, see John R. McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986); Theodore Griffith Foulk, “The ‘Ch’an School’ and Its Place in the Buddhist Monastic Tradition” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1987; Bernard Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism*. Translated by Phyllis Brooks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

however, lineage began to take on a much more important role in Tibetan Buddhism. The early imperial period was idealized by post-tenth century Tibetans as a “golden age,” when the Tibetan empire ruled over central Asia. The Indian and Tibetan masters of this bygone age underwent an apotheosis, thereby bestowing legitimacy upon any and all who could claim a link to them.

This was particularly the case among the Rnying-ma-pa. In Chapter Two it was suggested that this “ideology of nostalgia” was what conferred identity to the Rnying-ma school as a school during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This ideology held together even those communities that employed radically different tools to represent that golden age. Some used creative revelation to communicate directly with these past masters. Other, more conservative, Rnying-ma-pa, like Dam-pa Bde-gshegs and the Zur-s, engaged in careful exegetical analysis of the ancient tantras, constructing lineages to bind themselves to those same masters of the “golden age.” But in both cases, they accepted the ideology of nostalgia and were brought together beneath the banner of the Rnying-ma-pa.

As noted in Chapter Three, the period from the thirteenth through the sixteenth century witnessed a change in the rhetoric of the Rnying-ma-pa. Lineage began to be deployed less to unite the Rnying-ma-pa against their Gsar-ma-pa critics; and more in arguments within the school, between competing factions. In this way, the shift seen in doctrinal studies, away from the root

tantras of the past, towards the more recent Tibetan commentaries, was mirrored in the arena of lineage. Rnying-ma-pa concerns regarding lineage no longer revolved around their shared origin in the distant past of the early imperial period. Rather, they focused on the legitimacy of the recent lineal transmissions, on the question of whether a given lineage was really transmitted between this particular master and that particular student. Thus the facticity of the transmission became the central issue in post-fifteenth century debates over lineage. Just how the “facticity” of a transmission could be determined was, of course, a nebulous question that was ultimately decided through politics as much as through more refined, perhaps “spiritual,” measures of proof. This chapter explores some of the intricacies of these two measures of a lineal legitimacy (politics and spirituality) and how they were interwoven in a struggle over the lineage of the *Sūtra* tradition that took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Tibetan Buddhist lineages are traditionally transmitted from teacher to disciple by ritual means, through the empowerment ceremony. By the sixteenth century such ceremonies were common, with the result that, in theory, multiple persons could claim to be lineage holders. In reality, however, only a select few were to be remembered as such by future generations. Who these few were, that is, how the principal lineages were to be traced, was often a topic of sustained controversy.

Thus lineages are retroactively constructed. They do not simply exist to be discovered. This does not mean, of course, that they can be conjured out of nothing. In most cases, they are woven together from numerous threads of teaching transmissions from the past. A lineage is simply one feasible line traced through this tangle of transmissions, starting at point in the past and ending in the present. The line followed is usually a question of politics, though a peculiarly Rnying-ma form of politics.

The contours of these politics are apparent in the case of the *Sūtra* empowerment lineage. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked a pivotal time in the history of Tibet, for during these years the modern Tibetan state was consolidated under the rule of the Dalai Lamas. It is often assumed that the Rnying-ma remained outside the fray of large-scale Tibetan politics, that they stayed in their caves and remote villages focused on more ethereal concerns. The dramatic events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries paint a different picture. An examination of the *Sūtra* materials dating from these years reveals a Rnying-ma school deeply involved in the politics of the day. While Mongol and Tibetan armies battled on the field, another war was being waged in the parallel realm of prophecy and black magic, between the great masters of the Rnying-ma school. The nation's exoteric politics were being translated into the uniquely Rnying-ma language of prophecy, black magic, and esoteric ritual.

## I. Time for a new lineage

The next time we gain another clear view of the *Sūtra* comes with the works of the second head of Rdo-rje Brag monastery, Padma 'Phrin-las (1641-1717).<sup>3</sup>

Padma 'Phrin-las's predecessor, Ngag-gi Dbang-po, had founded Rdo-rje Brag monastery, the home of the *Byang-gter* lineage,<sup>4</sup> but it was his reincarnation, Padma 'Phrin-las, who established the new monastery as a major Rnying-ma institution. With this aim in mind, Padma 'Phrin-las turned to the issue of lineage. He saw that his monastery lacked the crucial lineage of the Spoken Teachings, and in particular of the *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions*.<sup>5</sup>

The *Byang-gter* community (known as the *E-vam Lcog-sgar*) traced its roots back to the revealer of the *Byang-gter*, Rgod-kyi-ldem-'phru-can (1337-1408). The community is traditionally said to have first been gathered together by Mnga'-ris Pan-chen (1487-1542), whose brother, Legs-ldan Bdud-'joms Rdo-rje, was recognized as Rgod-ldem-can's reincarnation. Under the charismatic leadership of these two brothers, the *Byang-gter* was the primary focus of the early

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<sup>3</sup> During 2000, two new *Bka' ma* collections, coming out of Kah-thog monastery, became available. Both collections are rich in materials on the *Sūtra* tradition dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. All of them are manuals for performing the empowerment ritual. Thus we can conclude that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, writers on the *Sūtra* became increasingly focused on the system's empowerment rites, so much so that it became known as the "Sūtra empowerment" tradition.

<sup>4</sup> The *Byang-gter* is a complete system of revelatory teachings, first revealed in the fourteenth century by the visionary, Rig-'dzin Rgod-ldem-can, of whom more will be said below.

<sup>5</sup> Though I am emphasizing the work Padma 'Phrin-las put into the *Sūtra* tradition, much of his attentions were of course also given to organizing the ritual texts of the *Byang-gter*, as pointed out by Boord 1993, 30.

community, but the Spoken Teachings lineage was also carefully nurtured. However, during the hundred years following the deaths of the two brothers, the community allowed its Spoken Teachings lineage to fade.<sup>6</sup> This loss is not surprising given the circumstances: During precisely this period the E-vam Lcog-sgar was forced to wander homeless throughout Tibet, persecuted by Tibet's rulers who were then based in the province of Gtsang.<sup>7</sup> This state of affairs made it impossible, or unnecessary, for the hapless community to maintain the *Sūtra*'s elaborate rituals. Years later, when Ngag-gi Dbang-po founded Rdo-rje Brag monastery, he brought these peregrinations to an end. A new E-vam Lcog-sgar was finally established at Rdo-rje Brag in 1632, and the lost Spoken Teachings lineage had to be restored.

The *Sūtra*'s changing role during this time must be understood in terms of its crucial function within the wider Spoken Teachings. In Chapter Two a distinction was drawn between the Spoken Teachings and the new revelatory teachings. In particular, it was observed that the Spoken Teachings were found in the larger monastic institutions and were of less interest to Tibetan Buddhists at the village level. In the case of the E-vam Lcog-sgar community, the *Sūtra*'s

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<sup>6</sup> That the lineage was broken between the two brothers and Padma 'Phrin-las was reflected in the fact that, when Padma 'Phrin-las eventually rebuilt his community's Spoken Teachings lineage, he was forced to exclude the intervening two figures of Ngag-gi Dbang-po and his father, Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal, even though they were central to the community's main *Byang-gter* lineage. This exclusion was made necessary by the fact that these two figures did not perform the Spoken Teachings rituals required for upholding the lineage.

<sup>7</sup> The details of these events will be explained further below.

continuing importance in larger monasteries is confirmed. For smaller communities, or those centered upon a single charismatic teacher, the *Sūtra*'s complex rituals were neither feasible nor necessary. But in the setting of major Rnying-ma institutions, the *Sūtra* was crucial. Given Padma 'Phrin-las's interest in establishing a new *Sūtra* tradition at Rdo-rje Brag, it appears that in the seventeenth century, the *Sūtra* had become a requirement for any major institution of the Rnying-ma school. Its was central to the Spoken Teachings, and the latter's reputation for stability, first put forth by the early Zurs and Dam-pa Bde-gshegs, had been well-established by the end of the fifteenth century. This assured the *Sūtra* of unprecedented attention during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a time when stability was of the essence.

Padma 'Phrin-las clearly manipulated the *Sūtra* tradition in his creation of Rdo-rje Brag monastery. He did this by composing two major works—a massive (three volume) new ritual manual and a collection of biographies of the masters of the *Sūtra* lineage. What follows is an analysis of the latter work, with extensive digressions into the political motivations driving Padma 'Phrin-las's project.

## II. Earlier lineages, 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>8</sup>

For the most part, the central lineage that Padma 'Phrin-las traces from the early Zurs up to Sgrol-ma-ba agrees with those traced earlier by Kah-thog-pa Rmog-ston Rdo-rje Dpal-bzang-po (late 15<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>9</sup> and Sog-zlog-pa (1552-1624). At Sgrol-ma-ba, however, three different lineages diverge—the one favored by Padma 'Phrin-las that passes to Zur-ham, another through Zur-ham's sister, Zur-mo Dge-'dun 'Bum, and one through Sgrol-ma-ba's son, Sgrol-chen Sangs-rgyas Rin-chen Rgyal-mtshan Dpal-bzang-po (b.1350). While Padma 'Phrin-las mentions the existence of the other two, he only traces the first. Sog-zlog-pa, however, follows the lineage of the son, without even mentioning the other two lineages passing through Zur-ham and Zur-mo.<sup>10</sup> In order to find a discussion of all three lineages, one must look to Dharmáśri.<sup>11</sup>

This difference in attitude between Padma 'Phrin-las and Dharmáśri regarding the other lineages is significant. As we will see below, it appears that

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<sup>8</sup> For this section I base my discussion of the lineage on Padma 'Phrin-las' *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*. An abbreviated lineage also appears in Padma 'Phrin-las' empowerment ritual manual (*Dkyil 'khor rgya mtsho'i jug ngogs*). The two sources are almost entirely in agreement, though a few minor differences do occur. The *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar* was written later, so perhaps the differences can be attributed to further research conducted by Padma 'Phrin-las in the meantime. This would imply that the *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar* should be considered more accurate.

<sup>9</sup> On Rmog-ston's dates, see Chapter Three, note 14.

<sup>10</sup> Though Sog-zlog-pa does refer to Zur-ham by name in another context. See *Shel gyi me long*, 375.4, where he discusses a *rdzogs-chen sems-phyogs* lineage in accordance with how Zur-ham's earlier arrangement.

<sup>11</sup> Probably due to its brevity and completeness, Dharmáśri's account is reproduced verbatim in the recent *History of the Nyingma School* by Dudjom Rinpoche.

Padma 'Phrin-las was more concerned to exclude other Rnying-ma lineages, while Dharmāśri was more inclusive. Padma 'Phrin-las makes the bold claim that, "During the later period, Zurham was the exclusive lord of the Zur system of the *Sūtra* empowerment. Nowadays this is our line of practice."<sup>12</sup>

When Padma 'Phrin-las refers to his own lineage as the Zur system, he is referring specifically to that which began with Zur-ham. As we have seen, Zur-ham made the most significant changes ever to the *Sūtra*'s empowerment ritual, innovations that can be seen in the ritual manual entitled *Rin chen phreng ba* written by his close disciple, Gnyal-ba Bde-legs. To the usual set of empowerments into the *Sūtra*'s root mandala, the *Tshogs chen 'dus pa* ('Gathered of the Great Assembly'), Zur-ham added a new series of empowerments, into what he called the "branch mandalas."<sup>13</sup> The *Rin chen phreng ba* was the earliest textual source for these new empowerments. As such, it was held in high regard by Padma 'Phrin-las, who made much of the fact that it was the "root manual" for own work.

Surprisingly, the main lineage did not pass from Zur-ham to the *Rin chen phreng ba*'s author, Dnyal-ba Bde-legs. Rather, Padma 'Phrin-las traces it to Lang-'gro Sprul-sku Tshe-dbang Rgyal-po. The latter then passed it to the lineage-holder, Legs-pa Dpal-bzang. Not much is known about either of these two, but

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<sup>12</sup> *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 269.4-5. *phyis su mdo dbang zur lugs kyi bstan pa'i bdag po 'di kho na yin la/deng sang yang 'di'i phyag bzhes kyi rgyun yin pa.*

<sup>13</sup> The technicalities of this development were discussed in Chapter Three.

the latter in turn passed it to 'Jam-dbyangs Rin-chen Rgyal-mtshan. This great master was the father of Mn̄ga'-ris Pañ-chen Padma Dbang-rgyal (1487-1542) and Legs-ldan Bdud-'joms Rdo-rje.

We have already met these two above, in the introduction to this chapter. The older brother, Mn̄ga'-ris Pañ-chen, founded the community of E-vam Lcog-sgar, while the younger, Legs-ldan Rdo-rje, was the second incarnation of the great revealer of the *Byang-gter*, Rgod-ldem-can. In their efforts to establish the *Byang-gter* tradition, this family trio seems to have had a great interest in the *Sūtra*. Sets of notes (*phyag mchan*) attributed to Mn̄ga'-ris Pañ-chen and his father are used by Padma 'Phrin-las in his ritual manual, and the father is recognized as an emanation of the main protector of the *Sūtra*, Legs-ldan Nag-po.<sup>14</sup>

The two brothers each bestowed the lineage on Skyi-ston Tshe-ring Dbang-po. In particular, Legs-ldan Rdo-rje is said to have granted him the empowerment at the palace of the Gtsang rulers of Tibet, Bsam-'grub-rtse. From Skyi-ston it passed to Lha-chen Bres-gshongs-pa Chos-rgyal Rdo-rje. This figure spent his youth at the ancient headquarters of the Zur clan, 'Ug-pa-lung. He studied under many teachers, most notably the sixth Zhwa-dmar-pa and Gong-ra Lo-chen Gzhan-phan Rdo-rje (1594-1654).<sup>15</sup> He received the *Sūtra* empowerment three times, first from Gong-ra Lo-chen, then from Rdzogs-chen-

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<sup>14</sup> See *Brgyud pa'i rnām thar*, 299.6. Note that Legs-ldan Nag-po is none other than the subjugated form of Rudra.

<sup>15</sup> See *Brgyud pa'i rnām thar*, 382.2-3.

pa Nam-mkha' 'Brug-sgra. Then came the main transmission that interests Padma 'Phrin-las, namely the one stemming from Legs-ldan Rdo-rje. This was received by Bres-gshongs-pa later in life, when Skyi-ston returned to Bsam-'grub-rtse, the site of his own empowerment, to grant it. Finally, the lineage was passed in private to Sman-lung-pa Blo-mchog Rdo-rje (1607-1671), the teacher of Padma 'Phrin-las.<sup>16</sup> Apparently the secrecy of this last transmission caused some to doubt as to its facticity, for Padma 'Phrin-las defends it by writing:

Nowadays certain parties gossip in secret whispers that, "The master Bres[-gshongs] Rin-po-che did not really grant the *Sūtra* empowerment to the pervasive lord, the great Sman-lung-pa." This is nothing but a conspiracy. This has been claimed even in my presence. There are indeed many marginal characters who would harm our great teachers with insulting accusations, but thanks to 'Jam-dbyangs Mkhyen-brtse Dbang-phyug and his nephews, as well as to the great omniscient Conqueror [i.e. the fifth Dalai Lama], it has been said time and again that the *vidyādhara* lord [Legs-ldan Rdo-rje]'s lineage is definitely unbroken. Therefore whosoever casts aspersions as these people do, rejecting the dharma and speaking against all those excellent masters, will cause many obstructions to be accumulated. Such benighted beings are objects for pity. Thus the great lama, Bres-gshongs-pa did not transgress even the slightest of his three vows and was completely pure in his conduct and vows.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Dudjom 1991, 718 on this section of the lineage. Following the death of Gong-ra Lo-chen, this Sman-lung-pa was nominated by the fifth Dalai Lama as the new teacher at the monastery of Gtsang Gong-ra. Sman-lung-pa was then responsible for transmitting the Rnying-ma *rgyud*-'bum to the Dalai Lama. On these events, see Ehrard 1996, 1n.

<sup>17</sup> *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 386.4-387.1. *deng sang yang gzhans phyogs 'ga' zhig khyab bdag sman lung pa chen por dpon slob bres rin po ches mdo dbang ma gnang bas dran rgya kho na yin zhes lkog shub tu gleng zhing/kho bo'i gam du yang 'di las brtsams te bla ma mchog la bsting tshig gi skur 'debs phyogs la zur bstan du byed pa man mod kyang/snga phyir gnas gsar pa 'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse khu dbon gsum dang rgyal dbang thams cad mkhyen pa chen po'i bka' drin la brten nas rigs 'dzin rje nas bryud pa'i mdo dbang 'di ma chad tsam byung ba yin pas/phyogs gtam 'di lta bu'i sgro skur bgyis na chos spong dang dam pa de dag kun la ngag gi sgrub pa du ma gsog pa'i rgyur 'gyur bas las ngan gyi 'gro ba 'di dag snying*

Here, Padma 'Phrin-las defends the legitimacy of a specific transmission of the *Sūtra* teachings, from Bres-gshongs-pa to Sman-lung-pa, a transmission that was key to the lineage he was trying to reconstruct. Apparently there was some doubt as to whether this transmission had ever actually occurred. One wonders who these "marginal characters" who doubted Padma 'Phrin-las's lineage were, and why they harbored such angst against him. It is to precisely these questions that we now turn.

### **III. Padma 'Phrin-las's precarious position in the *Sūtra* tradition**

It should be noted that Padma 'Phrin-las's teacher (and recipient of the questionable transmission), Sman-lung-pa, also granted the *Sūtra* empowerment to the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682), even receiving the honorary title of *ti-shih* from the great leader. In this way, and in many others, Padma 'Phrin-las was closely allied with the Great Fifth. He first took ordination from him, received teachings from him, and shared many of the same Rnying-ma teachers.

The fifth Dalai Lama seems to have been particularly interested in Padma 'Phrin-las's work on the *Sūtra* tradition. The extent of his role becomes clear from the following story, which I piece together here from both Padma 'Phrin-las's ritual manual and his collection of lineage biographies: Padma 'Phrin-las

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*rje'i gnas so/de ltar bla chen bres gshongs pa de nyid sdom gsum gyis bcas pa phra mo las kyang me 'da' pa'i tshul khrims dang sdom pa dam tshig rnam par dag.*

writes that before he ever received the *Sūtra* empowerment, the Dalai Lama himself had gotten it from Sman-lung-pa. After that,

The omniscient master of speech, Blo-bzang Rgya-mtsho [the fifth Dalai Lama] instructed the pervasive lord of the ocean of mandalas, [Sman-lung-pa,] as follows: "Please grant the empowerment which is the supreme crown of the golden teachings and explain the ritual arrangements [to Padma 'Phrin-las]."<sup>18</sup>

Padma 'Phrin-las goes on to describe his unusual experiences during the empowerment ceremony that resulted from the Dalai Lama's request:

Having arranged a certain date, in my twenty-fourth year, that pervasive lord of the one hundred [peaceful and wrathful] families, Sman-lung-pa, was invited to my home, Thub-bstan Rdo-rje Brag. On the very day he arrived, he began by granting the Vajrapāṇi empowerment. Then, granting it step-by-step, when he reached the level of the Gathered Great Assembly, he put on the costume—the secret robe, the summer hat and so forth—and held the vajra and bell, the white mustard seed, and the far-reaching lasso, to expel any hindrances. After that, making a vajra leap, the soles of his feet left a series of various blazing vajra-marks [wherever he stepped]. He said, "Hūm! Hūm!" and with a posture and a look of ferocity, he even caused one person who was unable to endure his incredible splendor to faint. Faith and devotion were born [in me]; I felt as if this very same holy lama were the real vajra-anger of the Bhagavan. When he flapped his thunderous wings, he made himself be seen as the actual deity, though only to those suitable. Then my comprehension increased still further in its faith; I attained a firm certainty that everything he did was perfect, and however he acted was not separate from wisdom's display. During the empowerment of the *vidyādhara* lama of the Great Assembly, even though I did not abide in the actual lineage, he [included me] in the marvelous lineage, sending the two nephews of 'Jam-dbyangs Mkhyen-brtse [Dbang-phyug] out [of the room].

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<sup>18</sup> *Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs* 43, 635.4-5.

This last sentence marks a crucial point, for it draws attention to Padma 'Phrin-las's ambiguous place in the *Sūtra* empowerment lineage. According to traditional criteria, as the head of the Evam Lcog-sgar community, he would not normally be in a position to be considered a major holder of the lineage. But, according to this description, Sman-lung-pa made special arrangements during the empowerment ceremony to overcome the traditional assumptions of authority and establish Padma 'Phrin-las an authoritative lineage-holder. Padma 'Phrin-las is, not surprisingly, careful to emphasize this moment in his account, and he goes on to describe the extent of Sman-lung-pa's transmission as follows:

Thanks to that lord's great kindness towards me, even though that supreme lama of the *Kun 'dus* root-text, that majestic ruler of karma, did not have anyone attending [the ritual performance] of his three doors, I saw the blessings and signs again and again. Certainty, faith and devotion were born from the depths [of my being]. The presence [of the deity] rested at the top of my head. Having written in tiny letters, "secret name, Karma Dbang-drug Rtsal," when he spoke of granting the empowerment, I was struck with tears. Seeing his presence, again I wept many tears and felt that I could bear no more. In that way the fully complete empowerment of the Great Gathering, together with the entrustment of the *Sūtra*-protectors, was granted in full.

He gave me the secret name, "Rdo-rje Bdud-'joms Rtsal." During the seal of entrustment, he spoke of the metaphor of planting the most subtle seed of the *nyagrodha* [fig] tree, by means of which all directions come to be pervaded by the fruits and the twigs of the great tree of paradise. "You must spread the tiny seed of this *Sūtra* empowerment of this old man widely and perform it extensively," he told me. I took this to heart. He offered me the vows that I should listen, reflect, cultivate, teach, study,

and perform widely this aspect of the dharma. Then that supreme lama too became happy.

When I reached the age of twenty-five, there arrived a letter from the great conqueror Rdo-rje 'Chang [Zur Chos-dbying Rdo-rje] that I should write a ritual arrangement. Accordingly, I composed one. However, because I had not completed my studies, I had many doubts and felt unhappy with what I had written. Therefore, when I was twenty-six, once again the pervasive lord, Sman-lung-pa was invited to my home. He thoroughly granted the empowerment for ripening into the mandala of the peaceful and wrathful deities of the *Māyajala*, and gave detailed instructions on the rites for the *Sūtra* empowerment, including even the dancing postures for the site ritual.<sup>19</sup>

Under orders from the Dalai Lama, Sman-lung-pa was clearly going to great lengths to transmit every detail of the *Sūtra* empowerment to Padma 'Phrin-las. The pressure coming from the Dalai Lama upon both Sman-lung-pa and Padma 'Phrin-las was unrelenting. At that same meeting,

In line with the order that had already come from the presence of the Supreme Conqueror [Dalai Lama], he [Sman-lung-pa] told me, "Before this old man reaches the fifth path [i.e. dies], you absolutely must compose a convenient explanation of the ritual arrangements of the *Sūtra* empowerment and make a capable restoration of this good casket of the precious Spoken Teachings."

Ordered as I was by these two excellent lamas, following that year I wrote only the [concluding] expressions of reverence, for I became stuck for a long time in the torpor of indifference and in the comfort of being distracted by pointless diversions. Then in my thirty-third year, 1673, I wrote a ritual manual for the empowerments of the three Vajrakilāyas of the *Byang-gter*. [At that time,] I was again in the presence of the Supreme Conqueror, and he offered encouragement, once more with head respectfully bowed, offering the flower of his words together with a good

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<sup>19</sup> *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 413.1-415.1.

gift of suvarṇa [gold]. In 1675 I wrote only about 100 pages, up to the mundane [empowerment for] gods and humans. Then as before, due to distractions and my annual retreat (*lo mtshams?*), I abandoned my writing. Finally, when I was thirty-nine years old, after the great gathering for the Buddha's birthday in 1679, I wrote the sections from the *śrāvaka* empowerment onwards, and in the last month of autumn of that year, during the eighth month, . . . it was completed.<sup>20</sup>

The fifth Dalai Lama's close ties to Rdo-rje Brag began even before Padma 'Phrin-las's birth, with the monastery's founder (and Padma 'Phrin-las's previous incarnation), Ngag-gi Dbang-po (1580-1639). The young Dalai Lama received his first major ceremonial blessing from Ngag-gi Dbang-po,<sup>21</sup> and throughout his life, the Great Fifth took an active interest in building up the institution of Rdo-rje Brag. His generosity is suggested by the lavish homage paid him at the opening of Padma 'Phrin-las's new empowerment ritual manual. Here we read again how the Dalai Lama commissioned the work:

In particular, the gentle protector and omniscient lama, Ngag-gi Dbang-phyug Blo-bzang Rgya-mtsho told me, "In order to hold and kindly protect beings and future generations, and so that they be unafraid as they teach, debate and write, you should masterfully compose a gradual path that brings together all the scattered ritual manuals for the empowerment which is the jewelled staircase of empowerments [leading] to the *Sūtra Gathering* [*the Intentions*], the highest point for the lone travelers on the many-varied paths."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For all of the passages cited here, see *Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs* 43, 636.1-637.2.

<sup>21</sup> See Dudjom, 821.

<sup>22</sup> *Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs* 41, 12.2-5.

Thus Padma 'Phrin-las had been given his task: to gather all the scattered traditions of the *Sūtra* empowerment into a new, authoritative system.

But why did the Dalai Lama commission this work? We have seen that in the mid-seventeenth century, there were essentially two other lineages alive in Tibet. This returns us to the three-way split in the *Sūtra* lineage that took place after Sgrol-ma-ba. The line traced by Padma 'Phrin-las passed from Sgrol-ma-ba through Zur-ham, but there were two others, passing through Zur-ham's sister and Sgrol-ma-ba's son respectively.

The lineage of the sister traveled almost immediately to eastern Tibet, where it breathed new life into the Kah-thog tradition.<sup>23</sup> By the time of Padma 'Phrin-las, Kah-thog's empowerment liturgy was one of the foremost in Tibet, called either the Kah-thog or the Khams System. The third lineage stemming from Sgrol-ma-ba was that of his son, Sgrol-chen Sangs-rgyas Rin-chen. This one remained in central Tibet and was followed by Sog-zlog-pa in his writings.<sup>24</sup> These people appear to have used the same ritual manual Padma 'Phrin-las took as his authoritative source, *Rin chen phreng ba* written by Zur-ham's student,

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<sup>23</sup> Zur-mo gave her transmission to Zur-ston Shākyā Bshes-gnyen, from whom it passed to Bra'o Chos-'bum. The latter figure was a Kah-thog master who also inherited Kah-thog's own tradition that could be traced straight back to Dam-pa Bde-gshegs. After him, the lineage soon fell to the master Rmog-ston Rdo-rje Dpal-bzang-po, who wrote the ritual manual entitled the *Sbrang rts'i'i chu rgyun* (discussed in Chapter Three).

<sup>24</sup> From Sgrol-chen it passed to Gnam-sdings-pa Nam-mkha' Rdo-rje, then to Mkhās-grub Sha-mi Rdor-rgyal. Then to Rje-btsun G.yu-drug Rdo-rje (see Sog-zlog-pa, 380.4-5; this last name is often spelt G.yu-'brug Rdo-rje, and occasionally, G.yung-drug Rdo-rje.), who taught Sog-zlog-pa, who then gave it to Gong-ra Lo-chen.

Dnyal-ba Bde-legs. The last in this lineage, Gong-ra Lo-chen, appeared in Padma 'Phrin-las's own lineage biographies, as the teacher of Bres-gshongs-pa. Gong-ra also granted the *Sūtra* empowerment to Bres-gshongs-pa's student, Sman-lung-pa, in accordance with the Kah-thog System.<sup>25</sup>

Both of these lineages, of the sister and the son, pre-dated the one traced by Padma 'Phrin-las. Both had long since been recognized in earlier materials—Zur-mo's lineage in the *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun* and Sgrol-chen's in the writings of Sog-zlog-pa.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Padma 'Phrin-las, it seems clear that at the outset of his efforts, the Rdo-rje Brag community did not have its own *Sūtra* empowerment lineage. Back in the days of Mnga'-ris Pan-chen and Legs-ldan Rdo-rje, when E-vam Lcog-sgar was first being established, a lineage had been constructed through Zur-ham. After the *Byang-gter* community was forcibly evicted from its home, the *Sūtra* empowerment lineage was lost.<sup>27</sup> According to the community's main lineage, which focused on the *Byang-gter*, the great masters, Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal (the rebirth of Mnga'-ris Pan-chen) and his son, Ngag-gi Dbang-po (the rebirth of Legs-ldan Rdo-rje) led the group. But these two figures could not be included in Padma 'Phrin-las's *Sūtra* empowerment biographies because, quite simply, they had been uninterested or unable to

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<sup>25</sup> See *Brgyud pa'i rnams thar*, 396.1.

<sup>26</sup> See *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun* 64, 63-68 and Sog-zlog-pa 2, 377-380.

<sup>27</sup> The circumstances surrounding this event are presented in more detail below in section III.

uphold the lineage. The *Sūtra* tradition had become something for large, settled communities with an established educational system, regular funding, and enough people and resources to perform the elaborate rites. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the E-vam Lcog-sgar community fulfilled none of these requirements. Only later, under the protection and sponsorship of the fifth Dalai Lama, was the community able to resurrect and reconstruct its *Sūtra* empowerment lineage.

This interpretation of Padma 'Phrin-las's situation is supported by the extremely useful colophon to his lineage biographies. There we learn that the third Yol-mo sprul-sku,<sup>28</sup> perceiving an erosion of the Spoken Teachings, had already asked Ngag-gi Dbang-po to construct a new *Sūtra* empowerment system appropriate to the burgeoning Rdo-rje Brag tradition.

In the following words, the *vidyādhara* Yol-mo-ba Chen-po made the request to the *vidyādhara* Mchog-gi Sprul-sku [Ngag-gi Dbang-po] that he should compose a [ritual] arrangement for this series of rebirths: "To the last [in the line of] rebirths of Rdo-rje Bdud-'joms Rgod-kyi Ldem-phru-can . . . , an most vast ocean of knowledge, he who nurtures with love, precious compassion, and all that is desireable, an ocean within which are

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<sup>28</sup> The famous third Yol-mo-ba, Bstan-'dzin Nor-bu, was appointed by the fifth Dalai Lama as the regent of Rdo-rje Brag for the period following Ngag-gi Dbang-po's death. In this role, Yol-mo-ba was charged with identifying Padma 'Phrin-las as the next incarnation of Rgod-ldem-can. Shortly after fulfilling this responsibility however, he died in 1644, when Padma 'Phrin-las was only four years old. The fourth Yol-mo Sprul-sku, Zil-gnon Dbang-rgyal Rdo-rje was seven years younger than Padma 'Phrin-las, and he never had much to do with Rdo-rje Brag. More will be said of this figure below. For an introduction to the influential line of Yol-mo Sprul-sku-s, see Ehrhard (no date).

gathered the strong, mighty, and powerful dragons, to Ngag-gi Dbang-po, wet-nurse of my first year, I bow down.”<sup>29</sup>

This project not only sought to provide a place for the revitalized *Byang-gter* tradition at the table of the Spoken Teachings; it was also meant to exclude others. For Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas Rgya-mtsho, the regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, tells us that the Yol-mo Sprul-sku’s recommendation was made, “in order to cleanse what had become a polluted teaching.”<sup>30</sup> Sde-srid’s claim comes at the end of some verses that make quite clear just who was responsible for this pollution:<sup>31</sup>

With a mind to help the others who are [lost] in the caverns of G.yu-'brug's deceitful lies,  
The intention to guide many was established. In the well of broken continuity,  
The confused and ultimately lifeless manuals  
That spread through the upper, lower, and middle regions are unlike this one.  
Because of them, the long-tradition of the secret, whose flames to the highest heavens

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<sup>29</sup> *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 424.4-6. rigs 'dzin yol mo chen pos/ rdo rje bdud 'joms rgod kyi ldem phru can/... /sky'e ba'i tha ma 'di lta ste/ mkhyen pa'i chu gter shin tu rgya che zhing/ brtse chen thugs rje'i rin cen 'dod dgu 'jo/ mthu stobs nus pa'i chu srin yongs 'dus'i mtsho/ ngag gi dbang po dgung zla'i ma mar 'dud/ ces skyes rabs kyi 'phreng ba tshar du dngar ba rigs 'dzin mchog gi sprul skur sgrig rtsom gnang dgos par ched du gsol.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 424.4. *bstan pa dri bcas su gyur pa sel ba'i ched du...* It is not certain that this claim was made by the Sde-srid. It appears at the end of the “printer’s colophon,” and one can only assume that it was made by Sangs-rgyas Rgya-mtsho, since it was he who requested and commissioned the carving of the blocks.

<sup>31</sup> These same verses appear in the identical printer’s colophons (*par byang*) of both the *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar* (421.2-424.6) and the *Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs* (43, 637.4-643.2).

Once reached, has now become mere sparks in a heap of ash.<sup>32</sup>

This somewhat obscure verse is helpfully explained:

After Gnubs-chen, the three yogas spread widely, but many persons, basing themselves on various 'Byams-yig-s by Mgos,<sup>33</sup> Chag, Dpal-'dzin and others, became caught in the trap of rejecting the dharma. With the passage of time, they gradually became confused as a result of taking the countless petty sectarian judgments (*grub mitha'*) to be the dharma. Furthermore, there is reason to doubt whether the [Sūtra] lineage was continuous after G.yu-'brug Rdo-rje's teachings. Also, in [those traditions that] spread in Khams, the ritual tradition became an impure teaching through [being overly concerned with irrelevant details like] differences between what is subtle and what is coarse.<sup>34</sup>

Thus two groups are blamed for the supposed pollution of the Sūtra tradition: the lineage issuing from G.yu-'brug Rdo-rje and the Khams System. G.yu-'brug Rdo-rje is accused of lies and deceit and breaking the continuity of the lineage, while those following the Khams System are faulted for spreading their confusing and overly complicated ritual manual throughout Tibet. These two groups correspond precisely to the two main lineages: that of Sgrol-ma-ba's

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<sup>32</sup> Brgyud pa'i rnam thar, 422.1-423.1 or Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs 43, 639.1-3. g.yu 'brug rdzun zog phug steng gzhan phan blos/ man 'khrid gom bkod rgyun bral chu dong du/ mthar srog dpral ba'i cho ga yid srubs kyi/ stod smad bar du dar dang 'di mi 'dra/ des gsang ring lugs me lce srid rtse'i bar/ bsnyegs bshul deng sang thal phung me stag tsam.

<sup>33</sup> I.e. the 'Byams-yig of Mgos-khug-pa, discussed in Chapter Two of the present work.

<sup>34</sup> Brgyud pa'i rnam thar, 424.2-4 or Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs 43, 642.1-4. gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes rin po cher bka' babs pa dar rgyas shin tu che na'ang/ 'gos chag dpal 'dzin sogs kyi 'jams yig sna tshogs la brten 'gro mang chos spong gi 'ching rgyar chud pa dang/ dus dbang gis grub mitha' mtha' dag gal chung chos la byed pa'i abang gyis rim gyis 'gribs par ma zad/ g.yu 'brug rdo rje zer ba nas brgyud pa rgyun yod med the tshom gyi gzhi dang/ khams phyogs nas dar ba tshor yang phyag len zhib rtsing gi khyad nas bstan pa dri bcas su gyur ba.

son and that of Zur-ham's sister, which pre-existed Padma 'Phrin-las's work. We have already encountered G.yu-'brug (as G.yu-drug) as the teacher of Sog-zlog-pa, and the purportedly complicated Khams System certainly refers to the famous ritual manual of Kah-thog, *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun*. Both of these groups, we are told, had strayed so far as to warrant their expulsion from the *Sūtra* lineage by Padma 'Phrin-las's faction.

While these doctrinal reasons for exclusion may be accepted as stated, one is left suspecting there may be more to the story.

#### **IV. Rnying-ma-pa political intrigue in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries**

Given Padma 'Phrin-las's close alliance with the fifth Dalai Lama, we can assume that his political views mirrored those of the great leader. For this reason, a brief review of the political history of this formative period may be in order.

A century before Padma 'Phrin-las's birth, in 1548, the Rin-spungs ruler of Central Tibet appointed one Zhing-zhag Tshe-brtan Rdo-rje as governor of Gtsang province. The new governor chose to settle in the palace at Bsam-'grub-rtse. He soon broke from his Rin-spungs master by proclaiming himself to be the King of Gtsang, and from his new position he gradually took over all of central Tibet.

Though the new government based in Gtsang was remarkable for its secularism, it maintained close ties with certain Buddhist schools, in particular

with the Karma Bka'-brgyud. At the same time, the Gtsang ruler's relations were less friendly with the burgeoning Dge-lugs school. This predicament worsened further when, in 1578, the Dge-lugs-pa abbot of 'Bras-spungs monastery, Bsod-nam Rgya-mtsho (1543-1588), converted the Mongol leader, Altan Khan, and all his subjects to Buddhism, receiving in return the previously unknown title of "Dalai Lama." (He was later recognized as the third in this new incarnation line, with his two previous incarnations retrospectively named as the first and second Dalai Lamas.) This new allegiance marked the beginning of a long struggle, "between two Buddhist religious schools, in this case, the Dge-lugs-pa and the Karma-pa, to secure the support of a patron without which neither could survive."<sup>35</sup>

Tensions continued to mount over the lifetime of the next, the fourth, Dalai Lama (1589-1616). In 1617 the fifth Dalai Lama was recognized despite a royal ban on doing so, and in 1621 a small army of Mongols was established near Lhasa to protect their Dge-lugs-pa ward. Finally, in 1640 (the year of Padma 'Phrin-las's birth), Gushi Khan, the new leader of the Mongols, invaded the eastern region of Khams, capturing it after a year-long fight. As Karmay points out, the eastern Tibetans of Khams had also been "partisans of the royal government,"<sup>36</sup> which made them enemies of the Mongols. The following year

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<sup>35</sup> Karmay 1998, 506.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 509.

(1642) Gushi Khan led his troops against central Tibet, deposed the Gtsang king at Bsam-'grub-rtse, and enthroned the fifth Dalai Lama as the king of all Tibet.

Broadly speaking then, we have on one side the Gtsang kings, allied with the Karma Bka'-brgyud school and the kings of Khams, and on the other side the Dalai Lama, based in Dbus and supported by the Dge-lugs school and the Mongols. This much is relatively well-known. What has not been studied, however, is the role played by the Rnying-ma school in these events, events that were so crucial to the history of Tibet. It is often assumed that the Rnying-ma school remained outside of the large-scale Tibetan politics. But when we delve a little deeper, taking as our focus the motivations driving Padma 'Phrin-las's reconstruction of the *Sūtra*'s lineage, we see a very different picture.

In his early nineteenth-century historical work, Guru Bkra'-shis gives us a good place to start. There, he tells us that despite being some of the most influential Rnying-ma-pa of their day, the threesome of "Snang, Sog, and Gong" were despised by the fifth Dalai Lama.<sup>37</sup> Throughout his writings, the fifth Dalai Lama insisted upon disparaging the first of these three (Snang), whom others

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<sup>37</sup> "The great treasure[-revealer, Zhig-po Gling-pa] himself, along with Sog-zlog-pa Blo-gros Rgyal-mtshan and Gong-ra Lo-chen, were known as the trio of Snang, Sog, Gong. During their lifetimes, all the Rnying-ma spoken teachings and treasures spread widely. These have remained without deterioration even up to the present day, thanks to the kindness of the great treasure[-revealer, Zhig-po Gling-pa]. However, the precious omniscient Fifth did not like this trio of Snang, Sog, and Gong." *Gu-bkra chos 'byung*, 448: *gter chen nyid dang sog zlogpa blo gros rgyal mtshan dang/gong ra lo chen rnams la snang sog gong gsum du grags te/ 'di rnam kyi sku ring la rnying ma bka' gter thams cad rgya cher 'phel te deng sang gi bar du ma nub par bzhugs pa yang gter cher 'di'i sku drin las byung ba yin no/ yang kun mkhyen lnga pa rin po che'i snang sog gong gsum la thugs mi dgyes pa.*

usually recognized as the treasure-revealer Zhig-po Gling-pa (1524-1583), the "Snang-rtse chieftain (*sde pa*)."<sup>38</sup> In doing so, the Dalai Lama was refusing to recognize Zhig-po Gling-pa as a truly prophesied treasure revealer, as he himself explains:

The name of Zhig-po Gling-pa [prophesied] in the *Thang yig* [of O-rgyan Gling-pa], may have been claimed by this aspirant, but in the *General Prophecy of Ratna* [Gling-pa] it says, "The revealer of the profound treasures from Khyung-chen-ri and Mkharg-chu also has the secret name, Zhig-po Gling-pa." Therefore please do not be pushed into doubt.<sup>38</sup>

The Snang, Sog, Gong trio actually constituted a short lineage. Zhig-po Gling-pa was Sog-zlog-pa's main teacher, and (in the son lineage above) Sog-zlog-pa taught Gong-ra Lo-chen. We also have seen that the colophons to Padma 'Phrin-las's two works on the *Sūtra* name G.yu-'brug Rdo-rje, Sog-zlog-pa's *Sūtra* empowerment teacher, as the source of corruptions in the *Sūtra* empowerment lineage.

That all of the Rnying-ma-pa teachers disparaged by the Dalai Lama came from the same small circle should make us pause to wonder if they had some more in common. When one looks more closely at the biographical information, one finds that they all worked closely with the Gtsang kings, against the Mongols invaders. Sog-zlog-pa wrote several extant works on the *Sūtra* tradition, and

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<sup>38</sup> *Byang pa'i rnam thar*, 457.4-5. *thang yig gi zhig po gling pa'i mtshan la zhal bdag mdzad par 'dug kyang/ratna'i spyi lung du/khyung chen ri dang mkharg chu'i zab gter 'don/gsang ba'i mtshan yang zhig po gling pa yin/zhes pa byung bas dog 'tshang mi mdzad pa zhu.*

because he came chronologically in the middle of this trio so disliked by the Dalai Lama, we can take him as representative of this group.<sup>39</sup>

A short autobiographical work by Sog-zlog-pa is still available, entitled *Sog bzlog bgyis tshul gyi lo rgyus*. Sog-zlog-pa, literally “Repeller of the Mongols,” gained his name from his proficiency at turning back the Mongol armies with magic, and this work provides ample evidence of his abilities. As a whole, it is a description and justification of Sog-zlog-pa’s use of violent practices to protect the Gtsang kings and their allies from imminent Mongol invasions. Sog-zlog-pa mentions several precedents for his activities, placing himself in the company of other Rnying-ma-pa *mantrikas* who resisted the Mongols. This text has much to offer the modern historian, but a detailed exploration of it is beyond the scope of this study. For our purposes, most interesting is how Sog-zlog-pa justifies his actions by presenting them in terms of numerous prophecies made by earlier Rnying-ma-pa visionaries.

As the explanations unfold, one figure emerges foremost: Sog-zlog-pa’s own teacher, Zhig-po Gling-pa, who is quoted repeatedly with sayings like, “one should understand that the Mongol armies come through the power of the prayers of demons.”<sup>40</sup> Such readings of Zhig-po Gling-pa’s prophesies may well

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<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Sog-zlog-pa’s dates (1552-1624) make him a contemporary of Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal (1550-1603), who led the E-vam Lcog-sgar during their years of itinerancy. This fact is noted by Blondeau, where she analyzes a disagreement between the two contemporaries over how to interpret the Padmasambhava biographies (Blondeau 1980, 46).

explain the Dalai Lama's distaste for him. The Dalai Lama responds to Zhig-po Gling-pa's troublesome treasures and prophesies with counter-prophesies, fighting fire with fire. At one point, for example, he notes that:

In the conclusion to the *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* . . . it is written that, "The sayings of myself and those like me are without deceptions. Take care to analyze the various teachings and persons. In particular, due to the strength of deceptions by the 'Brom-bza' demon, even some who are today associated with myself, Padma[sambhava], will by the power of their karma, at the time when the *Dgongs 'dus* [i.e. the *Sūtra*] spreads, make counterfeits of some treasure teachings on assorted old white papers. . ." Here the knower of the three times, U-rgyan, was making a prophecy about none other than the Snang-rtse chieftain.<sup>41</sup>

Here we can see that, throughout this historical period of battling armies, another war was being waged in the parallel realm of prophecy, between the great treasure-revealers of the Rnying-ma school.

Sog-zlog-pa's history of Rnying-ma-pa resistance to the Mongol armies provides a good picture of how the *mantrikas* of this school functioned in the political sphere of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Typically laymen, they were powerfully charismatic free agents, able to bestow an air of legitimacy upon whomever they deemed deserving, through their prophesies and visionary

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<sup>40</sup> *Sog bzlog bgyis tshul gyi lo rgyus*, 219.4-5. *hor dmag... bdud rnam kyi smon lam gyi shugs las yin par go zhes sprul sku zhig po gling pa gsung*.

<sup>41</sup> *Byang pa'i rnam thar*, 456.3-457.4. *bla ma dgongs 'dus kyi mtha' rten... las/bdag 'dra padma'i ngag la slu tshig med/ chos dang gang zag 'dra min brtag pa gces/khyad par 'brom bza' bdud kyiis bslus ba'i mthus/ da lta padma nga dang 'brel yod kyang/ las kyi dbang gis dgongs 'dus dar ba'i tshe/dpe dkar rnying zhugs 'dra min gter chos rtsom/... zhes pa ni sde pa snang rtse nas nyid kyi lung bstan du dus gsum mkhyen pa u rgyan gyis bka' stsal bar gda' ba.*

communions with Padmasambhava and other deities. Perhaps even more crucial, however, was their expertise in violent black magic. Theirs were powers that any king would be foolish to eschew. For these reasons, the Rnying-ma-pa *mantrikas* were both sought after and feared.

The extent to which these Rnying-ma-pa differed from the masters of other schools can be seen in an amusing story from the life of the third Yol-mo sprul-sku, Bstan-'dzin Nor-bu, a remarkable figure who navigated these turbulent times with political savvy, enjoying the favor of the Gtsang kings in his youth and the fifth Dalai Lama later in life. The previous incarnations in the Yol-mo sprul-sku line had all focused on the teachings of the Rnying-ma school, yet the third Yol-mo-ba spent his youth studying under the sixth Zhwa-dmar-pa Chos-kyi Dbang-phyug (1584-1630) and other teachers from the Gsar-ma schools. Not until his nineteenth year did he meet the Rnying-ma teacher who would bring him back to his roots—the master of the *Byang-gter* and founder of Rdo-rje Brag, Ngag-gi Dbang-po. At first, however:

Due to his experience in logic, [Yol-mo-ba] became apprehensive about partaking of the feast offerings [i. e. drinking], and various wrong ideas arose about how the rituals for subjugating demons only cause harm to beings. Then the great *vidyādhara* [Ngag-gi Dbang-po], glaring straight at that *sprul-sku*, said, “Are you embarrassed by the large number of cycles for direct wrathful action in the Rnying-ma Secret Mantra?” At this, the hostility of his scholar’s contempt and arrogance collapsed into a subdued state. A belief that did not distinguish the teacher and the teaching was

born from the depth [of his being], whereby, with purity and clarity, he became a mantra adept of the Rnying-ma-pa.<sup>42</sup>

This story is told by the fifth Dalai Lama, in his biographical history of Ngag-gi Dbang-po and the *Byang-gter* lineage.

Having gained some idea of the broad political situation in Tibet and the Rnying-ma-pa's general role within it, we can now turn to the internal rivalries within the Rnying-ma school and the more specific historical concerns Padma 'Phrin-las inherited as the new holder of the *Byang-gter* lineage. As already mentioned, the *Byang-gter* was first discovered by the fourteenth century treasure revealer, Rgod-ldem-can. But it is generally said that the *Byang-gter* community was only really established during the lifetime of Mnga'-ris Paṇ-chen (1487-1552), the charismatic brother of Rgod-ldem's next incarnation, Legs-ldan Rdo-rje (b. 1512). After Mnga'-ris Paṇ-chen died, it was Legs-ldan Rje's responsibility to recognize his older brother's next incarnation. He chose a prince from the wealthy Byang-pa family<sup>43</sup> named Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal Dbang-po'i-sde (1550-

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<sup>42</sup> *Byang pa'i rnam thar*, 516.1-3. *rtog ge ba'i nyams kyis tshogs 'khor gsol ba la 'tsher snang dang/dregs 'dul gyi las tshogs la sems can la gnod pa byed pa 'ba' zhig tu 'dug dgongs pa'i log rtog sna tshogs shar ba na/ rig 'dzin chen pos sprul pa'i sku la spyan gcer gyi gzigs nas/gsang sngags rnying ma 'di la drag po mnong spyod kyi skor mangs bas thugs khrel yod dam gsung ba na/ mtshan nyid pa'i khyad gsod dang nga rgyal gyi ham thul yul bud de/ bla ma dang chos la mi phyed pa'i mos pa gtting nas 'khrungs pas rnying ma pa'i sngags 'chang du gtsang sing gi song ngo.* This remarkable text, with many more tales of magical violence and visionary intrigue, is of great use in developing our picture of Rnying-ma alliances during the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>43</sup> This family had enjoyed great successes in the preceding years. The Byang lord, Nam-mkha' Tshe-dbang Rdo-rje had three sons. The middle son became a monk, while the ambitious younger son (Kun-dga' Legs-pa) appears to have usurped the older's (Nam-mkha' Rin-chen) position as the family head. As the fifth Dalai Lama writes, "the youngest became lord of the

1603).<sup>44</sup> It appears that this choice was not without its complications however, for the fifth Dalai Lama devotes several pages to defending Legs-ldan Rje's decision against conflicting opinions. The Dalai Lama begins by citing several prophesies about Mnga'-ris Pañ-chen's rebirth. Then, paraphrasing these, he explains that there were to be five incarnations of the early Tibetan king Khri-strong Lde'u-btsan, of whom Mnga'-ris-pa was the third (*thugs sprul*). The fourth emanation,

the emanation of the good qualities, would be the king of dharma, Dbang-po'i-sde. If the conditions were right, he would be born in a dog or a dragon year into the royal family of Mi-nyag Rtsa-shing.<sup>45</sup> If the conditions were not in order, he would be born into a family of ministers to that ruling family, as a son of the Byang Khang-gsar in a rooster or monkey year. In that [latter] case, before the son would be born, the father would die, [but] if he would be born into the ruling family, he would enjoy a long relationship with his father.<sup>46</sup>

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whole of Lho byang and became famous as a terrible hero." (Tucci 1949, 632.) Thus under the fierce rule of Kun-dga' Legs-pa, the family expanded its rule from La-stod Byang over the Lho region as well. While the Fifth goes on to write that both the eldest and youngest brothers were fathers to Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal, most sources say the eldest, Nam-mkha' Rin-chen was the real father. As an aside: though in his *Chronicles* (parts of which are translated in Tucci 1949) the Fifth writes that all three brothers were fathers to him, in his *Byang pa'i rnam thar* (462.4) he recognizes that the middle brother, being a monk, could not have been. It is interesting, given the allegiances of the time, to note that the mother of Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal, named Chos-skyong 'Dzom-chen, was from the governing family of Lhasa (see Kun-bzang Nges-don Klong-yangs's *Nor bu do sal*, 139b.3). One final note should also be made: Tucci mistakes Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal Dbang-po'i-sde as two names when it is only one.

<sup>44</sup> This is the date suggest by Gene Smith on his TBRC website. Boord 1993, 29 gives Bkra-shis Stob-rgyal's dates as 1550-1607, but he does not explain where he gets his 1607 date. Boord does note Blondeau's suggestion of 1550-1602, though he notes that she "points to some cause for doubt."

<sup>45</sup> The family of the Byang-bdag originally came from the Mi-nyag area of eastern Kham (see Tucci 1949, 631-641). On this family, see Sperling 1992.

This prophecy itself may well allude to some disagreement between the Byang lords and their minister, but more significant here is another problem that arose between the Byang lord and the Gtsang ruler at Bsam-'grub-rtse. The Dalai Lama continues:

Without understanding this [prophecy], many who fell in with the stupid factions said that the Byang lord made incorrect prayers, so [Mnga'-ris Pan-chen] took rebirth as the son of the Gtsang ruler. If the King of Gtsang, Karma Bstan-skyong Dbang-po's principal deeds of virtue are analyzed, he was, for the most part, an excellent being. However, for his main doctrinal system he did not practice the Rnying-ma secret mantra, and what is more, his tiny bit of practice in the cycles of the Rnying-ma traditions was exclusively of the Snang-rtse faction; there is no need whatsoever to speak of *that* treasure revealer and the ritual activities surrounding *his* revelations. When the causes for [the emanation] to come forth arose, it would seem that there would not have been even the slightest interest or appeal [in the Gtsang King], so the habitual seeds of this great dharma-king would not have been awakened. This is proven by all scripture and reasoning. Some, following this stupid opinion, then cited some fabricated prophesy that this great being's teachings [subsequently] collapsed, but this is just a mirror that clearly reveals their own selves.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> 465.3-4: *yon tan gyis sprul pa chos rgyal dbang po'i sde yin la/ de nyid rten 'brel ma 'phyugs na mi nyag rtsa shing gi rgyal rigs khyi'am 'brug gi lo par skye/ rten 'brel ma 'grig na rgyal rgyud de'i blon po'i rigs byang khang gsar ba'i bu bya spre lo par skye/ de'i tshe bu ma btsas gong nas pha mi 'tsho/ rgyal rigs su skyes na pha dang yun ring du 'groggs par bshad.*

<sup>47</sup> *Byang pa'i rnams thar, 465.5-466.3. de nyid slar 'byung rgyu yin pas zab gter spyan 'dren pa sogs 'gro don rgya chen po mdzad par gsal/ don 'di ma go bar blun po phyogs lhung can mang po dag gis/ byang bdag pos smon lam log par btab nas sde pa gtsang pa'i bur skye ba blangs pa yin zer ba ni/ gtsang pa'i rgyal po karma bstan skyong dbang po rnam dkar gyi mdzad pa 'gangs che lugs la dpags na skyes bu dam pa zhig yin shas che yang/ grub mtha'i gtso bo gsang sngags rnying ma la mi mdzad la/ rnying lugs kyi chos skor cung zad mdzad pa rnams kyang sde pa snang rtse pa'i phyogs 'ba' zhig yin 'dug cing/ gter 'don pa dang 'don pa'i sta gon tsam yang lta ci smos/ gdon rgyu byung na dgongs pa'i mos dung tsam yang med par snang bas/ chos rgyal 'di nyid kyi bag chags ma sad pa ni lung rigs thams cad kyiis 'grub/ la la dag blun gtam gyi rjes su 'brangs nas rang bzo'i lung bstan du/ bdag chen skye pa'i bstan pa mtha' nas sdud.*

Once again, at the Gtsang court it was the influence of Zhig-po Gling-pa's circle that prevailed in all matters Rnying-ma. This same group here appears to have been involved in an attempt to gain control of this important *Byang-gter* incarnation line by recognizing it within the palace walls. One suspects that there may have been larger political issues at stake in the conflict between the courts at Byang Ngam-ring and Bsam-'grub-rtse, but for now this must remain unclear. In any case, what concerns us here is how the struggle played out within the Rnying-ma-pa circles.

We should consider for a moment the possibility that Legs-ldan Rje's recognition of Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal may not in fact have been disputed immediately. As we shall see, later in his life Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal ran afoul of the Gtsang king. It is therefore possible that the entire controversy surrounding his birth may have been retroactively created after this confrontation in order to cast doubt over his legitimacy. The question is, then, how far back can these difficulties really be traced? Were they all Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal's doing or was Legs-ldan Rje already beginning to cause trouble? One other clue suggests that Legs-ldan Rje may have been involved. The Great Fifth writes that,

There was an official prophecy, that [Sangs-rgyas Gling-pa's *Bla ma*] *Dgongs-'dus* would be distorted [by those] observing the *vidyādhara* Rgod-ldem. Snang-rtse's faction identified Legs-ldan Rje [as the distorter], and proclaimed it widely. Thanks to them, many less fortunate people were plunged into doubt. But this is like the heretics who said the Tathāgata

was in love with a brahmin girl, or the evil ministers who claimed the master Padmasambhava tried to poison the king.<sup>48</sup>

Dudjom Rinpoche also seems to credit Legs-ldan Rje with starting the problems, when he writes that they began, "during the time of Rikdzin II, Lekdenje, who was the second Godemcen, and of Trashi Topgyel Wangpoide."<sup>49</sup> We can thus conclude with some confidence that the troubles for the E-vam Lcog-sgar community took root shortly after Mnga'-ris Pan-chen's death, during the stewardship of Legs-ldan Rje. More specifically, they may have been related to the recognition of Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal as the reincarnation of Mnga'-ris Pan-chen.

Even so, the trouble did not really erupt until some years later. Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal grew up under the tutelage of some of the greatest masters of his day, including the Jo-nang master, Rje-btsun Grol-mchog, and others, while also enjoying considerable political success as the new lord of Byang Ngam-ring.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> 458.5-6: *rig 'dzin rdog ldem la dmigs nas lhad bcug pa'i dgongs 'dus kyi bka' rgya'i lung bstan de legs ldan rje la sbyar nas snang rtse ba phyogs kyi bsgrags/ de dag la brten nas skal dman mang po the tshom gyis gzhir bkod na'ang/ mu stegs kyi de bzhin gshegs pa la bram ze'i bu mo dang mdza' zhes brjod pa dang/sdig blon rnams kyiis slob dpon padmas mnga' bdag la dug gtong bar 'dug ces sgrog pa lta bu'o.* Might we detect in this passage another aspect to this schism in the Rnying-ma school, between those who adhered strictly to the treasures of Sangs-rgyas Cling-pa and those who combined the *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* with the teachings of Rgod-ldem-can? This may be too simplistic, but it is something to consider.

<sup>49</sup> Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, 783. Still, none of the sources mention Legs-ldan Rje's presence during the climactic episode in which (in Dudjom Rinpoche's words), "the entire monastic community of their seminary became a wandering encampment, as a result of the depredations of Zhingshakpa, the governor of Tsang."

These halcyon days ended however in his thirtieth year, when the Byang-pa house became embroiled in a controversy with the Gtsang ruler, Zhing-shag Tshe-rtan Rdo-rje, who forcibly expelled both Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal and his brother, Nam-mkha' Rgyal-mtshan to Dbus province. The two brothers sought refuge at 'Phyong-rgyas, which is notable for several reasons; the fifth Dalai Lama would be born into this same 'Phyong-rgyas family some thirty-seven years later. It was during this same period (c.1580) that Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal's son, Ngag-gi Dbang-po, was born, the mother being none other than Yid-'dzin Dbang-mo, the princess of the hospitable 'Phyong-rgyas family.<sup>51</sup>

Once again it is unclear precisely what happened, but insults were exchanged and the situation continued to escalate, as Dudjom Rinpoche explains:

After Zhing-shag-pa consolidated his power, he had a disagreement with the Byang Lord, Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal. Lumping him together with [his brother,] Byang-pa Nam-mkha' Rgyal-mtshan, he exiled Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal. The Gtsang-pa [ruler] said, with self-satisfaction, "You, the so-called 'Powerful One' (*Stobs*), are a powerless Khams-pa. I banish you into the city of the hungry ghosts." To which Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal replied, "You, the so-called 'Field' (*Zhing*), in whom the ten fields [of non-virtue] are complete, I send into the mouth of Rahula," and following through with this threat, he killed Zhing-shag-pa. It seems that the reason for the short duration of the Gtsang-pa family and kingdom may even be attributed to this.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Kun-bzang Nges-don Klong-yangs writes that Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal, "gradually took over the domains of the three myriarchies of La-stod" (*Nor bu do sal*, 139b.6-140a.1: *rim gyis la stod khri skor gsum gyi rgyal srid la dbang bsgyur*). As noted above, the fifth Dalai Lama has Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal's father/uncle, Kun-dga' Legs-pa, taking over the La-stod Lho region, but I am not sure what the third domain would be here.

<sup>51</sup> See *Byang pa'i rnam thar*, 479.1.

From his new base at 'Phyong-rgyas, Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal mounted a magical attack against his persecutors. In a short while the offending king was dead.

The fifth Dalai Lama begins his own description of the incident by pointing out a prophecy in Mnga'-ris Pan-chen's own treasure cycle, the *Rig 'dzin yongs 'dus*: "In the southeast direction of the world, the demoness, Sharp-and-Fast Blackness, will give birth to nine sons and rule the world. In particular, in this snowy land of Tibet, as the future fortieth year approaches, nine emanated demons and nine evil ministers . . . will drag all beings into oppression."<sup>53</sup> Zhing-shag-pa, who would take over at Bsam-'grub-rtse six years after Mnga'-ris Pan-chen's death, had nine sons who helped their father establish control over Tibet, as the Dalai Lama takes care to point out before continuing with his story:

Foremost among those nine children was Kun-spangs Lha-dbang Rdo-rje. This father, Zhig-shag-pa and his son concocted an accusation against the *Byang[-gter]* followers, including Nam-mkha' Rgyal-mtshan and others. Then they cast terrible aspersions against this same great *vidyādhara* [Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal], expelling him into the Dbus region and otherwise carrying on. On this account, [Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal] understood that these horrible ones were disciples to be first subjugated by wrathful

<sup>52</sup> *Bdud 'joms rgyal rabs*, 493.2-5. *zhing shag pas dbang btsong byas nas byang gdag bkra shis stobs rgyal dang ma mthun pas/khong dang byang pa nam mkha' rgyal mtshan bsdongs nas bkra shis stobs rgyal yul bton te/gtsang pa na re/stobs zhes bya ba'i stobs med 'khams po khyod/kho bos pre ta pu ri'i 'gram du bskrad/ces snying tshims smras pa la/bkras stobs na re/zhing zhes bya ba'i zhing bcu tshang ba khyod/bdag gis ra hu la yi zhal du bstab/ces gzas yi las sbyor gyis zhing shag pa bsgral bas/gtsang pa'i mi brgyud dang mnga' thang yun thung ba'i rgyu mtshan kyang 'dir la thug par snang.*

<sup>53</sup> *Byang pa'i rnam thar*, 468.6-469.1. *rig 'dzin yongs 'dus kyi spyi lung las/'dzam gling shar lho'i phyogs mtshams su/bdud mo rno myur nag mo la/bu dgu skyes nas 'dzam gling 'jom/khyad par bod yul gangs can 'dir/ma 'ongs bzhi bcur nye dus su/bdud sprul dgu sdig blon dgu/... 'gro ba kun kha lo thur ku 'khrid.*

means and then accepted as students. While residing at 'Phyong-rgyas and 'Bri-gung, he performed many violent spells, such as Mañjuśri Yamāntaka and Khyab-'jug Gza'i-spu-gri, by means of which, before long, his enemies were led into the tent of the lord of death. In his powers and abilities he was unmatched by another.<sup>54</sup>

In any case, after this confrontation with the Gtsang ruler, the E-vam Lcog-sgar community became fugitives. It seems (at least as Kun-bzang Nges-don Klong-yangs tells the story) that after his expulsion from the world of court politics, Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal turned his attention increasingly to his religious responsibilities, excavating treasure revelations and composing ritual manuals for his community of *Byang-gter* devotees. Such was the environment within which Bkra-shis Stob-rgyal's son, Ngag-gi Dbang-po, grew up. The fifth Dalai Lama's biography describes various adventures of the father-son duo as they traveled during these years. Many involved fights with supporters of the Gtsang king and the "Snang-rtse faction."

We now have some idea of why Padma 'Phrin-las, as the rebirth of Bkra-shis Stob-rgyal's son, Ngag-gi Dbang-po, might have had his own reasons for disliking the central Tibetan *Sūtra* empowerment lineage controlled by Gong-ra

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<sup>54</sup> 469.3-5: *spun dgu'i gtso bo kun spangs lha dbang rdo rje ste/ zhing shag pa pha bu rnams dang byang pa nam mkha' rgyal mtshan sogs 'brel btags byas nas rig 'dzin chen po 'di nyid dbus phyogs su gnas dbyung ba sogs zhabs 'dren chen po byas par brten/ ma rungs pa de dag drag po'i sgo nas btul te rjes su 'dzin dgos pa'i gdul byar mkhyen nas/ 'phyong rgyas dang 'bri gung sogs su bzhugs skabs 'jam dpal gshin rje gshed kyi skor mang po dang/ khyab 'jug gza'i sru gri sogs drag sngags kyi las sbyor du ma'i sgo nas ring por ma lon par dgra bo rnams 'chi bdag gi khar 'dzud par mdzad cing/ mthu stob dang nus pa la gzhan gyis 'gran zla dang bral ba yin pas.*

Lo-chen, the inheritor to G.yu-drug Rdo-rje and Sog-zlog-pa. What remains to be considered is why he also held the Kah-thog System in such disregard. We should remember that Khams was, generally speaking, on friendly terms with the Gtsang kings. This may account in part for why the Dge-lugs and their Mongol protectors regarded the region with disfavor. However, there were similar tensions between Dbus and Khams within the Rnying-ma school.

Once more, the Dalai Lama's biographical history provides a clue. In the years that Ngag-gi Dbang-po spent wandering homeless at his father's side, they went to Kah-thog at least once:<sup>55</sup>

Just before they came to Kah-thog, at one place [Bkra-shis Stob-rgyal] said, "I am the middle descendant of the lord of the *Byang[-gter]*." But most said that they did not know there had been any lineage holders in that dharma family since the two descendants [i.e. Mnga'-ris Pan-chen and Legs-ldan Rdo-rje] of [Rgod-ldem,] the lord of the *Byang[-gter]* passed away. Yet, [the two masters] were not at all angry even with these people, who, adhering to only the tradition (*ring lugs*), were utterly ungrateful like Devadatta. Again and again they accomplished only the benefit of [these people]. Such is the complete liberation of the sons of the great noble Jina; they did not think in the manner of counterfeiters who are arrogant about the greatness of their gilded brass.

So they came to Kah-thog monastery, which is like the source of the ancient teachings of secret mantra in eastern Khams. All the laity and clergy of that region paid extensive reverence and made offerings of goods like gold, silver, turquoise, horses, armor and tea. In accordance with individual abilities, by means of the excellent dharma including the empowerments, the oral transmissions, and the pith instructions, they extensively carried out the welfare of beings.

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<sup>55</sup> This was likely the same trip on which Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal went to Dar-rtse-mdö and established the small temple that would eventually become the Rdo-rje Brag monastery there. See *Dar mdo rdo rje brag*, 5-6.

However, some holders of the lineage of the Snang-rtse chieftain who had evil motivations created dissent so that the public performance of a great accomplishment ceremony for the eight protectors (*bka' brgyad*) and other events could not take place. When the father, the dharma-king Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal, arrived, the Kah-thog-pa-s asked if they could perform a tea offering for the three roots. He [Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal] composed from his heart the *Teaching the Good Path of the Great Vidyādhara Mnga'-ris-pa's Marks and Signs*,<sup>56</sup> establishing it there. Even though [the Kah-thog-pa-s] regularly recited this, they did not understand the *vidyādhara* lord's marks and signs. Later, [Dbon-po Tshe-rgyal,] a direct disciple of the Snang-rtse chieftain, changed the recitation to *Teaching the Path of Dharma*, which recognized the greatness of the good qualities and wisdom of one Gtsang-pa Rab-'byams-pa.<sup>57</sup> For this reason [Bkra-shis Stobs-rgyal] became angry at him and destroyed both Gtsang-pa Rab-'byams-pa and that thief of many horses and mules, Dbon-po Tshe-rgyal. By performing the whirlwind of the black sun and moon, he caused Dbon-po Tshe-rgyal to suddenly die. Meanwhile, Gtsang-pa Rab-'byams-pa got into a fight with his patrons and wandered through three provinces, ousted from one place to another, until finally he was afflicted by a powerful demonic plague and passed into another world.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Rig 'dzin mga' ris pa chen po'i mtshan dpe la yod pa'i legs pa'i lam ston ma.

<sup>57</sup> This is almost certainly the Kah-thog mkhan-po, Gtsang-pa Padma Rgyal-mtshan, who is discussed in the *Kah thog lo rgyus*, 79-81. The same pages also refer to a student of his, one Hor-po Tshe-rgyal, or Rgyal-thang-pa Ston-pa-seng-ge, who appears below as Dbon-po Tshe-rgyal.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 496.6-498.1. khong rnams ka thog tu sngon la phyin nas la la'i sar/ nga byang pa bdag po'i dbon po 'bring ma yin zer pa dang/ phal cher la/ byang bdag po'i gdung rgyud gnyi ka gshegs nas rigs chos kyi brgyud pa 'dzin mkhan med zer ba sogs lhas byin drin gzo med pa'i ring lugs kho nar brten pa rnams la yang khro ba ye mi mdzad cing slar phan pa 'ba' zhig sgrub pa ni 'phags chen rgyal ba'i sras kyi rnam par thar pa ste/ ra gan gser chus byugs pa'i cher rlom tshul 'chos mkhan rnams kyi spyod tshul dang 'dra bar mi sems so/ mdo khams kyi gsang sngags snying ma'i bstan pa'i 'byung gnas lta bu ka thog dgon par phebs/ phyogs de'i skyas ser kun gyis gser dngul g.yu rta khrab ja sogs zang zing gi 'bul ba dang bsnyen bkur rgya cher bstobs/ so so'i blo dang 'tsham pa'i dbang lung man ngag sogs dam pa'i chos kyis 'gro don rgya cher spel/ 'on kyang sde pa snang rtse pa'i brgyud 'dzin 'ga' zhig gis kun slong ngan pas dbyen bcos te spyi thog tu bka' brgyud sgrub chen tshugs pa sogs ni ma byung/ yab chos rgyal bkra shis stobs rgyal phebs skabs ka thog pa rnams kyis rtsa gsum ja mchod cig dgos zhus pa la/ rig 'dzin mga' ris pa chen po'i mtshan dpel yod pa'i legs pa'i lam ston ma thugs rtsom mdzad de btsugs pa rgyun du 'don na'ang rig 'dzin rje'i mtshan dpel yod pa ma shes pa la/ rjes su gtsang pa rab 'byams pa zer ba'i yon tan dang shes rab re che yod pa snang rtse sde pa'i dngos slob yin pa zhig gis ngo shes te/ dar ma'i lam ston zhes 'don pa bsgyur pas/ de la thugs khros te gtsang pa rab 'byams pa dang rta dre mang po rku ba'i dbon po tshe rgyal gnyis la 'joms byed nyi zla nag po'i rlung 'khor 'dzugs pa gnang bas dbon po tshe rgyal glo bur du shi/gtsang pa

We can learn several things from this passage. First, it would seem that compared with the fame of the two brothers, Mn̄ga'-ris Pan-chen and Legs-ldan Rje, Bkra'-shis Stobs-rgyal was not so well-known. This may support the theory that the first two (and in particular Mn̄ga'-ris-pa) were well-loved, and that the tensions between the followers of the *Byang-gter* and the rest of the Rnying-ma school only really took shape after their deaths. In the Dalai Lama's comments on the initial insult, we see that he dismisses Kah-thog with a stereotype, saying they were only interested in the Spoken Teachings, an accusation that confirms Kah-thog's continuing connection to these teachings even four centuries after Dam-pa Bde-gsheg's death.

Next, it would seem that within Kah-thog both sides of the central Tibetan Rnying-ma-pa factions were represented. While some made generous offerings and received teachings from the two *Byang-gter* masters, others insisted on bringing up the difficulties with Gtsang and the descendants of Zhig-po Gling-pa. And as had become common in the Rnying-ma school, things ended in a display of magical violence. Such a debacle must have left the followers of the *Byang-gter* with strongly negative associations about Kah-thog, and it is not surprising to find Padma 'Phrin-las still harboring them some two generations later as he turned to writing his new ritual manual.

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*rab 'byams pa sbyin bdag rnams dang ma mthun par lung pa gsum gyi gcig nas gcig du yul don pa'i mthar rims gdon drag pos btab ste 'jigs rten pha rol tu song ngo.*

When Padma 'Phrin-las wrote his empowerment manual (*dbang chog*), the Kah-thog system, as represented by the massive three-volume *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun* manual, was the yardstick against which he measured his own. He began by calling theirs the "common" (*thun mong*) system and his own the "uncommon Zur System."<sup>59</sup> And after that, he filled his work with innumerable asides on how his manual is better than the one by Kah-thog-pa Rmog-ston Rdo-rje Dpal-bzang-po. The criticisms are varied, but they often do fit with the larger fault described in the colophon, namely that the Kah-thog System was too complicated. We read, for example, that, "The manual of Kah-thog Rdor-bzang indeed seems to have a very great and wonderful framework and elaborations, but at the point [in the ritual] for blessing and protecting the ground, the king's pole [gtor-ma offering], the purification of the [three] doors, the violator Matran[ka-Rudra], and so forth are all already included, so that right from the beginning it is extremely complicated and there is too much to do."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs* 41, 13.4-5. *brgyud srol zur lugs kah thog lugs/thun min thun mong gnyis su grags/'dir ni thun mong ma yin pa.*

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 108.6-109.2. *kaḥthog rdor bzang gi chog khrigs su bshad gzhi dang spros pa shin tu che zhing ngo mitshar ba snang mod kyang/sa byin rlabs dang bsrung ba sogs skabs 'dir byas pas rgyal tho sgo byang dam sri ma tram sogs thams cad de'i khog tu yod gshis thog ma nas spros pa che zhing byed rgyu mang ba.* As one can see, the details of Padma 'Phrin-las's arrangements are quite technical. A dicussion of them would certainly lead us astray from our present focus on lineage. For this reason, a survey of the various systems of empowerment ritual is left for the next chapter, when we turn to the writings of Lochen Dharmasri.

## V. Conclusions

It may seem at this point that we have wandered far from our starting point. All this historical background has been examined in order to gain a better picture of the motivations underlying Padma 'Phrin-las's works on the *Sūtra*, and in particular his collection of lineage biographies. We have seen how Padma 'Phrin-las carefully constructed a new third lineage for the *Sūtra* empowerment, one that brought to the fore his own *Byang-gter* lineage while excluding the supposedly corrupt traditions of Kah-thog and Sog-zlog-pa. Towards this end, two parallel forces drove him: his benefactor, the fifth Dalai Lama, and his own community's history of persecution at the hands of the Gtsang kings and their Rnying-ma-pa associates.

Padma 'Phrin-las's *Sūtra* project was deeply enmeshed in the politics of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. From Legs-ldan-rje's controversial recognition of his brother's reincarnation in the Byang Ngam-ring family, to Padma 'Phrin-las's critique of the Kah-thog empowerment manual, the entire series of events included a strong political component. What made it all uniquely Rnying-ma was the language into which the nation's political events were translated, a language of prophecy, black magic, and esoteric ritual forms. These elements worked in concert to create an alternative, Rnying-ma, history that ran parallel to the one unfolding between Bsam-grub-rtse and the fifth Dalai Lama's Dga'-ldan Pho-'brang.

Just as the fifth Dalai Lama changed Tibet forever, so did Padma 'Phrin-las alter the history of the Rnying-ma school. In the years before Rdo-rje Brag's rise to power, the group composed of Zhig-po Gling-pa, G.yu-drug Rdo-rje, Sog-zlog-pa, and Gong-ra Lo-chen represented the most powerful Rnying-ma-pa faction in central Tibet. Afterwards, these three figures were all but erased from the history books. Few of their writings survive, and they are rarely mentioned in modern histories. Zhig-po Gling-pa, for example, does not appear anywhere in Dudjom Rinpoche's 1991 *History of the Nyingma School*.

Upon closer examination of the sources, however, these modern histories are exposed as inaccurate reflections of the reality of the Rnying-ma school during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Snang-Zhig-Gong-gsum clique was so influential within the *Sūtra* tradition of this period that even Padma 'Phrin-las, despite his best efforts, could not avoid using them in his own lineage. He was forced to admit that Gong-ra Lo-chen transmitted the lineage to his own teacher, Sman-lung-pa, as well as to his teacher before him, Lha-chen Bres-gshongs-pa.<sup>61</sup>

While Padma 'Phrin-las did succeed in creating a new *Sūtra* empowerment lineage, he was ultimately unable to obliterate the earlier two.

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<sup>61</sup> Guru Bkra-shis (*Gu bkra chos 'byung*, 448) points out a similar resignation in the fifth Dalai Lama, when he is forced to trace his *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* lineage (received from Gter-bdag Gling-pa) through Snang-rtse-ba: *mchan/ gter chen la lnga pas bka' brgyad bder 'dus dbang gnang dgos gsung dus yul ri nga chos kyi brgyud pa med tshul zhus pas brgyud pa gang yin gsungs pa snang rtse ba lags zhus pas de yin pa shes bzhin khyed la na du zhu yin gsungs pa ltar bka' brgyad dbang lung phul ba 'dis shes so.*

Dudjom Rinpoche describes all three equally. The persistence of the other two lineages can be attributed to the success of another project that focused on the *Sūtra*, one that was significantly more inclusive in its approach than Padma 'Phrin-las's. The founders of Smin-grol-gling were concerned not with constructing their own closed lineage but with a much larger project to create a new foundation of public ritual that could be shared by the entire Rnying-ma school.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **REFORMATION**

In September 1691 over three hundred of the most renowned masters of the Rnying-ma school gathered at the newly founded monastery of Smin-grol-gling in central Tibet. Sacramental feasts, religious dances, and elaborate ceremonies were performed over eleven days. All those present received the initiations and instructions for a comprehensive new ritual system, one that drew together the various traditions relating to the *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions*. This event marked a turning point in the history of the Rnying-ma school. It was the culmination of the efforts of two charismatic brothers to reshape their tradition by unifying the scattered local lineages under the roof of large monastic institutions. Twenty-five years later, these teachers would be dead, their monastery destroyed in a violent religious persecution. Today the identity of the Rnying-ma school is still defined in large part by the regular observance of the same community rituals first performed three hundred years ago. This chapter looks at how, at the turn of the eighteenth century, Gter-bdag Gling-pa (1646-1714) and his brother Lo-chen Dharmasrī (1654-1717) worked to redefine the

Rnying-ma school, and how the *Sūtra* tradition played a particularly key role in their project.

### I. Public ritual as political strategy: The influence of the Dalai Lama

The previous chapter examined the *Sūtra*'s role in Padma 'Phrin-las's project to establish his seventeenth century *Byang-gter* community over and against competing Rnying-ma-pa groups. Around the same time, in 1676, the famous monastery Smin-grol-gling was being founded by Gter-bdag Gling-pa, Rig-'dzin 'Gyur-med Rdo-rje, directly across the Gtsang-po river from the *Byang-gter* stronghold of Rdo-rje Brag. Like Rdo-rje Brag, Smin-grol-gling received strong support from the new government of the fifth Dalai Lama. In this way, the two simultaneously burgeoning Rnying-ma centers shared much in common, yet there were some significant differences in the attitudes of their respective founders. 'Padma 'Phrin-las took a somewhat exclusionary course, made necessary perhaps by the decades of persecution his *Byang-gter* forbears had experienced. But his approach was quite unlike the one taken by the brothers at Smin-grol-gling; theirs was a much larger movement that sought to strengthen the Rnying-ma teachings throughout central and eastern Tibet. Ultimately both monasteries, Rdo-rje Brag and Smin-grol-gling, enjoyed considerable success, and the results of their distinct strategies can be seen to this day in the contours of the Rnying-ma school. Today the *Byang-gter* lineage enjoys a reputation as an

exceptionally strong *gter-ma* system that has remained intact since its fourteenth century inception, while the Smin-grol-gling tradition, less associated with any one lineage, pervades the ritual fabric of every major Rnying-ma monastery (excluding the Rdo-rje Brag branch monasteries, which usually maintain their own ritual traditions).<sup>1</sup>

The Sming-gling brothers implemented his inclusive approach by means of two interlocking strategies: in-depth historical research and the formulation of new, large-scale public rituals, with the former supporting the latter. They created elaborately choreographed festivals to be performed over a period of days before large public audiences. Smin-grol-gling became known for its elaborate dances performed by large numbers of monks, and for its grand festivals requiring the resources that only a large and wealthy monastery could supply. The popularity and scale of these new rituals helped to establish Smin-grol-gling at the center of the Rnying-ma school.

Gter-bdag Gling-pa's use of public ritual shared much in common with the contemporaneous activities of the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) and his

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<sup>1</sup> Rdo-rje Brag's unique position within the Rnying-ma school is further indicated by the fact that most monasteries today, even when relatively small, are called by their own names, while the Rdo-rje Brag branch monasteries are invariably referred to as simply "Rdo-rje Brag." The same distance can also be seen between the extant traditions of *Sūtra* empowerment. While the Kah-thog and the Smin-gling traditions are relatively well-known to each other, the Rdo-rje Brag empowerment manual, the *Rgya mtsho 'jug ngogs*, dwells in a world apart. Moreover, to my knowledge, Rdo-rje Brag does not observe the annual Gathered Great Assembly festival that is common to all the other major Rnying-ma monasteries. This festival is the focus of Chapter Six of the present study.

powerful regent, Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas Rgya-mtsho (1653-1705).<sup>2</sup> While Gter-bdag Gling-pa worked at Smin-grol-gling, in Lhasa the Dalai Lama was building his new Tibetan state, and one of the principal strategies the new king employed to accomplish this goal was to establish frequent annual festivals and public rituals, intricately scripted in detail and inclusive in scope. Hugh Richardson, in describing the official festivals performed annually in Lhasa, observed:

The origin of most of the ceremonies lies in the remote past, but they have been rearranged and elaborated at different times, especially in the seventeenth century during the rule of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama and his equally great regent Sangye Gyatso when they were put into what was very much their latest form with the clear intention of enhancing the grandeur of the new regime . . . and the prestige and stability of the position of the Dalai Lama and the Gelukpa, Yellow Hat, church.<sup>3</sup>

The ceremonies were extremely elaborate and had to be performed in exact accordance with prescribed forms. As Richardson notes, the presence of all officials was required at such occasions, and no excuses were accepted. Once there, even the seating arrangements were strictly predetermined, with a set number of seat cushions corresponding to each office.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although the present chapter takes the fifth Dalai Lama as its focus, Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas Rgya-mtsho was probably more influential in the development of public rituals to legitimate the nascent state.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson 1993, 7.

<sup>4</sup> These remarkably detailed seating arrangements were first set forth by the fifth Dalai Lama in volume two of his autobiography, and are cited in a logical fashion by 'Jam-dbyangs Mkhyen-brtse'i Dbang-po in his *Gangs can gyi yul du byon pa'i lo pañ rnams kyi mtshan tho rags rim tshigs bcad du bsdebs pa ma ha pandi ta shi la ratna'i gsungs* (*The Collected Works [Gsung 'bum] of the Great 'Jam-*

In this way the Dalai Lama's new ceremonies brought together (even if by force) all competing political factions beneath the banner of his Dga'-Idan Pho-'brang. Everyone was guaranteed a place at the table, as long as they remained seated and followed the proper ceremonial procedures. This controlled inclusiveness was typical of the Dalai Lama's later life. During his early years he had been occupied with eliminating his rivals, directing military reprisals, suppressing rival sects, and confiscating the properties of those who posed threats to his incipient state. But later in life, as his position stabilized, his approach became increasingly diplomatic and thus inclusive, a trend that was extended significantly by his regent, Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas Rgya-mtsho. The shift seems to have begun around 1670: In 1667 he recognized the new Pan-chen Blama incarnation in the Bru clan, one of the five major families of the Bon-po, who had long been his enemies, and in 1674 he received his long-time enemy, the Karma-pa, at the Potala.

These two phases in the Great Fifth's politics—exclusive then inclusive—mirrored what was taking place within the *Sūtra* tradition, in the projects of Padma 'Phrin-las and then Gter-bdag Gling-pa. This parallel was no coincidence. As in the case with Padma 'Phrin-las, the Dalai Lama was directly involved in Gter-bdag Gling-pa's development of his new, more public *Sūtra* rituals at Smin-grol-gling. Padma 'Phrin-las's creation of a new *Sūtra* lineage for

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*dbyans Mkhyen-brtse'i dbani-po*. Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1977-80, vol. 11). My thanks to Gene Smith for this reference.

Rdo-rje Brag had been ordered by the Great Fifth, and the new ceremonies at Smin-grol-gling were similarly inspired by the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama's exclusivity affected Rdo-rje Brag's new *Sūtra* tradition, while his (and even more so his regent's) later inclusivity was reflected in the new Smin-grol-gling tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Just as the nation of Tibet was brought together by the Dalai Lama's institution of new public festivals, so also was the Rnying-ma school united by the new Smin-grol-gling rituals. The scale of Gter-bdag Gling-pa and Lo-chen Dharmaśri's work was enormous, and although the present study focuses on the *Sūtra*'s role in their project, many other elements were also crucial in their own ways and should not be forgotten. Gter-bdag Gling-pa's own *gter-ma* revelations on the deity Avalokiteśvara, for example, also served as the basis for new public festivals that contributed similarly to their project.<sup>6</sup> Yet it is clear that the two brothers (and especially Lo-chen Dharmaśri) gave much attention to the Spoken Teachings, and the *Sūtra* especially. Dudjom Rinpoche writes, "In order that the teaching might endure for a long time, Lo-chen Dharmaśri composed the texts making up his eighteen-volume *Collected Works* (*bka'-bum*), beginning with his

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<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the Dalai Lama's influence on Smin-grol-gling was reciprocal. The ritual dances, for example, that figured prominently in many of Gter-bdag Gling-pa's new Rnying-ma festivals, are said to have caught the Dalai Lama's own interest, inspiring him to introduce similar dances to the Dge-lugs school, which had always shunned them. See Kohn 2001, 49-50.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent study of another large-scale ritual created during this same period at Smin-grol-gling, but based on Gter-bdag Gling-pa's *gter-ma*, see Kohn 2001. While Gter-bdag Gling-pa's *gter-ma* have certainly spread since the early eighteenth century, his reformulation of the Spoken Teachings remains far more influential in today's Rnying-ma school.

unprecedented writings on the intentional meaning of the *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions of All [the Buddhas]* and the *Magical Net*.<sup>7</sup> Of his eighteen volumes, five are devoted to Dharmasrī's own writings on the *Sūtra*.

It is clear from the nature Dharmasrī's writings that he was primarily interested in the *Sūtra* for its rituals.<sup>8</sup> This was certainly a reflection of his own wider project to rebuild the ritual systems of the Rnying-ma school. While his writings did address other rituals associated with the *Sūtra*—like its *sādhana*, its fire offering ceremony, and so forth—most of his attention went to the *Sūtra*'s famous empowerment ritual. The present chapter will focus on the empowerment ritual and leave the other rituals for our next chapter, on "Preservation."

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<sup>7</sup> Dudjom 1991, 732.

<sup>8</sup> His five volumes are known collectively as his '*Dus pa mdo skor gyi yig cha*', and all the texts found therein focus on the ritual tradition. The first volume contains two texts dealing with the mandala rituals. The second volume contains four works: The '*Dus pa mdo'i sgrub khog rin chen 'od kyi snang ba*' discusses the ritual procedures of the *sādhana* according to the four ritual stages of propitiation and accomplishment (*bsnyen sgrub kyi yan lag bzhi*). It should be noted that this is a large-scale *sādhana*, to be performed by an assembly of monks and not of the sort an individual might perform on a daily basis. The *sādhana* is accompanied by a second work that serves as an appendix to both the *sādhana* and the mandala ritual manual that is found in the first volume. The remaining two texts in this second volume are performance lists (*tho*) for the empowerment and the blessing (*dngos grub len*) ceremonies respectively. Volume three contains the empowerment ritual manual (*dbang chog*) followed by a short description of the ritual cards (*tsakli*) needed for the empowerments. Volume four consists of seven texts. The first one, entitled '*Dus pa'i mdo dbang gi spyi don rgyud lung man ngag gi gnad gsal byed sgron me*', is the most interesting for the purposes of this chapter. The remaining six texts are relatively short works on how to draw the mandala (*thig tshon gi bya ba*), the ritual dances ('chams) and the musical accompaniments (*rol mo*). Finally, volume five contains three works on the offerings ceremonies, including the manual for the fire sacrifice (*byin sreg*).

## **II. Excavating the foundations: Smin-grol-gling's historical research**

The *Sūtra* was thus a key piece of the Smin-grol-gling project to rebuild the Rnying-ma school through its rituals. Before beginning, however, Dharmāśri first embarked on an extended study of the *Sūtra*'s history, excavating the long-buried foundations of this influential text to use as the basis for his new system. He did this to strip away the layers of Rnying-ma-pa infighting that had built up over the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, to get down to a shared historical base upon which all Rnying-ma-pa could agree.

Chapter Four has shown how Padma 'Phrin-las refused to accept Kah-thog's accretions to the empowerment ritual. Rather, he chose to base his own manual on the *Rin chen phreng ba* and the hand-written notes he inherited from his *Byang-gter* predecessors, 'Jam-dbyangs Rin-chen Rgyal-mtshan and Mnga'-ris Pan-chen. For Padma 'Phrin-las, the *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun* was unnecessarily complicated, and though he pointed to all sorts of examples in Rmog-ston's manual, the worst offense was undoubtedly its new empowerments for *mahāyoga* and *atiyoga*. In addition, there were the tensions within central Tibet, between the fifth Dalai Lama/Rdo-rje Brag and the Snang-Sog-Gong-gsum faction of the Rnying-ma school.

Such was the contentious state of affairs faced by Gter-bdag Gling-pa and Lo-chen Dharmāśri. In order to unite the opposing factions within their school, the two brothers first made sure to gather all three major lineages—from Padma

'Phrin-las, from Kah-thog, and from the Gong-ra faction. The first they received directly from Padma 'Phrin-las, and the latter two from their father, Gsang-bdag 'Phrin-las Lhun-sgrub. With all three lineages under his belt, Dharmāśri could now proceed with his historical excavation of the *Sūtra* empowerment.

Dharmāśri's approach to history marked a turn in the rhetoric of the Rnying-ma school. We have seen how, between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, the Rnying-ma-pa turned away from their original canonical tantras to focus on certain disagreements in their more recent commentarial literature. This shift has also been discerned in the arena of lineage, where the early sections of the Rnying-ma-pa lineages became fixed, agreed upon by all, and concerns focused on the legitimacy of the more recent transmissions.

Now, at the end of the seventeenth century, the Smin-grol-gling project to reform the Rnying-ma school brought with it a return to the past. This was one of several important ways in which this project set a precedent for the remarkable Rnying-ma renaissance that was to unfold over the following two centuries. Gene Smith has pointed to "the antiquarian and archaeological interest" of late eighteenth century Rnying-ma-pa scholars like 'Jigs-med Gling-pa and Tshe-dbang Nor-bu.<sup>9</sup> The latter, Smith writes, "not content simply to repeat what he found in secondary sources considered authoritative by the

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<sup>9</sup> Smith 2001, 22.

Tibetan tradition,... sought to go back to the original.”<sup>10</sup> Such high valuation of historical research was characteristic of many “non-sectarian” (*ris-med*) Rnying-ma-pa thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it can be traced back to what began at Smin-grol-gling at the end of the seventeenth century.

Dharmaśri’s genius lay not only in his ability to comprehend the innumerable details of all the empowerment traditions, but in his discernment of the wider structural issues. Unlike any before him, Dharmaśri was able to step back made from the specific manuals to reflect on the overall framework of the ritual and to make explicit the historical foundations for his new system. Thus he composed a supporting work that set forth his vision of the *Sūtra* empowerment’s history, entitling it *A General Introduction to the Empowerment for the Sūtra of the Gathered, a Lamp for Illuminating the Crucial Points of Sūtra, Oral Precept, and Pith Instruction* (‘Dus pa’i mdo dbang gi spyi don rgyud lung man ngag gi gnad gsal byed sgron me).<sup>11</sup> In this work Dharmaśri distinguished, with great historical rigor, two ritual formats that had existed in the *Sūtra* empowerment

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>11</sup> After Gnubs-chen’s *Mun pa’i go cha*, this is by far the most useful source for the modern historian of the *Sūtra* tradition. That it is more of a “history” than a commentary may be confirmed by ‘Jam-dbyangs Mkhyen-brtse’i Dbang-po, who seems to refer to it under the title of the *History of the Sūtra empowerment* (*Mdo dbang gi chos ’byung*—for this reference, see ‘Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po’i gsung rtson gces sgrib [Chengdu: Si-khron Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1989], p.45). Dan Martin (Martin 1997, 119) has suggested that this title might refer to another Dharmaśri history of the *Sūtra* empowerment that is distinct from his *Spyi don*. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any such text, nor have I seen any other reference to it. It does not appear in either the standard or new version of Dharmaśri’s *Gsung ’bum*, nor in any of the *Bka’ ma* collections. Thus we must conclude that either it is lost or Mkhyen-brtse is referring to Dharmaśri’s *Mdo dbang gi spyi don*, which does include a substantial section on the lineage lamas (34-127) and does have an historical tone. I suspect the latter may be the case.

tradition since the beginning, calling them the “tantra system” (*rgyud lugs*) and the “pith instructions system” (*man ngag lugs*).<sup>12</sup>

The importance of this distinction to Dharmaśri’s larger project is indicated by the full title of his own manual—*The Diamond Staircase: An Empowerment Ritual Manual that Unifies the Systems of Tantra and Pith Instructions* (*Rgyud dang man ngag gi lugs gcig tu dril ba’i dbang chog rdo rje’i them skas*). In his historical study, Dharmaśri devotes many pages to delineating the precise roles of these two systems throughout the history of the *Sūtra* empowerment. The extraordinary level of detail with which he treats them would seem a further reflection of these two categories’ significance to his project.

By taking these two systems as his focus, Dharmaśri was able, in that one move, accurately define the *Sūtra*’s place within the Rnying-ma school while undercutting the various disagreements that had arisen over its empowerment ritual. What follows is a summary of just one part of Dharmaśri’s history, one that exemplifies the rigor of his thinking in establishing the historical foundations for his vision of the tradition.

Dharmaśri opens his history with an extended review of the Rnying-ma lineages, first for the *Sūtra*, and then for each of the other eight, non-*anuyoga*, vehicles. Thus the last lineage traced is that of *atiyoga*, which, he writes, began with Dga’-rab Rdo-rje, a.k.a. Ro-langs Bde-ba. Dharmaśri notes that the *anuyoga*

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<sup>12</sup> These have been introduced in Chapter Three of the present study.

lineage, which originated as usual with Mt. Malaya and King Dza, also passed through Dga'-rab Rdo-rje. This leads him to the question of how the individual lineages of the nine vehicles are related to the single lineage of the fully complete *Sūtra* empowerment/pith instructions system, which includes within itself all the nine individual lineages; is the latter merely the sum of the former or something more? Apparently this question bred some significant confusion amongst early Tibetan Buddhists:

Following [the *Sūtra*'s] reception here [in Tibet], most of the mantrins thought that anything that was the empowerment of the fully complete *Sūtra* must [also] be the empowerments for all nine vehicles. And, if such were the case, then that [fully complete empowerment] must have been a collection made from each of the eight [other] vehicles' own liturgies, that is, they must have been made into a single general liturgy. And by that reasoning, it would make sense that the lineages for all the other eight vehicles could also be transmitted individually [through this one fully complete empowerment].<sup>13</sup>

In answer to this problem, Dharmāśri asserts that even though all the component parts of the *Sūtra* empowerments were in place in the person of Dga'-rab Rdo-rje, the fully complete *practice tradition* (*phyag bzhes*) did not begin until Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad. Thus Dharmāśri is making a crucial distinction between when the lineages of all nine vehicles met for the first time in a single

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<sup>13</sup> *Spyi don*, 133.6-134.2. 'dir zhugs pa'i phyis kyi sngags pa phal cher/ mdo yongs rdzogs kyi dbang yin na/ theg dgu'i dbang yin dgos la/ de yin na theg brgyad sgos kyi cho ga so so las btus te spyi'i cho gar byas pa yin dgos snyam pa dang/ rgyu mtshan des theg brgyad gzhan thams cad kyi brgyud pa'ang so sor 'dren rigs.

person—Dga'-rab Rdo-rje—and when all the lineages were first gathered into the practice tradition of the fully complete *Sūtra* empowerment by Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad. This distinction is key to the discussion that follows:

It must be held that only from that point [i.e. from Dga'-rab Rdo-rje] on were both the transmissions, of the root *Sūtra* [which began on Mt. Malaya] and of the fully complete four streams [of the individual empowerments], unified as a single river.<sup>14</sup> [However,] with regards to the *practice tradition* by which the empowerment of the fully complete *Sūtra* is granted, we must say that it is granted on the basis of the eighteen various texts (the *Las tho* and so forth) by the great master Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, because in these individual lineages of the fully complete *Sūtra* just explained, Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad does not appear. Therefore the teachings on the branch maṇḍalas for the stream of arising [i.e. for the *Sūtra's mahāyoga* empowerments] and below arose separately, without being connected to the general scripture [of the *Sūtra*]; I think that this [Sūtra lineage] was the one-transmission system that Slob-dpon Dharmarāja granted to Gnubs-chen.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Thus in fact Dharmasrī is making a three-part distinction between (1) the root *Sūtra* empowerment, which first began atop Mt. Malaya, (2) the fully complete *Sūtra* empowerment, which can only have begun with Dga'-rab Rdo-rje because he was the first human to receive the truly *atiyoga* teachings, and (3) the fully complete practice tradition, which was first assembled by Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad around the mid-ninth century. (Of course, none of these origins are historically verifiable.) In the second distinction here, we see a tension arising between on the one hand the *Sūtra's* early claim to include the *atiyoga* teachings, which thus would have first appeared in the world atop Mt. Malaya along with all the inner tantras, and on the other hand the later tradition's claim that *atiyoga* originated much later, during the lifetime of Dga'-rab Rdo-rje.

<sup>15</sup> *Spyi don*, 132.1-132.5. *de man chad mdo rtsa ba dang yongs rdzogs kyi chu bo bzhi'i brgyud lugs gnyis ka chu bo gcig 'dres su 'dod dgos te/ mdo yongs rdzogs kyi dbang bskur ba'i phyag bzhes yin na/ slob dpon chen po bde ba gsal mdzad kyi las tho sogs yig sna bco brgyad la brten nas bskur dgos pa gang zhig/bshad ma thag pa'i mdo yongs rdzogs kyi brgyud pa bye brag pa de'i nang du bde ba gsal mdzad ma byung ba'i phyir ro/des na 'di ni lung spyi dang ma bsgrel bar/ yan lag gi dkyil 'khor 'byung ba'i chu bo man chad kyi bka' bye brag tu phyung ste/ slob dpon dharma rā dzas gsnubs chen la bskur ba'i brgyud tshul gyi nye brgyud lugs gcig yin snyam mo//*

Having dismissed the possibility that Dga'-rab Rdo-rje was the first to develop the fully complete practice tradition, Dharmášri turns to the possibility that Gnubs-chen might have done so. He considers the following line of reasoning (which he regards as mistaken): Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad does not appear in any of the individual lineages for the other eight vehicles. However, Gnubs-chen does figure in all the lineages. Therefore, Gnubs-chen must have been the first human to hold all the individual lineages as well as the fully complete practice tradition. The flaw here, as Dharmášri points out, is that just because Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad does not appear in the later lineage lists for the individual lineages, it does not mean that he did not hold all of the lineages. Many persons may hold a single lineage, but only one of them will finally be chosen for inclusion in the later lists.

In short, Dharmášri has the tantra system, which is equivalent to the “root *Sūtra*” empowerment in the quotation above, starting with the teaching atop Mt. Malaya. Dga'-rab Rdo-rje was the first human to hold the principal lineages for each of the nine vehicles, and therefore also the first to hold all the parts theoretically needed for the pith instructions system, or the “fully complete *Sūtra* empowerment.” Then Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad was the first to compile the *practice tradition of the pith instructions system*.

As one can see, Dharmášri was meticulous in both his research and his thinking. By the end of his work, he had carefully exposed and reinforced the

historical foundations of the *Sūtra*'s ritual system. He could now be sure that the new system he built would stand for centuries to come, made strong with the authority it received from his rigorous excavations.

### **III. The Smin-gling reformation of the *Sūtra* empowerment**

In Dharmāśri's new ritual manual, he carefully wove together the two systems he had so carefully defined in his historical work. In doing so, one might have expected him to simply return to the original format set forth in Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad's various notes. But, while he did look to these for some guidance, Dharmāśri had to balance these early forms against the modern concerns of the Rnying-ma school. Thus he explicitly adopted certain innovations from some manuals while rejecting others. Dharmāśri seems to be calling attention to the sincerity of his diplomatic efforts as he makes repeated references to his "adoption and rejection strategy" ('*dor len bya tshul*).<sup>16</sup>

Dharmāśri's "rolled into one" (*gcig tu dril ba*) system opens with sixteen preliminary empowerments into a Vajrapāṇi maṇḍala.<sup>17</sup> Then the branch maṇḍalas are assembled for each of the first six vehicles, as per Zur-ham's system, and the outer stream of ten empowerments are granted for them along with the deity empowerments for each. Thus in Dharmāśri's pith instruction

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, *Spyi don*, 185.6 or 245.1.

<sup>17</sup> These are said to have first appeared in the six chapters extracted by Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad.

system, he adopted Zur-ham's additional branch maṇḍalas, but rejected the idea that the ten empowerments of the outer stream should be postponed until the *mahā-anu-ati* empowerments that use the Gathered Great Assembly maṇḍala. In this way Dharmaśri struck a balance. On the one hand, he implicitly conceded that these six lower vehicles each need their own representation and cannot be truly represented by the Gathered Great Assembly maṇḍala alone. On the other hand, he acknowledged that this is, after all, the *Sūtra* empowerment system and that the ten outer empowerments must be applied at this point in order to keep the branch maṇḍalas under the ritual umbrella of that system.

This was a completely novel approach. While Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad did grant the ten outer stream empowerments for the branch maṇḍalas, he only used two branch maṇḍalas and granted the ten empowerments all at once after both maṇḍalas had been built. For Dharmaśri to do this now, with all forty-three branch maṇḍalas, would mean postponing the outer stream of empowerments until much later in the ritual, thus weakening the connection between the branch maṇḍalas and their respective *Sūtra* empowerments. Recognizing this, he carefully divided the outer stream's 108 coarse branch empowerments into their corresponding vehicles. He then wove each of the resulting sets into its proper ritual place, positioning each immediately prior to the deity empowerments for its respective branch maṇḍalas.

For example, the first of the ten empowerments of the Outer Stream traditionally sub-divides into twenty coarse branch empowerments. Dharmaśri took the first eleven of these to be for the first vehicle of gods and humans. After this first vehicle is introduced and its branch mandalas arranged, these eleven empowerments are granted, followed by the appropriate deity empowerments. This same basic structure is then observed for each of the first six vehicles.<sup>18</sup>

This is how the disciple is initiated by the outer stream empowerments into the branch mandalas in accordance with the pith instruction system. Next the common Gathered Great Assembly mandala is constructed, and the ten outer empowerments are granted all over again, this time according to the tantra system. As Dharmaśri explains, this repetition is necessary because the two systems' outer empowerments are different in both number and how they are granted.<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere, Dharmaśri adds that the branch mandalas are more appropriate for lesser disciples who require training in the first six vehicles,

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<sup>18</sup> For a summary of how Dharmaśri divided the coarse branches between the vehicles, see *Spyi don*, 220-221. Note that there is considerable overlap between the first three vehicles, so that the seventh coarse branch, the name empowerment (*ming dbang*), is granted twice, once during the gods and humans vehicle and again in the śrāvaka vehicle. Such repeats happen twenty-seven times, and four "additional" (*lhag por*) empowerments are added, so that by the end of these six vehicles the 108 coarse branches have in practice grown to 139 in number (on this, see *Spyi don*, 239.3).

<sup>19</sup> See *Rdo rje them skas*, 6.6: *phyi dbang lugs gnyis grangs dang dbang bskur thabs mi 'dra bas so sor bskur dgongs*.

whereas the same empowerments into the root mandala are more suitable for those who have already attained these levels of realization.

It is further said regarding the two ways of granting, by the tantra and the pith instructions systems, that for those extraordinarily worthy ones who, being inherently qualified, already have faith in the profound meaning, the thirty-six empowerments that perfect the four streams are granted into the mandala of the root *Sūtra*. And for those worthy ones who only through training can become qualified and believe in the great and vast, the system of the fully complete *Sūtra*, distinguishing the individual branch mandalas, is granted by means of distinguishing between the 801 coarse branches of the thirty-six root *Sūtra* empowerments, within which all the vehicles are gathered.<sup>20</sup>

Here we begin to see how Dharmāśri was careful throughout his writings to distinguish between two types of potential disciple recipients: the specialist and the general public.

In writing his new manual, Dharmāśri seems to have had in mind a public performance before an unrestricted audience. His target audience was unlike those of the earlier manuals; his was for a much larger, public venue. For this

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 63.6-64.1: *de la'ang rgyud dang man ngag gi lugs kyi bskur tshul gnyis te/ rang bzhin gyis snod du gyur pas zab mo'i don la mos pa'i skal ldan khyad par can la mdo rtsa ba'i dkyil 'khor du chu bo bzhi rdzogs kyi dbang sum cu rtsa drug bskur ba dang/sbyangs pas snod du gyur pa rgya che ba la mos pa'i skal ldan la mdo yongs rdzogs kyi lugs yan lag gi dkyil 'khor so sor phye bar theg pa thams cad 'dus pa'i mdo dbang rtsa ba so drug la yan lag rags pa brgyad brgya so gcig tu phye nas bskur bar gsungs.* This passage confirms that only for the fully complete, or pith instructions system, are the individual coarse branch empowerments distinguished, whereas the tantra system is restricted to the more general distinction of the thirty-six root empowerments. This is borne out upon examination of the manual itself. In the section where the ten outer empowerments are granted according to the tantra system, Dharmāśri makes no mention of the coarse branch empowerments (this specific section begins on *Rdo rje them skas*, 327.2). Rather, each of the ten root empowerments is granted as a single empowerment. Abbreviated in this way, several do not even use the empowering substances (*dbang rdzas*), but are granted instead through a brief visualization and a prayer.

reason, he was forced to simplify many parts of the ritual, lowering the overall level to the lowest common denominator. As he proceeds to the higher initiations, this tendency becomes increasingly pronounced. Thus, after these outer empowerments, the eleven inner empowerments are granted for the same common root mandala in accordance with the tantra system,<sup>21</sup> and Dharmaśri explains that,

When [the empowerment is] being performed for a group, the vast majority have been neither ripened [through meditation] nor educated. Therefore, thinking little harm would come of it, the construction of the uncommon root mandala of the Great Gathered Assembly, the mandala of the Supreme Secret Charnel Grounds, does not really matter. Instead, the 115 branches are distinguished within the thirteen roots of the accomplishment empowerment stream of renown and granted into the same mandala from the inner empowerments, the common root mandala.<sup>22</sup>

It may be remembered that in earlier manuals, there were two Great Gathered Assembly mandalas, a common and an uncommon one. The former would be used for the *mahāyoga* empowerments, and the latter for the *anuyoga*. Here, Dharmaśri decides to simplify the situation by only using the common mandala for both sets of empowerments. He does this, he tells us, because he expects that

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<sup>21</sup> See Ibid., 7.1-2.

<sup>22</sup> *Spyi don.*, 243.6-244.1. *tshogs sgrub dus dbang gis smin slob mi mdzad pa shas che bas cung zad gnad chung bar dgongs nas/ tshogs chen 'dus pa thun mong ma yin pa'i rtsa dkyil dur khrod gsang ba mchog gi dkyil 'khor bzhengs ba btang snyoms su mdzad de/ rtsa dkyil thun mong ba nang dbang gi dkyil 'khor de nyid du sgrub dbang grags pa'i chu ba rtsa ba bcu gsum las yan lag brgya bco lngar phye ste bskur ba.*

"the vast majority" of those receiving the empowerment will not have attained the high level of realization needed to fully benefit from this *anuyoga* empowerments. Most will be there just for the blessings, for "merely aspiration or study," as he writes elsewhere,<sup>23</sup> and for this reason, one may as well abbreviate the ritual, even if it means less benefit for the rare expert in the crowd.

The latter possibility prompts Dharmaśri, in his section on the final, secret empowerment stream of perfection (also according to the tantra system),<sup>24</sup> to direct the presiding lama to separate out the select few experts in the crowd and grant them the highest initiations in private, after the main ceremony is over. "Afterwards," Dharmaśri writes, "it is possible that some extraordinary students who are working on the perfection stage might be present. If so, in order to care for them, they can be taken aside and the rituals can be performed for granting the pith instructions system, the empowerment method of the fully complete *Sūtra*."<sup>25</sup>

This confirms our picture of the wider Smin-grol-gling project, as reformulating the Rnying-ma school through public ritual performances at major

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<sup>23</sup> See *Rdo rje them skas*, 7.1-2: *mos slob tsam la brten pa shas che ba...*

<sup>24</sup> On this, see *Ibid.*, 491.3-503.6. These empowerments strongly resemble the secret empowerment, the empowerment of wisdom through insight and the fourth empowerment common to all *anuttarayoga* tantras.

<sup>25</sup> *Spyi don*, 244.5.6. *de rjes rdzogs rim don du gnyer ba'i slob ma khyad par can yang 'byung srid pas de dag rjes su 'dzin pa'i ched du man ngag gi lugs mdo yongs rdzogs kyi bskur thabs de nyid zur du phye nas bskur ba'i phyag len mdzad pa yin.* After these final secret empowerments, the whole ceremony ends with a long-life empowerment (*tshe dbang*) and, if appropriate, the conferral of the seal of entrustment (*gtad rgya*).

monasteries. The primary purpose of the new Smin-grol-gling *Sūtra* empowerment was no longer to initiate a given disciple into the *Sūtra*'s teachings, but as a community building event. The ceremony was now a performance foremost, and in this sense, its emphasis had shifted from the participants to the observers. How it was perceived as a public spectacle was now more crucial to its function within the Rnying-ma school.

The new Smin-gling *Sūtra* empowerment ritual reflected this goal in one other way: Dharmasri further increased the grandeur of the performance by dividing the ritual manual bewteen a number of shorter, distinct texts. Thus a separate text directed the monks on how to construct the maṇḍala, another described the ritual cards (*tsakli*), another the musical arrangements (*rol mo*), and so on. By delegating the ritual responsibilities in this way, Dharmasri made possible a larger performance that was easier to assemble. The different groups of monks might only had to master their own particular responsibilities, but, when combined, they could create a spectacle of unprecedented grandeur.

By increasing the size and splendor of the ceremony, Dharmasri had to be careful not to overwhelm his audience. Thus at the same time, he made it far shorter in duration than any of the earlier versions, taking only three full days instead of ten or more. Unlike the Kah-thog empowerment system, for example, which packed in every detail it could, Dharmasri's was relatively efficient in its grandeur.

This desire for brevity may also explain, in part, why the *mahāyoga* and *atiyoga* empowerments introduced by Rmog-ston in his Kah-thog system were conspicuously missing from the Smin-grol-gling version. The case for these empowerments to be included was certainly not helped by the lack of any historical precedent in the early notes of Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad. Dharmāśri's explains his decision in the following passage:

In that same text [by G.yung-ston] it says, "According to some who do not understand our methods, . . . these [*atiyoga*] introductions are not discussed in any of the tantras, commentaries, or pith instructions of *anuyoga* whatsoever, so these [accretions] should be known as the mere wishful thinking of people with no practice tradition for the four streams of empowerment." This [criticism] may be valid in terms of how in the Khams tradition the empowerments of the eighteen mind class meanings of "A" were added. However, in the Glan tradition there are explicit and implicit texts, and these [critics] appear to have made the mistake of assuming the ritual arrangements without first discovering the hidden texts.<sup>26</sup>

Dharmāśri goes on to cite the presentation of the *atiyoga* empowerments in Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad's '*Dren pa'i las byang che le* as proof that some kind of *atiyoga*

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<sup>26</sup> *Spyi don*, 241.3-6. *yang de las/de lta bu'i tshul ma go ba kha cig na re... ngo sprod byed pa 'di rnams ni a nu'i rgyud 'grel man ngag gang nas kyang ma gsungs pa'i phyir/dbang gi chu bo bzhi'i phyag len dang bral ba rnams kyi 'dod rgyal du rig par bya'o/zhes gsungs ba ltar na/khamis lugs su sems sde a don bco brgyad kyi dbang sbyar ba la dpags na'ang/glan lugs 'di la yi ge phyi nang yod pa'i lkog yig rnams ma nges par chog khrigs mdzad pa'i skyon du snang.* The Glan chog was unusual for only describing the empowerments of the first three empowerment streams, leaving the empowerments for *atiyoga* secret. In the manual as it is today, the secret stream is found in an appendix added by Zur-ham himself (see *Glan chog* 61, 788-833), at the end of which Zur-ham insists that it is all "according to Glan-chen Shākyā Mgon-po Dpal-Idan Chos-seng and Zur-ban Cho-rje Byams-pa Seng-ge" (*Ibid.*, 810.2). Here Dharmāśri points out that for this reason it was possible for someone to look at the *Glan chog* and see no evidence for the *atiyoga* empowerments.

empowerments have existed in the *Sūtra* tradition since the beginning. Yet he clearly felt that Kah-thog Rmog-ston's addition of the eighteen mind class meanings of "A" was vulnerable to criticism because there was no precedent for it in the early tradition. One can extrapolate that Dharmaśri felt the same way about Rmog-ston's other major addition, of the eighteen *Māyajala* empowerments, for which there was also no precedent.

Dharmaśri completed his new manual in the autumn of 1704 and his accompanying historical study, the *Mdo dbang gi spyi don*, in December 1710.<sup>77</sup> In his writings, Dharmaśri consistently defers to Gter-bdag Gling-pa. He insists that his own writings on the *Sūtra* tradition "should be perceived as supplements" to two earlier works composed by his elder brother, Gter-bdag Gling-pa—a sādhana (*Mdo rtsa ba'i sgrub thabs dngos grub char 'bebs*) and a manḍala ritual (*Dkyil chog dri med 'od 'phreng*). It seems that Dharmaśri's new manual closely followed a ritual format that had already been developed by his elder brother. Before putting his brother's new empowerment ritual into writing, Dharmaśri received it on three occasions. All three were major events with many important lamas from all over Tibet in attendance. The first was at the festival mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It took place in September 1691, and Dharmaśri describes it in the following words:

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<sup>77</sup> *Rdo rje them skas*, 567.4-5: *rang lo Inga bcu nga gcig pa nyi sgrol byed ces shing po spre'u'i lo ston zla 'bring po'i tshes bcu drug gi snga dro... And then Spyi don*, 259.2-3: *rang lo Inga bcu nga bdun pa rnam 'gyur lcags stag gi lo dgun 'bring rgyal zla'i tshes nyi shu'i snga dro...*

In particular, once there gathered together we who normally live at Smin-sgrol-gling—a congregation headed by the supreme son of [Gter-bdag Gling-pa's] body, speech and mind, Padma 'Gyur-med Rgya-mtsho<sup>28</sup>—together with realized ones assembled there only temporarily such as the emanation body Tre'o, Rab-'byam-pa Chags-pa Chos-'phel, the lamas of Dpal-ri Gdan-sa-ba and Spo-bo, three hundred in all. To all of us was bestowed, in accordance with a system in which the earlier and later classifications of the root and branch mandalas, those of Lha-rje 'Gar, of Glan and so forth, were all brought into a single tradition of ritual practice for [all the rituals] up to and including the great accomplishment,[according to that system] for eleven days, from the seventh to the eighteenth of September, 1691, the ripened and developed fulfillment of the complete four rivers of the *Sūtra Gathering [the Intentions]*, based on a mandala of colored powders, together with the seal of entrustment, the flanking explanatory instructions, and the related ritual sequence of the great accomplishment. Thus signs were displayed and the welfare of beings was immensely and continuously enacted. Now [Gter-bdag Gling-pa] has reached the age of sixty-five.<sup>29</sup>

Of particular relevance is the ritual tradition depicted here. It is unclear what the precise relationship was between this 1691 empowerment system and that which would appear in Dharmāśri's manual some fifteen years later. However, the picture of a ritual system that unified all the earlier traditions appears to be a

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<sup>28</sup> Gter-bdag Gling-pa's biological son was the second Smin-gling throne-holder, and would have been only five years old in 1691.

<sup>29</sup> *Spyi don*, 124.4-125.2. *khyad par sku gsung thugs kyi sras mchog padma 'gyur med rgya mtshos thog drangs smin grol gling 'dus tshogs sogs bdag cag gnyug mar gnas pa rnams dang/ te'o sprul pa'i sku/rab 'byams pa chags pa chos 'phel/dpal ri gdan sa ba/spo bo bla ma sogs glo bur lhags pa'i don gnyer can te khyon 'dus pa sum brgya bskor la/ rtsa ba dang yan lag gi dkyil 'khor kyi dbye bsdu lha rje 'gar dang glan snga phyi sogs sgrol chen yan chad phyag len gyi srol gcig tu 'bab pa'i lugs ltar/ rdul tshon gyi dkyil 'khor la brten pa'i 'dus pa mdo'i chu bo bzhi rdzogs gtad rgya gdams ngag bshad pa mtha' brten dang bcas pa sgrub chen gyi las rim dang 'brel bar lcags lug khums zla'i tshes bdun nas bco brgyad kyi bar zhag bcu gcig gi khongs su rdzogs pa smin rgyas su stsal bas mtshon bstan 'gro'i don rlabs po che rgyun chags su mdzad bzhin par lta dgung lo drug cu re Inga'i steng du phebs pa 'di lags te.*

reference to some early prototype for the later “rolled into one” (*gcig tu gril ba*) system.

Gter-bdag Gling-pa granted the *Sūtra* empowerment twice more before Dharmāśri wrote his manual. Neither time is described in any detail, but Dharmāśri does list some of the more important lamas who received it.<sup>30</sup> It is clear from the size of these lists that Smin-grol-gling functioned as a font from which the new *Sūtra* empowerment system spread to all corners of Tibet. The inclusive nature of the Smin-gling *Sūtra* empowerment combined with the charisma of its creators to draw lamas from all the Rnying-ma monasteries, old and new. These events were not simply empowerments; they were workshops, to which the major Rnying-ma lamas of the day came to receive and learn the latest rituals. By the time of Gter-bdag Gling-pa’s death in 1714, his version of the *Sūtra* empowerment tradition had become the standard throughout the Rnying-ma school.

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<sup>30</sup> “The second time, the *Sūtra* empowerment was bestowed to the excellent lord lama’s son and relatives and to ‘Od-mchog Sprul-sku [Lce-ston Ngag-dbang Kun-bzang Rang-grol], Thang-’brog Sprul-sku [Kun-bzang Legs-grub], Bon-Lung Sprul-sku and so on, and the last time to [Pad-gling] Gsung-sprul Ngag-Dbang Kun-bzang Rdo-rje, Yon-po Sprul-sku, Khams-pa Sprul-sku, Rna-bo Gdung-Brgyud, Rong-pa Rdzogs-chen Sprul-sku and so forth.” (*Spyi don*, 127.1-3. Bracketed additions are culled from colophon of the *Rdo rje'i them skad*, 566.6-567.1.) The colophon to Dharmāśri’s manual adds a few more names to these, including Mdo-khams Go-’jo Bla-ma Rnam-Grol Bzang-po, Dpal Bla-ma Ye-shes, and Rdo-rje Mgon.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

Smin-grol-gling affected a major change in the Rnying-ma school. United as never before, the school enjoyed lavish support from the new Dalai Lama governement. During the lifetimes of Gter-bdag Gling-pa and Lo-chen Dharmaśri, nearly all the major Rnying-ma monasteries in central and eastern Tibet were founded.<sup>31</sup> The efforts of these two brothers changed the face of the Rnying-ma school forever, for the trends that they started would continue to unfold for the next two centuries. After Smin-grol-gling, the Rnying-ma-pa became increasingly focused on their monastic institutions and large public rituals.

Three years after Gter-bdag Gling-pa's death, tensions between the Dzungar Mongols and the Chinese erupted into war.<sup>32</sup> Late in the year of 1717, the Dzungar Mongols invaded central Tibet, bringing with them a terrible backlash of sectarian violence. Many within the ruling Dge-lugs school had long expressed displeasure at the rising fortunes of the Rnying-ma school, and the Dzungars gave vent to these rumblings with the zeal of the recently converted. The Dzungar soldiers executed Lochen Dharmaśri, as well as the new Smin-grol-gling throne-holder, Padma 'Gyur-med Rgya-mtsho, and Padma 'Phrin-las.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Smith 2001, 18-20.

<sup>32</sup> On the reasons behind the Dzungars' Tibetan expedition, see Petech 1972, 32-33.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

**Almost overnight, decades of work at the new Rnying-ma monasteries in central Tibet was undone, as libraries were burned and temples looted.**

**Yet none of this could stem the flood of these masters' wider project.**

**After the Dzungars' departure, both Rdo-rje Brag and Smin-grol-gling were restored with the help of Tibet's new leader, Pho-lha-gnas Bsod-nams Stobs-rgyas (1689-1747), and their former relations with the Dalai Lamas resumed.<sup>34</sup>**

**But even without Pho-lha-gnas's restoration of the physical place, Smin-grol-gling's rituals were assured of success. Long before the Dzungar invasion, Gter-bdag Gling-pa had guaranteed his new rituals' expansion by convening large assemblies of Rnying-ma lamas like the one in September of 1691. The ceremonies he transmitted at these gatherings formed the ritual backbone of the new Rnying-ma monasteries to the east. The arrival of Smin-grol-gling's rituals in eastern Tibet was crucial to the future identity of the Rnying-ma school, for it was there that they really took root, at the large new monasteries throughout Khams and A-mdö. These monasteries were the site of the next major development in the history of the *Sūtra*, and it is to them that we now turn.**

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<sup>34</sup> See Smith 2001, 19.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### **PRESERVATION**

When the Smin-grol-gling brothers started their reformulation of the Rnying-ma school that resulted in what we see today, they turned first to the *Sūtra*. Through rigorous research into the *Sūtra*'s history, they excavated the ancient foundations of their school and built their new edifice upon what was revealed. After their deaths, the effects of their project continued to unfold, as the Rnying-ma-pa masters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries carried their work forward in countless ways. But the foundations were soon covered over once more, and today the *Sūtra* is largely forgotten.

This chapter examines the last remaining traces of the *Sūtra* in today's Rnying-ma school, points at which the hidden structures still show through. During the nineteenth century, a new Rnying-ma-pa festival grew out of the work that had been done at Smin-grol-gling on the Spoken Teachings. This was an elaborate festival that even today continues to be observed annually at all of the "mother" monasteries of eastern Tibet.<sup>1</sup> At the festival's center stands the

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<sup>1</sup> There are six mother monasteries in the Rnying-ma school: two in central Tibet—Rdo-rje Brag and Smin-grol Gling—and four in Khams—Kah-thog, Dpal-yul, Rdzogs-chen and Zhechen.

**mandala of the Gathered Great Assembly, an incongruous fragment of the past jutting into the present.** The chapter ends with an account of the remarkable events that brought the great commentary on the *Sūtra*, the *Mun pa'i go cha*, out of extinction and into the libraries of western academy.

### **I. The *ris med* ('non-sectarian') homogenization of the Rnying-ma school**

The changes that have occurred in the Rnying-ma school since the eighteenth century must be understood against the background of the *ris med* movement that swept across eastern Tibet during this period. Under the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682), who first established the modern Tibetan state, numerous large Rnying-ma monasteries had been founded in the regions around Sde-dge. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Dge-lugs-pa sought to extend the new capital, Lhasa's influence in this region.<sup>2</sup> The resulting competition for power in and around Sde-dge led to an intensification of religious sectarianism, until finally, in 1798, a rebellion broke out, and the queen, who was a great supporter of the Rnying-ma-pa, was imprisoned and then exiled. The young prince grew up under the tight controls of his anti-Rnying-ma tutors, but never forgot his mother's fate. Eventually, having ensured the succession, he renounced his throne to become a monk. It was during these

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Except for Kah-thog, all of these were founded in the one hundred years between 1632 (Rdo-rje Brag) and 1735 (Zhe-chen), and even Kah-thog was "re-founded" in 1656.

<sup>2</sup> See Smith 2001, 332n.

years that the *ris-med* movement truly flowered.<sup>3</sup> The two central figures in the movement were 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul (1811-1899) and 'Jam-dbyangs Mkhyen-brtse'i Dbang-po (1820-1892), of the Bka'-brgyud and Sa-skya schools respectively. Despite their official affiliations, the two were masters of all schools, including the non-Buddhist religion of Bon, and both maintained particularly close ties to the Rnying-ma school. The former was responsible for compiling the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, an unprecedented sixty-three volume anthology of Rnying-ma *gter-ma*.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the Rnying-ma school focus increasingly on in its institutions. Large new monasteries flourished, and authoritative anthologies of the school's literature were compiled. These developments led to an unprecedented homogenization of the school. As observed in Chapter Five, the new monasteries adopted many of the same public rituals, and for the first time, standardized commentaries were composed for use in the new Rnying-ma monastic colleges. Gene Smith writes, for example, that, "during the eighteenth century . . . certain Rnying ma pa gurus perceived a need to formulate Rdzogs chen and, especially the *Snying thig* methodology into a system if these profound teachings were to benefit the scholastically oriented."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 229. The Rnying-ma-pa of the nineteenth century emphasized the differences between their own scholastic curriculum and that of the Dge-lugs-pa. While these differences were certainly real, the trend towards standardization was still apparent, and by the time 'Jam-mgon

At the same time, the literary collections, while nominally preserving the Rnying-ma ritual systems, had the unintended effect of pushing many into obscurity. Those systems that were excluded from the anthologies were largely forgotten, and even those that were included often fell into disuse because the empowerments, reading transmissions, and explanations (*dbang lung khrid gsum*) were transmitted as a set rather than individually.

This trend towards homogenization was based primarily at the monasteries around Sde-dge, specifically Kah-thog, Dpal-yul, Rdzogs-chen, Zhe-chen, and their nearby affiliates. Its roots, however, can be traced back to the seventeenth century and to the early years at Smin-grol-gling. The effects of Gter-bdag Gling-pa and Lo-chen Dharmáśri's project continued to gain momentum through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even the twentieth centuries, producing the Rnying-ma school as it is known today.

In order to effect their reformulation of the Rnying-ma school, the two brothers from Smin-grol-gling had turned first and foremost to the Spoken Teachings. Their efforts in this area continued to bear fruit through the nineteenth century, when Rdzogs-chen Rgyal-sras Gzhan-phan Mtha'-yas (b.1800) carved the first wood-block edition of the collected Spoken Teachings. Rdzogs-chen Rgyal-sras, himself a reincarnation of Gter-bdag Gling-pa, is said to

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Mi-pham Rgya-mtsho (1846-1912) composed his elegant commentaries, it was undeniable. On this figure, see *Ibid.*, 227-233 and John Pettit, *Mipham's Beacon of Certainty* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1999). For a more sophisticated analysis of the nineteenth century trend towards monasticism among the Rnying-ma-pa, see also Smith 2001, 23.

have based his ten-volume edition on earlier manuscripts brought to Khams from Smin-grol-gling.<sup>5</sup>

How these manuscripts made their way east is uncertain, but it seems likely that they accompanied the third Rdzogs-chen Rin-po-che, a contemporary of Rdzogs-chen Rgyal-sras from the same monastery. This figure, upon seeing that key aspects of the Spoken Teachings had not been properly sustained in Khams, is said to have traveled to Smin-grol-gling to study the teachings and return them to Rdzogs-chen. In his history of Dpal-yul monastery, Tshe-ring Blama 'Jam-dpal Zang-po writes that on Rdzogs-chen Rin-po-che's return:

He gave the transmissions at Dzogchen monastery. This was particularly important to the great masters of this time because the original source of the Nyingmapa tradition is the *kama* [Spoken Teachings] lineage. Later, Gyatrul Rinpoche invited Khenpo Dorje Rabten (Jamgon Khontrul's nephew) of Dzogchen monastery to come to the Palyul monastery to pass on all the newly acquired transmission. The Khenpo came and taught all aspects of *sadhana* practice in great depth, including chanting, musical instrumentation, lama dancing and so forth.<sup>6</sup>

After Smin-gro-gling's Spoken Teachings tradition had been established at Rdzogs-chen, it was then brought to Dpal-yul. The lama who oversaw this project was Rgya-sprul Padma Mdo-sngags Bstan-'dzin (1830-1891). Rgya-sprul was probably behind the new Dpal-yul edition of the Spoken Teachings that

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<sup>5</sup> This according to Sprul-sku Thub-bstan Dpal-bzang Rin-po-che (henceforth Thubzang Rinpoche), an unsurpassed scholar of the Spoken Teachings, in a series of interviews conducted at Dpal-yul monastery in May and June of 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Zangpo 1988, 96-7.

expanded upon Rdzogs-chen Rgyal-sras' collection and that appeared around this time.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to his work with the texts of the Spoken Teachings, Rgya-sprul Rinpoche started a new annual festival devoted solely to them. Dudjom Rinpoche writes that:

Inspired by both Jamgön Khyentse Wangpo and the great treasure-finder Chogyur Lingpa, Gyaltrul Pema Do-nga Tenzin instituted, at that very seat [of Dpal-yul], the annual attainment and worship of the twenty-seven great mandalas of the transmitted precepts [i.e. the Spoken Teachings] of the Ancient Translation School, which are all those of which the continuous empowerment and transmission exists at present.<sup>8</sup>

Rgya-sprul Rin-po-che created this festival on a grand scale, using the ritual arrangements he had received from Smin-grol-gling. A sense of the extent of this undertaking can be gained from the following description:

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<sup>7</sup> On this Dpal-yul xylographic edition in twenty volumes, see Dorje 1987, 167 n.175, where he cites an interview with Dudjom Rinpoche. According to him, the *Sung kama* edition (in fourteen volumes) that appears in the PL480 collection is in large part based on these two nineteenth century editions from Rdzogs-chen and Dpal-yul. The Dpal-yul edition was then supplemented by Dudjom Rinpoche in the 1980s to make the *Bka' ma rgyas pa* collection (in fifty-seven volumes) that is also found in the PL480. In the past two years, two further editions have come out, one in 110 volumes, another in 120. According to A-lags Gzan-dkar Rinpoche, both were compiled with the inspiration of Mkhan-po Mun-sel, alias Tshul-khrims Rgya-mtsho, (1916-1993). According to Thubzang Rinpoche, both editions also benefited greatly from the involvement of Kah-thog Mkhan-po 'Jam-dbyangs, a great scholar who only recently passed away in automobile accident. Both of these last two editions are currently held at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center.

<sup>8</sup> Dudjom 1991, 738.

Gyatral Rinpoche prepared all of the materials used for these *sadhana* mandalas from the very best substance, scepters, *Dhyani* Buddha crown ornaments, costumes for the wrathful lama dances and sixteen offering goddesses' dance, hats, cloaks, head ornaments, hand implements, bone ornaments, musical instruments and others. Even the king of Dege offered the crops from a large fertile field to help cover the expenses.<sup>9</sup>

Within a short time, the festival spread to other monasteries throughout Khams. The annual performance guaranteed that the Spoken Teachings would be practiced regularly throughout the Rnying-ma school. The annual performance of this new Spoken Teachings festival was the culmination of the project, begun three hundred years earlier at Smin-grol-gling, to reshape the Rnying-ma school into a unified institution by means of large-scale monastic rituals.

## II. The Spoken Teachings festival<sup>10</sup>

The Spoken Teachings "festival" (*sgrub mchod*)<sup>11</sup> that was started by Rgya-sprul Rin-po-che is the last remaining trace of the *Sūtra* in today's Rnying-ma school. It is now held annually at all the major Rnying-ma monasteries in Khams. The entire festival revolves around the central mandala of the Gathered Great

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<sup>9</sup> Zangpo 1988, 97.

<sup>10</sup> Appendix Six contains a brief description of this festival as it was performed on two recent occasions, first at Rnam-grol-gling monastery in June of 2000 and then at Dpal-yul monastery in June of 2001.

<sup>11</sup> At Zhe-chen in Kathmandu a "great accomplishment" (*sgrub chen*) is performed, but this requires the *sādhana* practice to continue unbroken throughout each night, so at most other places this is not done. A more literal translation of what I am calling a "festival" (*sgrub mchod*) is a "sādhana ritual." The term *sgrub mchog* is used by Dudjom Rinpoche when he refers to the festival in question his *Bdud 'joms rgyal rabs*, 410.

Assembly. At its crescendo, all the blessings from all the deities of the Spoken Teachings are ritually channeled into the body of the presiding lama, representing the primordial buddha at the center of the Gathered Great Assembly, and then redistributed to the assembled crowd. Watching this ritual being performed, one cannot help but see it as a defining moment for the Rnying-ma school.

Each of the observing monasteries holds the festival on the same date every year, though the date differs from one monastery to the next. At Dpal-yul it takes place from the fifth through the fifteenth day of the fourth Tibetan month, and it is performed simultaneously at Dpal-yul's branch monastery in exile, Rnam-grol-gling monastery in Bylakuppe, Karnataka in south India. At Zhe-chen in Khams it begins on the twenty-seventh day of the third month, running for seven days, while at Zhe-chen in Kathmandu it runs for ten days beginning on the tenth day of the first month every year. And at Kah-thog it is performed from the third to the fifteenth of the first month.<sup>12</sup>

In brief, the festival proceeds as follows: On the first day the place ritual (*sa chog*) and the root dance (*rtsa chams*) are performed. Both are intended to prepare the ritual space for the rest of the festival. The place ritual is common to

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<sup>12</sup> The dates for Zhe-chen and Kah-thog in Khams are based on oral communication from Kah-thog Rmong-rtsa Sprul-sku on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001. The dates for Zhe-chen in Kathmandu are from Mattieu Ricard, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2000. Other Rnying-ma monasteries throughout India also perform the festival, including the Smin-grol-gling branch in Dehra Dun and, in the ninth month, at Rimgul Sprul-sku's monastery, where only the Gathered Great Assembly mandala is accomplished because of limited resources.

all such festivals. The root dance derives from the *Māyajala* ritual system, the morning dances from the peaceful sections and the afternoon from the wrathful. Day two brings the drawing rituals (*'bri chog*) and the preparatory practices (*stag gon*) for the various mandalas. Under ideal circumstances, if the festival were performed in full, a mandala would be required for each of the thirteen principal deities of the Spoken Teachings.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, owing to the limited resources of most Tibetan monasteries nowadays, only some of the more important mandala are practiced. The Gathered Great Assembly mandala is always constructed in the monastery's main temple, and usually one or two other mandalas are found in every other temple. The mandalas are constructed using colored sands on day three. On day four, the offering cakes (*gtor ma*) are made for each mandala shrine, and in the evening the deities are called down into the mandalas. Then, first thing in the morning of day five, the recitations of the ritual manuals (*cho ga*) begin, with an assembly of monks assigned to each mandala. These continue for three days until, on day eight, the offering dances (*gar 'chams*) are performed. These are based on the *Sangs-rgyas Mnyam-'byor* system of the Spoken Teachings. On day nine come the wrathful dances (*khro bo 'chams*), in which the subjugation of Rudra is reenacted, complete with an effigy of the hapless demon. Like the root dances, these dances are derived from the *Māyajala* system.

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<sup>13</sup> A list of these can be found in Appendix Six.

Finally, on day ten an elaborate fire offering (*sbyin sreg*) is carried out in the morning, followed by the grand finale—the distribution of the blessings (*dngos grub len*). In fact, there are four fire offerings performed simultaneously, one for each of the tantric activities. The fire offering for pacification is drawn from the peaceful *Māyajala*, expansion from the Gathered Great Assembly, overpowering from Yang-dag, and wrath from the wrathful *Māyajala*.

After lunch, the blessing ceremony is performed. A particularly large number of the lay community attend this, and there is a festive atmosphere. It is clearly the culmination of the whole ten days. The ceremony takes place in the main hall where the Gathered Great Assembly maṇḍala still stands. In the middle of the hall are many long tables laden with mountains of food. The team that has been accomplishing the Gathered Great Assembly is seated as usual, and the rest of the hall is filled with other monks, nuns and laity. One at a time, each of the other halls with the other maṇḍalas empty out as each team proceeds to the main hall. Each team enters ceremoniously in single file, bearing incense and all the blessed objects from their maṇḍala shrine. They progress up the aisle to the *vajrācārya* seated on his throne. The *vajrācārya* is blessed with each object before the next team enters and does the same.

Without seeing this ceremony, one can only imagine the power of its build-up. We are in the central cathedral of Penor Rinpoche, the head of the Rnying-ma school. For ten days every sort of ritual has been performed, all on as

grand a scale as possible. Now the products of each temple's efforts are presented to the lead vajrācārya. This figure, who is the top *sprul-sku* living at the monastery, has over the last days established himself as the primordial buddha, Kun-tu-bzang-po/Che-mchog Heruka atop the nine-storied Gathered Great Assembly maṇḍala. Within this state, he receives the blessings one-by-one from each of the other deities of the Spoken Teachings. By the time all the blessings from the entire tradition have been channeled into this one figure, the atmosphere is pregnant with energy.

This is only broken gradually, as the monks and then the laity receive the blessings. The mountain of food is distributed to all assembled, and the people eventually disperse. After all the hubbub dies down, as evening falls, a brief butter lamp offering is performed in the same main hall, leaving a sense of peaceful closure. The next morning the maṇḍalas are disassembled, and the sands together with the sacrificial cakes are carried down to the river to be returned to the *nāgas* living there.

The annual Spoken Teachings festival is the only uniquely Rnying-ma event shared by all the school's major monasteries. It employs all the maṇḍalas of the Spoken Teachings in a ritual celebration and recognition of the school's shared origin, and in this way the festival helps to maintain the identity of the Rnying-ma school. The festival builds over its ten days to the crescendo, when all the groups come into the main hall and reunite in the central deity of the

Gathered Great Assembly. This is a return to the source, a reaffirmation of what binds the school together. It is a “family reunion.”<sup>14</sup>

In this way, the entire festival focuses on the Gathered Great Assembly mandala. Without knowing the history of the *Sūtra*, this obscure mandala’s presence at the center of such a significant festival might seem odd. This is, after all, a tradition that is no longer studied, a mandala that appears almost nowhere else in today’s Rnying-ma school. One rather might have expected, for example, the *Māyajala* mandala, which is still used and discussed in a number of other arenas. This apparent incongruity is compounded by the composition of the festival. For each of the festival’s rituals, from the dances to the fire offerings, the *Sūtra* is repeatedly passed over for the *Māyajala* or another of the better known ritual systems of the Spoken Teachings. If the *Sūtra* is so central to this festival, why are its ritual forms not preferable? The short answer is that the *Sūtra*’s own rituals have faded from use, and the other systems are simply more popular. Yet the *Sūtra*’s role remains central in the festival. Since its own rituals are ignored, it must be operating in some other way.

When the *Sūtra* arrived in Tibet at the turn of the tenth century, it provided Tibetans with a set of strategies for organizing the Buddhist teachings in their entirety. Other tantras arriving at that time focused on a specific deity, whether Vajrakīlāya, Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, or another, each with its own

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<sup>14</sup> Penor Rinpoche, at the *Sūtra* empowerment he granted in October 1999, referred to the *Sūtra* as “the mother of all the teachings.”

mandala and its own ritual system. The *Sūtra* stood out for its breadth of vision, integrating these other tantras into a comprehensive tantric world-view. It allowed Tibetans to step back from the closed systems of their personal deities and gain a new perspective. In this sense, the *Sūtra* operated through a different dimension from most other tantras. Rather than limiting itself to a single mandala, for example, it worked to construct a space that all the other mandalas could inhabit. (The nine levels of the Gathered Great Assembly mandala are a particularly clear representation of this further dimension.) The space that resulted was not an empty space, but an intricately structured palace with nine stories, three interpretive levels (in the *brgyud gsum*), and separate entrances for everyone.

The *Sūtra*'s early history is reflected in the Spoken Teachings festival. Just as the *Sūtra* once offered Tibetans a comprehensive tantric world-view, so today it provides and defines the ritual space for the festival. Since the *Sūtra*'s own rituals are often not even used, it is not present in ordinary ways. The other tantric systems are each effective for their particular purpose, whether preparing the site (Phur-pa), making offerings (Gsangs-rgyas Mnyam-sbyor), "liberating" Rudra (*Sgyu-'phrul khro-bo*), or overpowering obstacles (Yang-dag). But the Gathered Great Assembly works in the background. From its position in the main hall, it is the source from which all these activities emanate, it is the center around which they orbit, and at the festival's climax, it is the summit to which

they all return. In the festival, as in early Tibetan tantra, the *Sūtra* provides the structure within which the other systems operate.

### III. Reviving the *Mun pa'i go cha*

The final chapter in the history of the *Sūtra* began in 1919. On the fifth day of the ninth Tibetan month of that year, Kah-thog Si-tu Chos-kyi Rgya-mtsho (1880-1925) arrived at the Dge-lugs-pa monastery of Bkra-shis Lhun-po.<sup>15</sup> On one of his first evenings there, a strange thing happened.<sup>16</sup> Just as darkness was falling, an old woman came into the encampment of Kah-thog Si-tu's party just outside the monastic complex. She asked to see the lama, claiming that she had an important message for him. She entered his tent and was heard conversing with Kah-thog Si-tu in a foreign tongue that no one else could understand. Several times she pointed toward the monastery. Kah-thog Si-tu later told his followers that this woman was none other than Ekajati, the grand protectress of the Rnying-ma school, and that she had instructed him in a prophecy<sup>17</sup> to go first

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<sup>15</sup> His arrival is dated on the basis of his *Gnas bskor lam yig*, 418.

<sup>16</sup> The following story, except where otherwise noted, was provided to me orally three times during my research—first by Kunzang Lama of Rnam-grol-gling (in an interview conducted on October 21, 1999), then by Rig-'dzin Padma of Zhechen in Kathmandu (on September 8, 2000), and finally by Thubzang Rinpoche of Dpal-yul in Kham (on May 29, 2001). Except on those points noted, the three stories were generally in agreement.

<sup>17</sup> Mkhan-po Nus-ldan calls her advice a “prophecy” (*lung bstan*) in the colophon to his sub-commentary (*Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 56, 714): *gtsang bkra shis lhun por dpal ldan sngags kyi srung mas brda lung dang mthun par mdo 'grel mun pa'i go cha phyag tu son pa*. The use of this term indicates that this discovery was understood as a form of treasure revelation. The term, “prophecy,” was also used by Thubzang Rinpoche in telling this story.

thing next morning to the monastery's main library. Kah-thog Si-tu followed this advice, and the next day, as he entered the library and began to look around, he noticed a light shining upon a dusty old manuscript in the corner.<sup>18</sup> The lama turned to the librarian (*sku gnyer*) and asked him to fetch that book. To Kah-thog Si-tu's amazement, it was the long-lost *Sūtra* commentary by Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, the *Mun pa'i go cha*.

This work had been missing for two hundred years, probably ever since the libraries at Smin-grol-gling and Rdo-rje 'Brag were destroyed in 1718.<sup>19</sup> Before the Dzungar invasion, the first Pan-chen Lama, Blo-bzang Chos-kyi Rgyal-mtshan (1570-1662), a supporter of the Rnying-ma traditions, had received the *Sūtra* empowerment from Gter-bdag Gling-pa's father, Gsang-bdag 'Phrin-las Lhun-sgrub. At that time he also obtained a copy of the *Mun pa'i go cha* for his own studies.<sup>20</sup> Shortly after this, the Pan-chen Lama died and his library at Bkra-shis Lhun-po was sealed, with Gnubs-chen's commentary inside. There it stayed

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<sup>18</sup> Some who told me this story have this light entering through a high window to shine down upon the text, but most described it as a more mysterious light (possibly rainbow colored) shimmering around the text.

<sup>19</sup> It seems that Dharmāśri possessed a copy of the *Mun pa'i go cha*, as he cites it regularly in his *Spyi don*, though it is also possible he was citing it from another source.

<sup>20</sup> This part of the story was told to me by Rigs-'dzin Padma of Zhe-chen. He claimed that the Pan-chen Lama got Gnubs-chen's commentary from Smin-grol-gling, but this is impossible because he died in 1662, fourteen years before Smin-grol-gling was founded. Still, given that he received the empowerment from Smin-gling Cter-chen's father, he probably did obtain the text from this family.

for the following two and a half centuries, unrecognized by its Dge-lugs-pa caretakers, until it was discovered in 1919 by Kah-thog Si-tu.

Situ Rinpoche pleaded with the librarian to let him have the text. Only after considerable hesitation did the librarian allow it to be smuggled out, and only with the condition that Situ Rinpoche replace it with some other book wrapped up in the original cloth and shelved in the same place. Over the years that followed, Situ Rinpoche, always on the lookout for rare books, supplemented his discovery with several sets of early notes on the empowerment ritual that he found at Dwags-lha Sgam-po and other places.<sup>21</sup>

When Situ arrived back at Kah-thog, his discovery generated a flurry of activity throughout the thriving Rnying-ma monasteries of Khams. Under Mkhyen-brtse Chos-kyi Blo-gros's (1893-1959) sponsorship, new set of printing blocks were carved of the ancient commentary.<sup>22</sup> But in order to revive the *Sūtra*'s long-lost commentarial tradition, the Rnying-ma-pa lamas of Khams had to do more than simply publish the physical text of the *Mun pa'i go cha*. They were faced with the long hiatus in the reading (*lung*) and explanation (*khrid*) lineages that resulted from the text's long absence. In Tibetan Buddhism, every ritual system consists of three parts: the empowerment, the reading, and the explanation (*dbang lung khrid*). Each of these aspects has its own distinct lineage.

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<sup>21</sup> On these additional discoveries, see *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 56, 702.4-704.6, most of which is translated and discussed in Appendix Three.

<sup>22</sup> The fate of these blocks and the prints made from them is addressed below.

For a system to be fully vital, all three lineages must be intact, that is, there must be no gaps in the series of teacher-to-disciple transmissions traced from the original teaching to the present day. Furthermore, for each of a system's commentaries that is studied, though no further empowerments are required, a reading and an explanation transmission is required for it to be effective. Because the *Mun pa'i go cha* was lost for two hundred years, it could be neither read nor explained; both of these lineages were broken.

The solution to this problem came when another master from Kah-thog, the great meditator, Mkhan-po Ngag-chung (1879-1941), had a vision (*dag snang*) of Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, the author of the *Mun pa'i go cha* himself. In this vision, Gnubs-chen granted Mkhan-po Ngag-chung the complete lineages anew, bestowing on him both the reading and the explanation. Mkhan-po Ngag-chung added to his new transmissions by composing a meditation manual (*bsnyen yig*) for the practice of the generation phase (*bskyed rim*). From him, the teachings began to spread throughout Khams. The excitement that followed is clear from the colophon to this same meditation manual:

The master of the absolutely perfect teachings, the pervasive lord Si-tu Rin-po-che Bshad-sgrub Chos-kyi Rgya-mtsho widely propagated Dam-pa [Bde-gshegs] Rin-po-che's commentarial outline of the *Sūtra which Gathers*, as well as an annotated copy of the *Sūtra which Gathers* from the oral traditions of former generations. I, at this monastic center [of Kah-thog], obtained an authorization from him when he told me that because there were far too many versions of the root text of the *Sūtra* that is a medicine for learning and study, I should, with a commitment to

continuing the teachings on the *Sūtra which Gathers*, establish a single [version] in terms of its general meaning, one that accords with the majority of explanations of this tantra. Subsequently, the supreme emanation of Dpal-yul, [the third] Penor Rinpoche also encouraged me, requesting an explanation of the tantra because, in consideration of the study center of Dpal-yul [he thought] it vitally important to include [in the curriculum] an explanatory commentary to the *Sūtra Which Gathers*. Then later, Kah-thog Phyag-tsha Sprul-sku Rin-po-che urgently requested that I explain the daily practice for the *Sūtra which Gathers* and that I raise the point of the principal means for performing the propitiation during the cultivation of the generation phase. And then the supreme sprul-sku of Go-'jo, Bshad-sgrub Rgya-mtsho, wanted to establish a retreat center for [practicing] the two, *Sūtra* and *Māyajala*. Not wanting to refuse these many repeated exhortations, this ordinary follower of the great Kah-thog-pa Si-tu Chos-kyi Rgya-mtsho, [named] Rdo-rje Theg-mchog Rtsal or the Buddhist monk Tshul-khrims Rgya-mtsho, wrote this in his own place, the meditation hut of Ljon-pa Lung. By this [act] may the embers of the teachings of the triad of sūtra, illusion, and mind of the early translations be rekindled.<sup>23</sup>

One of the persons who received the newly revived lineages from Situ Rinpoche and Mkhan-po Ngag-chung was yet a third Kah-thog-pa, Mkhan-po Nus-ldan. At the request of Situ Rinpoche, the third Penor Rinpoche, and others, Nus-ldan began work on a massive new sub-commentary. He based his work

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<sup>23</sup> *Bsnyen yig legs bshad skyas reng dang po'i snang ba*, 490.4-491.5. *yongs rdzogs bstan pa'i mnga' bdag skyabs rje si tu rin po che bshad sgrub chos kyi rgya mtshos rje dam pa rin po che'i 'dus pa mdo'i sa bcad dka' 'grel dang/snga rabs pa'i gsung rgyun gyi 'dus pa mdo'i rgyud mchan 'grel bcas rgyas par stsals zhing/gdan sa 'dir 'dus pa mdo'i bshad rgyun 'dzugs bzhed kyis 'chad nyan la sman pa'i mdo'i rgyud rang gi rtsa ba ches mang bas spyi don gyi tshul gyis rgyud bshad mang nyung 'tshams pa zhig sgrub dgos par bka' yi gnang ba thob pa dang/slاد mar yang dpal yul mchog sprul pad nor rin po ches kyang dpal yul gyi bshad grwa'i thog 'dus pa mdo'i 'grel bshad zhig phog na shin tu gnad che bas rgyud bshad zhig stsals grub par bskul ma gnang ba dang/ phyis nas ka:thog phyag tsha sprul sku rin po ches 'dus pa mdo'i rgyun bshad zhig dang/bsnyen pa btang tshul gtso bo bskyed rim gyi bsgom pa'i gnad slong ba zhig ci nas gal che bar bskul ba dang/go 'jo mchog sprul bshad sgrub rgya mtshos mdo sgyu gnyis kyi mtshams grwa 'jog rgyu'i thugs bzhed kyis snga phyir lan mang du bskul ba mi ldog tsam du dpal ka: thog pa chen po si tu chos kyi rgya mtsho'i bka' 'bangs tha shal ba gnubs chen po'i byin rlabs snying la shar ba rdo rje theg mchog rtsal lam/shākya'i dge slong tshul khrims rgya mtshos rang gnas ljon pa lung gi bsam gtan gyi khang bur sug bris su bstar ba 'dis snga 'gyur mdo sgyu sems gsum gyi bstan pa'i me ro bslangs te.*

primarily upon the *Mun pa'i go cha*, supplemented by Dam-pa's *Bsdus don* and the other early notes collected by Situ Rinpoche. This was a huge undertaking that required some five years of research, and numerous obstacles are said to have impeded Nus-ldan in his writing. Many even began to think that the protectoress, Ekajati, must have been blocking the project because enough time had not yet passed since the *Mun pa'i go cha* had been discovered—the time had not "ripened" yet.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the third Penor Rinpoche, just before his death, sent Nus-ldan a last gift of encouragement, an ancient ritual dagger (*phur pa*) meant to symbolically cut through the obstructions Nus-ldan was experiencing. After this, it is said, the writing progressed easily and was soon complete.

It was now up to Nus-ldan to teach his massive four-volume sub-commentary.<sup>25</sup> To do so would require several months of uninterrupted time,<sup>26</sup> and no such opportunity arose until 1959. The young fourth Penor Rinpoche agreed to sponsor Nus-ldan's transmission of the entire commentary. Before beginning, Nus-ldan set strict requirements concerning where and to whom he would teach. At the top of a mountain over-looking Dpal-yul monastery, a hermitage was built just for the occasion, and it was named the "temple of

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<sup>24</sup> This interpretation was suggested to me by Kunzang Lama of Rnam-grol-gling.

<sup>25</sup> The following story of Nus-ldan's teaching is based primarily on a series of interviews conducted with Thubzang Rinpoche in May, 2001. I heard the story several other times, but only Thubzang Rinpoche's was first hand.

<sup>26</sup> Whenever the *Sūtra* is transmitted, certain rituals are required in the morning and the evening of each day. These are described in the '*Chad thabs zin bris nyung ngu rnam gsal*' by 'Jam-dbyangs Chos-kyi Blo-gros.

expanding merit” (*Dge 'phel chos sgang*). Only five students would be allowed: Penor Rinpoche, Thubzang Rinpoche, Zhe-chen Gang-shar, Dpal-yul Mkhan-po Mgon-sgrub,<sup>27</sup> and Dpal-yul Rdzong-nang Rin-po-che ‘Jam-dpal Blo-gros (1930-1987).<sup>28</sup> The empowerment was not granted at this time since all five students had already received it several times.<sup>29</sup> The teaching lasted four months in all.

In the colophon to his sub-commentary, Mkhan-po Nus-ldan describes the mountain above Dpal-yul where he taught, as “the second forested site of Malaya.”<sup>30</sup> In this way he was likening his revival of the commentarial tradition to Vajrapāṇi’s original teaching atop Mt. Malaya in Śri Lanka. In the same vein, his requirement that only five students join him mirrored the five excellent ones in the Malaya myth. Thubzang Rinpoche confirms that this was indeed a conscious effort on Mkhan-po Nus-ldan’s part to establish a connection (*rten 'brel*) between the two events. In this reenactment, Nus-ldan was Vajrapāṇi and Penor Rinpoche was the Lord of Lanka. Just as at the end of the original teaching

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<sup>27</sup> This was a major student of Nus-ldan’s and a teacher to both Penor Rinpoche and Thubzang Rinpoche. He left Tibet in the same party with Penor Rinpoche but was shot dead en route by the Chinese.

<sup>28</sup> Also a teacher to Penor Rinpoche.

<sup>29</sup> Thubzang Rinpoche had received it in the Kah-thog tradition (using the *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun* empowerment manual) twice from the Kah-thog Mkhan-po Sbyor-ldan. The latter figure also gave the same empowerment to Nus-ldan as well as Penor Rinpoche and Rdzong-nang Rin-poche. Thubzang Rinpoche received it in the Smin-gling tradition from Penor Rinpoche. He also received the *lung* for the Rdo-rje ‘Brag and Dmyal-ba empowerment manuals from Mkhan-po ‘Jams-dbyangs of Kah-thog, who himself probably received them from Mkhan-po Sbyor-ldan. Penor Rinpoche has also received the empowerment in the Rdo-rje ‘Brag tradition, though I have not determined from whom.

<sup>30</sup> *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 56, 713.5. *ma la ya yi nags khrod gnyis pa.*

the Lord of Lanka puts Vajrapāṇi's words into writing with lapis ink upon gold, at the end of the four months Nus-Idan presented Penor Rinpoche with his own hand-written manuscript of the sub-commentary. In establishing these connections with the original teaching myth, Nus-Idan was tapping into the power of the *Sūtra*'s mythic teaching atop Mt. Malaya, bridging the gap of centuries between himself and Vajrapāṇi's teaching by reenacting the myth.

Not long after he transmitted his opus on the *Sūtra* tradition, Nus-Idan died, and Penor Rinpoche soon fled Khams for south India.<sup>31</sup> Of the five students who received the commentary, only the first two are alive today. During his time in exile, Penor Rinpoche has granted the empowerment three times, most recently in October, 1999. All three times were in the Smin-gling tradition. He has given the reading transmission for Nus-Idan's sub-commentary (which contains within it the entire root text) once, at the request of Ldil-mgo Mkhyen-brtse Rin-po-che. He has never given the explanation (*khrid*).

Mkhan-po Nus-Idan's teaching in eastern Tibet was the last in a series of efforts to revive the waning *Sūtra* tradition. While the responses to the *Sūtra*'s perceived decline were various, they all shared a single strategy; in each case, an attempt was made to return to the source of the *Sūtra*'s vitality, to reach back to

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<sup>31</sup> The blocks for Nus-Idan's commentary are said to have been hidden at Rmugs-sangs monastery by the fourth Karma Sku-chen, this according to Thubzang Rinpoche, who showed me a print made from these same blocks. The new version found in Dudjom Rinpoche's *Bka' ma rgyas pa* collection fills four volumes, but this older edition from the Rmugs-sangs blocks is only two volumes. I have not seen these older Nus-Idan blocks myself.

its origin. Rgya-sprul Rin-po-che, in his Spoken Teachings festival, returned the Rnying-ma pantheon home to the mandala of the Gathered Great Assembly; Mkhan-po Ngag-chung revived the lineage through a visionary encounter with Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes; and Mkhan-po Nus-l丹 reenacted the myth of the Vajrapāṇi's original teaching atop Mt. Malaya. Each attempt hearkened back to the *Sūtra*'s origins. Each in some way tried to revive the tradition by tapping into the power that was believed to lie at its source.

In the case of the Spoken Teachings festival, it was observed that the *Sūtra*'s organizing role from behind the scenes mirrored its historical role in late ninth century Tibet, when it offered Tibetans an elaborate organizational system for all of tantra.

#### IV. Into exile

When Penor Rinpoche fled Tibet, he was sure to carry with him his treasured copy of Nus-l丹's sub-commentary, written in the author's own hand. What he did leave behind, however, was the only recently rediscovered *Mun pa'i go cha*, and once more, the work was lost.<sup>32</sup> Twenty years later, as Dudjom Rinpoche turned to the task of compiling his new and expanded Spoken Teaching collection (*Bka' ma rgyas pa*), he began to search for a copy of Gnubs-chen's

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<sup>32</sup> Rinpoche's decision certainly made sense given that Nus-lDan's commentary incorporates word-for-word the entirety of the *Sūtra* itself and the *Mun pa'i go cha*. The trouble is that, while Nus-lDan marked every word from the root text, it is impossible to tell what of the commentary are his own words and what are Gnubs-chen's.

famous commentary. Several times he sent people to look in Tibet, but they always returned empty-handed. He knew that on the basis of the manuscript found by at Bkra-shis Lhun-po, a new set of printing blocks had been carved. Now he learned that, unfortunately, only a few prints had been made before the Chinese invasion, during which the blocks were apparently destroyed. Finally, word arrived of a single copy that had survived the Chinese desecrations, one that had been secreted away by Tshe-ring Bla-ma of Dpal-yul monastery.<sup>33</sup> In 1983 Dudjom Rinpoche sent Kunzang Lama, himself formerly from Dpal-yul, to fetch the text from Khams.<sup>34</sup>

Kunzang Lama obtained the book, along with about 100 kg of additional missing works, and assembled them in Lhasa. There, he made contact with a group of nineteen Tibetans who were planning to make the illegal trek across the Himalaya to Nepal. He arranged to pay for their transportation to the border and to have them met on the Nepalese side by an associate who would then guide them down into Kathmandu. In return they would each carry a volume or two of the rare books.

One morning in early December, they all climbed aboard a truck driven by two sympathetic drivers from Shinjiang Province, and began the drive to Pu-

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<sup>33</sup> Tshe-ring Bla-ma is the author of a famous history of Dpal-yul, an English translation of which has been published under the title, *A Garland of Immortal Wish-Fulfilling Trees* (cited in this study as Zangpo 1988).

<sup>34</sup> The following story comes from two interviews with Kunzang Lama (conducted October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1999 and June 13, 2000). It was confirmed by Gene Smith, who was working with Dudjom Rinpoche at that time through the Library of Congress on saving Tibetan rare books.

hrang on the Nepalese border. As they came to each new area, the drivers changed the license plates so as not to draw attention to the truck. This trick, combined with their good mechanical abilities, got them all safely to Pu-hrang in thirteen days.

While there, the twenty Tibetans—the nineteen escapees plus Kunzang Lama—pretended to be pilgrims en route to the holy Mt. Kailash. A few nights later, at 2:30 a.m. they were dropped at the side of the road to start the next leg of the journey. They walked through the night, and as morning came, they saw that they were still within sight of a Chinese checkpost. Thankfully, it must have been too far across the long snowy plain, for the Chinese did not come out to chase them, and the party hurried on. At last, at around four o'clock the following afternoon, they reached the top of Tingkar Pass, with an altitude of about 18,600 feet. At every kilometer along the border, the Chinese had set up concrete blocks saying "Nepal-China," and even here, at the top of this pass, one stood.

Also here were piled sticks marking the local spirit's abode, where others had burnt incense and hung offering flags. The group was cold and exhausted, so they resigned themselves to break propriety and use the sticks to build a fire for tea. After this short rest, they continued until dark. One old monk had lagged behind all day, so they found a dry cave to wait for him to catch up. Awakening to their first morning in Nepal, they went down into the village of

Tingkar, where Kunzang Lama's Nepalese friend, Sonam Dorje, had been waiting for ten days. They all rested for a day before Kunzang Lama started back, alone, to Lhasa so as to fly out legitimately on his visa. He left the group under the care of his friend.

After Kun-bzang left, however, a misunderstanding over money took place between the Tibetans and Sonam Dorje. Each Tibetan was supposed to pay Sonam three hundred rupees, but they had assumed this would be Nepalese rupees, and Sonam Dorje was insisting on Indian currency, worth about twice the Nepalese currency. (Kunzang Lama notes that Sonam was correct that this had indeed been the agreement.) Tempers flared, and Sonam Dorje left them in a huff. Now without a guide, the Tibetans started their way towards Kathmandu. They did not make it far before they were stopped by a Nepalese border patrol who decided to force them back over the border. Back through Tingkar village and on up toward the border the Tibetans were led, becoming increasingly agitated over their upcoming fate. One old man in the group had already suffered considerably at the hands of the Chinese army, and he was growing especially scared. His sister tried to calm him down, but he finally panicked. In a fit of terror, he threw down his bags and flung himself into a freezing river, drowning almost immediately. The text he had been carrying was the *Mun pa'i go cha*.

The sister took the text with her, and they continued up the pass. But near the top the Nepalese police suddenly stopped. They told the Tibetans to go on and return to their own country, turned around, and went back down into Nepal. The Tibetans stood there for a while, wondering what to do. Eventually they decided to ignore the police and enter Nepal once more. Back down in the village, the sister left her brother's heavy volumes in the care of the village chief, one Patam Singh, and the group made their way down to Kathmandu, this time without trouble.

All the books had made it except for the *Sūtra* commentary. The next year, Kunzang Lama paid Sonam Dorje another 3,000 rupees to return to Tingkar village for the *Mun pa'i go cha*. The trip was attempted but failed. The season was over, and they had to wait yet another year to get up to the village. Finally, in 1985 now, Kunzang Lama himself decided to go, along with Sonam Dorje and a monk. They started from Delhi, travelling through Uttar Pradesh to Pitharagal on the Nepal border, where there was a customs checkpoint but no immigration, then onwards to Tingkar. After paying still more money to the "self-sacrificing" guardian of the text, Patam Singh, they retrieved their prize at last. During the two year interim, the chieftain had offered it to the local (Dge-lugs-pa) lama. Fortunately, the lama had not like it and returned it to Patam Singh. The three returned triumphant to Delhi, to present the text to Dudjom Rinpoche.<sup>35</sup> Today

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<sup>35</sup> A final obstacle arose when they found that a single page had somehow been left in Khams, but Kunzang Lama was easily able to retrieve it on his next trip to Tibet.

the elusive *Mun pa'i go cha* can be found in volumes fifty and fifty-one of the *Bka' ma rgyas pa* collection.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The Spoken Teachings provide the structure and the *gter-ma* the ornaments.  
(*bka' ma khob 'bubs gter ma zur rgyan*)

—a well-known Rnying-ma-pa saying

The Rnying-ma school as we know it today is united by an unconscious obedience to the *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions*. Today's Rnying-ma-pa may follow any of a vast array of *gter-ma* ritual systems, but they all share one system in common: the Spoken Teachings. Of the Spoken Teachings' three principal works (*mdo sgyu sems gsum*), the *Sūtra* is the least known, yet it has wielded the greatest influence over the structure of the Spoken Teachings, and thereby also of the Rnying-ma school. Many of the structures fundamental to the identity and self-understanding of the Rnying-ma school derive directly from the *Sūtra*. Today, when the Rnying-ma school presents itself, whether ritually through the Spoken Teachings festival, mythically through the Mt. Malaya myth, ontologically through the three transmissions (*brgyud gsum*), or doctrinally through the nine vehicles, it is always in terms received from the *Sūtra*. Yet the

*Sūtra*'s foundational role remains unknown. Despite its centrality, the *Sūtra* today has been all but forgotten, its pervasive role occluded.

In fact, the *Sūtra*'s incongruous fate was due in large part to the unique nature of its own project. Its demise as a system that was commonly taught and practiced was an inevitable consequence of its very success. Its original purpose was to provide tenth century Tibetans with a comprehensive set of interwoven strategies for organizing tantra. Once this structure had been adopted as the dominant paradigm, the unwieldy *Sūtra* had little more to offer. There were other more succinct systems for any number of specific practices. Before long, the *Sūtra*'s commentaries were no longer read and its rituals no longer performed.

Thus, if a system's vitality is judged by whether its rituals are being practiced and its doctrines taught, the *Sūtra* is largely extinct. (This perception was what spurred the recent efforts, observed in Chapter Six, to revive the waning tradition in eastern Tibet.) And yet in other, less visible ways its influence continues as strongly as ever.

Chapter Six demonstrated how in the Spoken Teachings festival the *Sūtra* operates in the background, from where organizes the ritual proceedings; that its own rituals are not used is irrelevant to its larger purpose. This ritual function, it was suggested, parallels the *Sūtra*'s role in early Tibet, when it provided its structure for organizing all the other tantric ritual systems. Now this

correspondence between the *Sūtra*'s role in the Spoken Teachings festival and its historical function in early Tibet suggests a further parallel, regarding the *Sūtra*'s incongruous place in the today's Rnying-ma school: Could the *Sūtra*'s invisibility in today's Rnying-ma school be related to its behind-the-scenes function in the Spoken Teachings festival?

In the festival, the *Sūtra*'s concealment is intrinsic to its role as the principal structuring force. Today, the *Sūtra*'s is no longer read or practiced as a vital ritual system, but it operates as strongly as ever by defining the structures through which the Rnying-ma-pa understand their own school. Only when this distinction is made—that the *Sūtra* continues to function through its pervasive structures and not through its particular rituals or texts—can the *Sūtra*'s fate be fully comprehended.

In Chapter Three, several possible explanations were offered as to why after the thirteenth century the *Sūtra* began to slip into disuse—the rise of *gter-ma*, the continuing innovations within *mahāyoga* and *atiyoga*, the lack of a Sanskrit original, and so forth. While these explanations all contribute to our understanding, they miss a crucial point, and they do so because they assume the *Sūtra* operates on the same level as other tantric systems. In the festival and in early Tibet, the *Sūtra* worked through a different dimension than that of most other tantras. It was more concerned to organize all the other tantras than to compete on their level. Similarly, the *Sūtra* today functions through its

structures, structures that have come to pervade the entire Rnying-ma school, and this is precisely why it has slipped into disuse according to the normative criteria used to judge a system's vitality.

The *Sūtra*'s influence is rarely apparent because its role is so diffuse. Its structures are so pervasive that those working within them can rarely gain a perspective on them; to try to do so would be like the eye looking for itself, to use a common Rnying-ma-pa metaphor. To the eye of the Rnying-ma-pa, the *Sūtra*'s organizational strategies have become so ubiquitous, repeated in so many other places throughout the tradition, that for them to have a single origin in the *Sūtra* is no longer conceivable. The *Sūtra* is thus an invisible origin, the source for the structures within which all the other, more traditionally "vital," ritual systems operate.

Today's Spoken Teachings festival is one of the last visible traces of the *Sūtra*'s influence. Through this festival, the *Sūtra* continues to be worshipped, though even there as a mere icon; almost none of the rituals that make up the festival are the *Sūtra*'s, and almost none of the festival's participants know about the historical importance of the *Sūtra*, nor even that the Gathered Great Assembly mandala derives from it. Yet the *Sūtra*, as the focus of the festival, is the *raison d'être* for these rituals' performance. The *Sūtra*'s ongoing iconic presence in this one place is an aporia, a surprising clue that the *Sūtra*'s role continues even today, on some unseen dimension, within the Rnying-ma school.

Thus by turning to the Spoken Teachings, and to the *Sūtra* in particular, a new Rnying-ma school appears to the eye, one that otherwise remains hidden.

Because genealogy draws attention to the accidents and the discontinuities of history, it is particularly well-suited for religious systems, like the *Sūtra*, that have disappeared. The genealogy that has been woven in these pages suggests several alternatives to the standard formulations of the Rnying-ma school. By “shortening our vision to those things nearest to us,” we have revealed the previously overlooked continuity of the *Sūtra* in today’s Rnying-ma school. The *Sūtra*, which normally appears to be on the verge of extinction, can now be seen continuing through the perpetuation of its structures.

In this way, the genealogical approach taken in these pages has revealed continuities where previously none were perceived. These normally overlooked continuities are as crucial for making sense of the *Sūtra*’s position within today’s Rnying-ma school as they are for understanding this present study’s own position within the field of Tibetan Studies. The standard presentations of the Rnying-ma school, Tibetan and western alike, have often ignored its “clerical” elements—its elaborate organizational structures, hierarchies, large monastic institutions, and rigorous scholarship. Yet when the *Sūtra* is examined, these elements are revealed as powerful forces beneath the school’s “shamanic” exterior. The *Sūtra* offers an alternative history of the school, one that has been

consistently present, challenging the normative view, since its inception. Every time the *Sūtra* resurfaces into the literature of a given period, it serves to reestablish the school's conservative, institutional, hierarchical, and scholarly structures.

At the same time, such continuities should not be over-emphasized, for they do not account for the vast number of loose ends protruding from within the *Sūtra*'s history. Each chapter in this dissertation sketches the *Sūtra* in a given historical setting, being used for a particular purpose. These chapters do not constitute one single story, but a series of discontinuous ones. Many of the strands picked up in one chapter are dropped in the next, others may continue for a couple of chapters and then disappear, but any storyline that runs from beginning to end, it should be recognized, is a weaving of discontinuous threads. Any appearance of continuity is only so from a distance; if one looks close enough, one can see the hand of the weaver. In this way, the discontinuities revealed in these pages can also help to remind us of our own assumptions. The *Sūtra* is not really a single text that, for example, can serve as a stable object for the analytical tools of our Religious Studies; the *Sūtra* as "tantra" is historically discontinuous from the *Sūtra* as "ritual" or as "lineage." Any aspect of the *Sūtra* can only be understood within specific historical settings that, in turn, result in radical changes to the *Sūtra* itself.

Thus the genealogical study provided in these pages has revealed continuities where there were discontinuities and discontinuities where there were continuities. In both cases, some of our own presuppositions are simultaneously highlighted. But surely many more assumptions remain hidden, too close to our eye for detection. Perhaps, then, we must wait to be able to see the conclusions of this dissertation. Only when it has become another chapter in its own story will we be able to see clearly how it has manipulated the *Sūtra* once more towards some new end.

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX ONE: ORIGINS OF THE SŪTRA

The usual place to begin an exploration of a text's origin is the colophon. In the *Sūtra*'s we read that, "In the market-place of Bru-sha, the Indian scholar, Dharmabodhi, and the great master of the tradition, Dhanarakṣita, and the translator, Che Btsan-skyes (who requested it), translated and edited [the *Sūtra*] from Burushaski into Tibetan."<sup>1</sup> What follows is an attempt to piece together the circumstances surrounding this event.

In order to determine a date for this translation project, we should begin with a better-known figure. The famous Tibetan exegete, Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes studied directly under the translator, Che Btsan-skyes, and composed the most influential commentary on the *Sūtra*, the *Mun pa'i go cha*. Dudjom Rinpoche suggests that Gnubs-chen, on the advice of his Nepalese teacher, Vasudhara, went to meet Che Btsan-skyes around 885 C.E. Gnubs-chen

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<sup>1</sup> *Mdo*, 617.3-4. *Rgya gar gyi mkhan po dha rma bo dhi dang/ ring lugs chen po da na rakṣi ta dang/ Zhu chen gyi lo tsa che btsan skye kyis/ 'bru sha'i yi ge las 'bru sha'i yul gyi khrom du bsgyur cing gtan la phab pa.*

would have been about forty-one years old at that time.<sup>2</sup> The ultimate source for Dudjom's 885 date is uncertain, but roughly the same time is arrived at through another means: We can say with some confidence that Gnubs-chen composed his *Mun pa'i go cha* some years before his other renowned work, the *Bsam gtan mig sgron*. This is stated in his biography and is corroborated by the regular citations of the *Sūtra* (under the alternate title of *Rnal 'byor sgrub pa'i lung*) throughout his *Bsam gtan mig sgron* (where it is, in fact, cited more than any other work). According to his biography,<sup>3</sup> Gnubs-chen composed his *Bsam gtan mig sgron* in order to purify the bad karma he accumulated in the second revolt (*khengs log*), dated by Vitali at 904.<sup>4</sup> Thus we can assume that Gnubs-chen was focusing his attentions on the *Sūtra* during the period just prior to the turn of the tenth century, which makes the *Sūtra*'s translation date of 885, or slightly earlier, look quite accurate.

Today the *Sūtra* exists only in its Tibetan translation. The *Sūtra*'s claim to be translated from the obscure language of Burushaski (Tib. *Bru sha skad*) rather

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<sup>2</sup> See Dudjom 1991, 608, where he says that Vasudhara suggested to Gnubs-chen, during a visit in a wood snake year (885), that he should go meet Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad. Dudjom Rinpoche's version that has Gnubs-chen meeting Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad rather than Che Btsan-skyes seems unlikely for reasons that will become clear below. Dudjom Rinpoche guesses that Gnubs-chen was fifty-four years old at this time, but this should be refigured as forty-one in light of Vitali's more felicitous dating of Gnubs-chen's birth—844 (wood rat year) instead of Dudjom's 832 (water rat year). It is unclear where Dudjom Rinpoche gets his water year from since most sources say it was a "wood" year. On Gnubs-chen's dates, see Vitali 1996, 546–7.

<sup>3</sup> *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 169.6.

<sup>4</sup> Vitali 1996, 547.

than from Sanskrit (or a Sanskritic language) is a remarkable one. Laufer has identified Bru-sha as Little P'u-lu in Chinese, Belur in Arabic, or the country of Buruso/Gilgit,<sup>5</sup> and Uray has added his approval, noting that these claims are borne out by Chinese sources.<sup>6</sup> Burushaski has been of some interest to modern linguists because it is completely distinct from the other languages in the region. It appears to have been one of the most widespread languages in the region.<sup>7</sup> Recent scholarship has exhibited some confusion about the precise location of Bru-sha. This may be because the Burushaski people were forced to move at some point from their original home into the much smaller area in which they are to be found today (the Hunza Valley).<sup>8</sup> Our knowledge of these people in their earlier, Buddhist, days is hindered by their later conversion to Islam, as well as a paucity of documents dating from the period. It has been observed that the Burushaski people continue to sing a version of the Ge-sar epic in Burushaski.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise, the only major study of Burushaski writings seems to be a three-volume study from 1935 by D. Lorimer.<sup>10</sup> The first volume contains some

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<sup>5</sup> Laufer 1908, 2-4. In the same article (*Ibid.*, 6-8), Laufer studies the *Sūtra*'s title as it is presented in Bru-sha and in Sanskrit. Little P'u-lu should be distinguished from Great P'u-lu, which is equivalent to Baltistan. On the early history of these two places, see also Petech 1977, 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Uray 1979, 283.

<sup>7</sup> Dani 1996, Vol. 4, 222.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 223. The same book suggests that because of their unique origins, "Today the Burushaski people are much more open-minded than most in that region." [Check Lorimer on when this move occurred.]

<sup>9</sup> Martin 1995, 5.

translations of Burushaski folktales, while the second and third are a grammar and a dictionary respectively.

In Tibetan sources, the earliest known mention of Bru-sha appears in the Dunhuang *Royal Annals*, which describes a Tibetan military expedition to the region. Uray dates this expedition to 737/8 A.D.<sup>11</sup> It was a successful campaign, which shifted control of the area from China to Tibet. In 740 Tibetan sovereignty was secured through marriage. Tibet maintained control of the area for about ten years, until, after several attempts, the Chinese finally dislodged them. Even so, Tibetans seem, “to have held on to some of their positions in the Pamirs until later in the [ninth] century,”<sup>12</sup> when the Tibetan empire collapsed. This continuing Tibetan presence is further indicated by a description in Bsod-nams Rtse-mo’s *Chos la ‘jug pa’i sgo* of Bru-sha’s role in the development of the Buddhist tradition of western Tibet (*Stod kyi chos*), a role that culminated in an important Buddhist council that met in the year 836.<sup>13</sup>

This council would have taken place just five years before the assassination of the Tibetan king, Glang Dar-ma, an event that marked the beginning of the “dark period,” a time of economic collapse in Tibet, and throughout much of

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<sup>10</sup> According to Gerard Fussman (“Silk Highways and Mountain Paths: Gilgit and the Internationalization of Buddhism”, an unpublished paper delivered at Harvard in November, 2000), Lorimer was the first western scholar to note the existence of Burushaski while working as a British agent in the region in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lorimer published his three volume study of the language between 1935-8.

<sup>11</sup> Uray 1979, 282. See also Beckwith 1987, 116.

<sup>12</sup> Beckwith 1987, 163.

<sup>13</sup> See Vitali 1996, 166.

Asia for that matter. Buddhist monasteries in Tibet were forcibly closed down as the imperial government fragmented. Given the the *Sūtra*'s hypothetical translation date (arrived at above), it is particularly crucial for us to see how Buddhism fared in Bru-sha during these "dark" years.

On the basis of early Bon-po materials, Dan Martin has confirmed that in fact Buddhism continued to thrive:

In these areas [to the west of western Tibet] there were indeed strong local traditions of Buddhism, some of them lasting well beyond the Islamic conquests of the early ninth century, and it was in approximately the late ninth or early tenth century that, according to Bon histories, the Bru clan migrated from the areas of Little Balur (Bru-sha) and Tukharistan (Thogar) to western Tibet and Gtsang province. The Bru clan was one of four clans that gathered around the teachings of Gshen-chen Klu-dga' in the early eleventh century, and one of the six most important families of the Bon religion.<sup>14</sup>

Thus it seems that the region continued to be a supportive environment for Buddhists through the dark period, and we are given no reason to doubt that the *Sūtra* might have originated there. Buddhism's stability in the region may even explain why Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes might have been attracted to the area in the first place.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Martin 1995, 58.

<sup>15</sup> Two centuries after the dark period, Kah-thog Dam-pa Bde-gshegs (in his *Dka' 'grel*, 209) would claim that the *Sūtra* was translated in Bru-sha precisely because it was such a supportive environment at a time of great difficulties for Buddhism in central Tibet. While this claim may be possible, there is no evidence to support it in any earlier sources. For this reason, it could well be simply a result of the retrospective construction of the "dark period" as such.

However, we must consider the possibility the *Sūtra* may have been composed in Tibetan and that no Burushaski original ever really existed. Fortunately, there is some evidence that was not the case, at least for a part of the work.<sup>16</sup>

In his cursory study of the *Sūtra*'s Rudra-taming myth, Stein has written that, "La traduction tibétaine est malhabile, souvent confuse," made worse by Burushaski words left untranslated.<sup>17</sup> There are possible explanations for why these words were not translated. In the same article, Stein points out that a similar practice can be seen in early Bon-po works, in which untranslated Zhang-zhung terms commonly appear. He notes that both Bru-sha and Shang-shung are sacred languages for the Bon-po, implying that the words may have been retained to add a certain exotic legitimacy to the *Sūtra*. An alternative explanation is that the translators—and Che Btsan-skyes in particular—might have "gone native," so much so that they no longer noticed some Burushaski terms as non-Tibetan. While this explanation might seem outlandish, the terms

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<sup>16</sup> When Mkhan-po Nus-ldan, in his 20<sup>th</sup> century commentary on the *Sūtra*, dealt with the colophon cited at the opening of this present appendix, he divided it, so that first Dharmabodhi and Che Btsan-skyes translated the *Sūtra* from Sanskrit into Burushaski, and then Dhanarakṣita and Che Btsan-skyes translated it from Burushaski into Tibetan. It seems clear that a need for a Sanskrit original motivated this extrapolation, though in doing so Nus-ldan was most likely following the lead of earlier commentators on this translation story. (As Nus-ldan points out in his own colophon, almost everything in his commentary was culled from earlier sources.)

<sup>17</sup> Stein 1972, 502.

left untranslated seem to be completely arbitrary, and Stein's theory does not explain why untranslated Burushaski is not found throughout the *Sūtra*.<sup>18</sup>

Stein did not notice that these untranslated Burushaski terms only appear in certain places. The *Sūtra* has seventy-five chapters, twelve of which (chs. 20-31) are devoted to the core myth of the buddhas taming of Rudra. These chapters are peppered with untranslated Burushaski, but outside of this myth not a single Burushaski word is to be found.

This could be interpreted in two ways: It could be that the Rudra myth was all that the translators completed before they were forced to conclude their marketplace translations. The rest of the *Sūtra* would have been translated outside of Bru-sha, where the Burushaski language was not a lingua franca or where they relied upon a Sanskrit version. This would be consistent with the tradition's own claims of the existence of a Sanskrit original. Unfortunately, there are several problems with this idealistic picture: First, it raises the question of why they would have passed over the first nineteen chapters to begin their translation with the Rudra myth in the Bru-sha marketplace. Second, even if they had moved elsewhere, one would expect that at least the occasional Burushaski word would still appear. Third, no claim has ever been made that any part of the *Sūtra* was translated directly from Sanskrit, and had such a claim been possible to make, it probably would have been.

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<sup>18</sup> The latter was the explanation suggested by Mkhan-po Padma Shes-rab.

A second possible conclusion is that the Rudra myth represents the core of the *Sūtra*, not just thematically but compositionally. That is to say, first the Rudra myth was translated from Burushaski, and then the rest of the *Sūtra* was constructed around this core. The question, then, is how much of the Rudra myth existed in Burushaski and how much was composed by the translators? I see no reason not to accept that much of it existed in some form in Burushaski. That at least some part was translated from Burushaski would explain why it was claimed that the text as a whole was translated from Burushaski, an anomalous and arbitrary claim otherwise.

One problem with this hypothesis still needs to be addressed: If this myth indeed represents an earlier textual stratum that was translated from Burushaski, why do we find within it so many references to the doctrinal and ritual theories discussed elsewhere in the *Sūtra*, theories that are supposed to have been added only later to the Burushaski myth? We must conclude that the myth was reworked to conform to the tantric system being developed in the rest of the text. This prompts a still closer examination of exactly where the untranslated Burushaski appears. And indeed, what we find is that after chapter twenty-seven, the Burushaski stops. This is not surprising given that the subsequent chapters from twenty-eight through thirty-one are devoted to the empowerment ritual granted to Rudra and his followers, a ceremony specific to the *Sūtra* tradition. Prior to the myth, there is no Burushaski before chapter twenty-five,

except for chapter twenty-two. Again, this makes perfect sense. Chapters twenty and twenty-one describe Rudra's past lives and his followers' wrong views respectively, and both topics are presented according to the terms laid out in later chapters.<sup>19</sup> Chapter twenty-two, where Burushaski appears, is straightforward mythic narrative. Chapters twenty-three and twenty-four describe the process by which the three mandalas and the deities emanate forth. Thus the chapters divide as follows:

20-21: Doctrine, no Burushaski.

22: Myth narration, Burushaski present.

23-24: Doctrine, no Burushaski

25-27: Myth narration, Burushaski present.

28-31: Doctrine, no Burushaski.

This suggests that most of the *Sūtra* was composed directly in Tibetan. It is important to keep in mind, however, that given the number of scholars working within the larger *Sūtra* milieu, certain other, closely-related works may well have been composed in Sanskrit. (I am thinking here of the other four root sūtras of *anuyoga*; see Appendix Three.) While I do not believe the *Sūtra* itself came from a Sanskrit (or even Burushaski) original, it is possible that the community from which it came was at least partly Indian. We are thus

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<sup>19</sup> In particular, certain aspects of Rudra's lifetimes can be seen in the presentation of "the vehicle of the magical display arising obviously" (*cho'phrul mn̄gon par 'byung ba'i theg pa*). And the nine mistaken views held by Rudra's followers appear in chapter twenty-five, where they structure the buddhas' discussions.

presented with the picture of Indians and Tibetans (Che Btsan-skyes) collaborating on a work “written for export” directly in Tibetan. Such a work would present an interesting juxtaposition to the normal black-and-white categories of “authentic” (Indian) and “apocryphal” (Tibetan).

In envisioning this collaborative effort, it is also worth returning to the colophon’s description of the translators working in the “marketplace” (*khrom*) of Bru-sha. Here one gets the picture of a project that did not enjoy much official patronage, an idea that further supported by another, related, story. Several sources tell us that the translators were forced by upset Bru-sha locals to abandon their efforts in the middle of their work. Only after moving their operation to Nepal did they finally manage to complete the project some years later.<sup>20</sup> Given the “written for export” theory, this break in the process can perhaps be seen as a reflection of the shift that took place from translation of Burushaski to inspired composition in Tibetan.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The earliest extant version of this story appears in Dam-pa Bde-gshegs’ *Yang khog dbub*, 48.3-4. Most commentators follow this story-line, but Dudjom Rinpoche has them eventually returning to Bru-sha to complete the project (see Dudjom 1991, 489).

<sup>21</sup> Given that Gnubs-chen was the main Tibetan holder of the lineage, we must also consider the possibility that Gnubs-chen himself wrote the entire sūtra, perhaps with Che Btsan-skye to help with the Burushaski parts and Dharmabodhi playing a largely inspirational role. However, Gnubs-chen does not say he was involved in the translation effort, and there would be no reason to deny it if he had been. In fact, Gnubs-chen was remarkable in his day for his honesty in admitting his hand in numerous works, including his *Mun pa'i go cha*, *Bsam gtan mig sgron* and many shorter texts. To my knowledge, no other Tibetans were fixing their names to their compositions this early. In short, while it must remain provisional, the “written for export” picture outlined above seems the best choice. A better picture of Gnubs-chen’s role in this tradition might be gained by examining the tantras that he is purported to have translated,

A story is reported by Dharmáśri in his *Spyi don* that enriches our sense of what the translation of the *Sūtra* might have been like:

During the translation, a non-human, holding [in one hand] a patala-colored flower of the gods who are beyond this Jambudvípa world and [in the other hand] a chariot-wheel, came and said, ‘To whom are you listening (*thos*)?’

The Mkhan-po-s replied, ‘We are listening to the noble Vajrasattva.’

Then that being, scattering flowers and circumambulating three times with great respect, venerated them with an elephant-like conduct (*brtul zhugs*)—without any doubts. He said, ‘Jina Rāja!’ and then withdrew.

The Mkhan-po-s were amazed at this, and proclaimed, ‘Surely excellent good qualities will arise in plenty!’ At the Fragrant Mountain there dwells an elephant earth-protector [spirit], an emanation of a bodhisattva. Hereafter this will be recognized to be a manifestation of that [spirit].<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately Dharmáśri does not provide the source of this story, but since it is taken as representative of this early circle of scholars, it may provide some insight. Apparently these scholars were concerned about the legitimacy of their “translation.” Their solution was to look not to a Sanskrit (or even Burushaski) *ur-text* for authority, but straight to Vajrasattva himself. What this means of course is that they looked to no one outside of themselves and, perhaps, their visionary experiences. They may have been working with an extremely loose sense of “translation” that was not constrained in any strictly historical sense

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located in the *anuyoga* section of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. For now, however, this must be left for a later time.

<sup>22</sup> *Mdo dbang gi spyi don*, 53.5-54.2.

**with regard to creative innovation. Appendix Two is an analysis of who the shadowy figures behind the *Sūtra*'s composition might have been.**

## APPENDIX TWO: INDIANS INVOLVED IN THE EARLY MDO-DBANG

In the biography of Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes found among the *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar* by Padma 'Phrin-las, the transmissions of the *Sūtra* into Bru-sha and Tibet are described as follows:

In Nepal, [Gnubs-chen] requested the *Sūtra* empowerment from the master Vasudhara, but [the latter] prophesied that he should ask \*Upādhyāya Dharmarājapāla [Mkhan-po Chos-rgyal Skyong]. So, in accordance with this prophecy, [Gnubs-chen] proceeded to India. How he went to see \*Upadhyāya Dharmarājapāla in Magadha and requested [teachings from] him has already been written about in the context of the lineage of the *mahāyoga* lamas. As we have seen, Mkhan-po Chos-rgyal Skyong granted him many transmissions and *sādhanas*. Furthermore, he also received some from Ācārya \*Prakāśalāmkāra [Gsal-ba'i Rgyan].<sup>23</sup> Around that time, \*Upadhyāya Dharmarājapāla went to the kingdom of Bru-sha. He had been invited as part of a threesome, along with Dhanarakṣita—who is also known as Shākyā Seng-ge, that is, the great one from Uddiyana<sup>24</sup>—and Dharmabodhi, by the scholar of Bru-sha, Che Btsan-bkyes the translator.<sup>25</sup> Then they [started] translating the *Sūtra* in

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<sup>23</sup> This is an alternate name for Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, as is made clear in the colophon to the *Las tho rab gnas* ascribed to him (*Las tho rab gnas*, 410.2). The name Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad is more commonly used in later literature, for example throughout the works of Lochen Dharmāśri.

<sup>24</sup> Here Padma 'Phrin-las is saying that Dhanarakṣita is Padmasambhava, an odd claim that will be examined below.

the marketplace of Bru-sha, but there was little support (*mos pa*) for their project, so they had to stop.

Returning once more to India,<sup>26</sup> he [\*Dharmarājapāla?] taught it to the scholar of Bru-sha, Vasudhara, Jñānakumāra, Gtsug-lag Dpal-dge, and Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes. The master, Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes also heard it from the scholar of Bru-sha. Moreover, the scholar of Bru-sha combined it with the teachings of Dhanarakṣita, and this was what [Gnubs-chen] heard when he received it once more during the translation in Bru-sha, in accordance with the *anu* lineage. In that way, the translator Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes himself is said to have also heard it from the scholar of the *Sūtra*, Dharmabodhi.<sup>27</sup>

This a complicated series of names and places, and it is likely that much of it is not historically accurate. Unfortunately, Padma 'Phrin-las dealt with this story by packing in every variant possible. We will approach it one person at a time. Generally speaking, there are two groups of teachers here: those who were not directly involved in the translation effort, and those who were central to it.

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<sup>25</sup> There is something awkward about this sentence. Including the slightly different spelling for Che Btsan-skyes' name that is given. I have translated it so that it conforms better to what appears in the colophon to *Mun pa'i go cha*.

<sup>26</sup> Note that Dam-pa Bde-gshegs (*Yang khog dbub*, 48.4) has them returning to Nepal, which was the home country for Vasudhara.

<sup>27</sup> *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 162.2-163.1. *bal yul du slob dpon ba su dha ra la mdo dbang zhus par mkhan po chos rgyal skyong la zhus shig par lung bstan pa bzhin rgya gar gyi yul du byon te/ mkhan po chos rgyal skyong la rgya gar dbus 'gyur tshal du zhus tshul gong du ma hā yo ga'i bla brgyud skabs bris pa ltar la/ de ltar mkhan po chos rgyal skyong gis dbang brgyud sbrub thabs mang du gnang ngo// gzhan yang ā tsarya gsal ba'i rgyan la yang nos/ dus nam zhig gi tshe mkhan po chos rgyal skyong bru sha'i yul du byon te/ dha na ra kshi ta'am shākyā seng ge ste o rgyan chen po/ dharma bo dhi gsum la bru sha'i mkhan po che btsan bkyes kyi lo tsā mdzad de bru sha'i khrom du mdo 'gyur mdzad pa mos pa chung ste ma 'gyur bar/ slar yang rgya gar du byon te bru sha'i mkhan po dang/ ba su dha ra dang dznyā na ku mā ra dang/ gtsug lag dpal dge/ sangs rgyas ye shes rnams la gsungs shing/ slob dpon sangs rgyas ye shes kyis bru sha'i mkhan po la yang gsan te/ de yang bru sha'i mkhan pos dha na rakshi ta'i bka' dang sbyar te/ slar yang bru shar bsgyur ba'i tshe bskyar te gsan pas a nu'i brgyud pa ltar ro// de ltar lo tsā ba sangs rgyas ye shes nyid kyis mdo mkhan dharma bo dhi la yang gsan par bzhed.*

\*Dharmarājapāla, Ā-tsarya Gsal-ba'i Rgyan, and Vasudhara make up the former set,<sup>28</sup> and the others make up the latter.<sup>29</sup>

Regarding the first group, Dudjom Rinpoche has Vasudhara instructing Gnubs-chen to go study under Ā-tsarya Gsal-ba'i Rgyan (\*Prakāśālamkāra) rather than \*Dharmarājapāla, as was claimed by Padma 'Phrin-las.<sup>30</sup> Dudjom also agrees with Padma 'Phrin-las in having \*Dharmarājapāla take part in the Bru-sha translation project. This appears to be a mistake, since the *Sūtra*'s colophon does not mention him, nor is his presence in Bru-sha mentioned by Dam-pa Bde-gshegs. Thus we can probably assume that this \*Dharmarājapāla had little to do with the translation project. The relative marginality of his role may explain why he came to be confused with \*Prakāśālamkāra. In fact, we can probably group these two together as figures who worked within the wider tantric circle surrounding the *Sūtra* but who were not directly involved in its composition. What we are seeing here may be a larger circle of individuals and tantric developments within which the *Sūtra* took shape.

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<sup>28</sup> Padma 'Phrin-las would add here \*Dharmarājapāla, but, for reasons explained just below, we can exclude him from our initial list.

<sup>29</sup> In his brief review of Buddhism in Nepal during this period, Lo Bue refers precisely to this circle of innovators when he writes, "The circles in which Hūmkara moved are representative of the fertile cultural background which could be found at the end of the Licchavi period in the Nepal Valley" (Lo Bue 1997, 632).

<sup>30</sup> Dudjom 1991, 609. Dudjom Rinpoche does mention that \*Dharmarājapāla received the teaching from Dharmabodhi back in Nālandā, which may or may not be true, but is irrelevant for our present purposes.

\*Prakāśālamkāra is the best example of someone who appears to have been influential in this wider tradition. Rog Brtson-'grus Seng-ge tells us that, "this master is identical to Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad/Sukhodyotaka."<sup>31</sup> In Chapter Four of this dissertation, we saw that according to later sources, this Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad was responsible for creating the extensive empowerment rituals relating to the *Sūtra*. This complex ritual system was common to all the works (primarily the four root sūtras of *anuyoga*) produced within the *Sūtra*'s wider tantric community. A few of his works on the empowerment ritual survive, and they are cited regularly from an early date, so they can be provisionally accepted as authentic. One final note: most sources have Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad receiving the transmission from both Sthiramati and Hūmkara, a point to which we will return below.

Vasudhara, the last of our three teachers in this generation, had a long-standing relationship with Gnubs-chen, but it seems that he also was only a peripheral figure in the *Sūtra* transmission; he may have received it in India or Nepal, alongside Gnubs-chen and several others, from Dhanarakṣita, or Dharmabodhi, or whomever. Thus, while the larger *Sūtra* tradition may have involved a fair number of individuals, the transmissions of the *Sūtra* specifically all flowed from Dhanarakṣita and Dharmabodhi.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 609.

Proceeding to the next generation, we have seen in the *Sūtra*'s own colophon (see Appendix One) that there were three figures in the translation committee: Che Btsan-bkyes, Dhanarakṣita, Dharmabodhi. We have also observed in Appendix One a connection between certain Bon families and the kingdom of Bru-sha. This has led R. A. Stein to suggest that Che Btsan-skyes, translator of the *Sūtra* and teacher to Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, may himself have been a "renowned bon-po."<sup>32</sup> Here, Stein was referring specifically to the Bon-po translator named Mtsho Btsan-skyes, mentioned in the 1922 Bon-po historical work, *Legs bshad rin po che'i gter mdzod dpyod*. This character is said to have lived in Bru-sha at roughly the same time as our Che Btsan-skyes.<sup>33</sup> Still, as Stein himself points out, there is a slight difference between the two names (Che vs. Mtsho), so the relationship between these two Tibetans living in Bru-sha, while an interesting question, must for now remain unanswered.

Only a little more information on Che Btsan-skyes is provided by Lo-chen Dharmaśri, in his early 18<sup>th</sup> century study of the *Sūtra* empowerment (*mdo dbang*) tradition. According to Dharmaśri, Che Btsan-skyes came from the area of Yarlung, "but he became proficient in three languages and later protected the

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<sup>32</sup> Stein 1972, 503 and 1974, 509.

<sup>33</sup> See Karmay's translation of this historical work (Karmay 1972, 7-8). There Karmay gives as dates for Gyung-drung Seng-ge 994-1054 C.E. This was the great-great grandson of Mtsho Btsan-skyes, which would seem to put the latter at the turn of the tenth century, roughly when Gnubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye shes was supposed to have studied under him.

Buddhist activites in the land of Bru-sha. For that reason he was known as the 'master of Bru-sha.'"<sup>34</sup>

Regarding Dhanarakṣita, in addition to his being one of the translators, he is also supposed to have taught Sthiramati.<sup>35</sup> Sthiramati then taught Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, who in turn taught Dharmabodhi.<sup>36</sup> Thus Dhanarakṣita seems to have been the ranking member on the translation team. Because Che Btsan-skyes received the teaching first from Dharmabodhi and then from Dhanarakṣita, the latter came to be known as the "short transmission."<sup>37</sup> These two early transmission lines are already distinguished by Dam-pa Bde-shegs.<sup>38</sup> In both cases, it seems that Dhanarakṣita was involved in the formulation of this tradition at many levels. But who was he?

In his above-quoted treatment of Dhanarakṣita, Padma 'Phrin-las suggests that he is the same person as Shākyā Seng-ge, which is an alias for the great master from Uddiyāna, Padmasambhava. However Dharmāśri points out that

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<sup>34</sup> Dharmāśri, *Dbang gi spyi don*, 54.2-3. *De la che btsan skyes ni/yul yar lung pa yin/skad rigs gsum la sbyangs nas phyi bru sha'i yul du phrin las bskyangs pas bru sha'i slob dpon du grags.* These details might make a useful point of comparison should further information surface about the Bon-po person of Mtsho Btsan-skyes.

<sup>35</sup> See *Yang khog dbub*, 48.2. Dharmāśri has Dhanarakṣita teaching both Sthiramati and Hūmkara (*Spyi don*, 51.2 and 51.5.)

<sup>36</sup> See *Mdo dbang gi spyi don*, 51-2. Dharmāśri has Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad receiving from both Sthiramati and Hūmkara (*Spyi don*, 51.6-52.1.)

<sup>37</sup> See *Spyi don*, 53.1-2.

<sup>38</sup> *Yang khog dbub*, 48.2. And this distinction is followed by most later histories. See for example 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba in Roerich 1976, 159.

this identification is based on a misreading of an earlier source:

Some ancient texts say, “This master [Dhanarakṣita] is the same as Shākyā Seng-ge.” Regarding this statement, the explanation in the *Mdo'i khog dbub* distinguishes three people of whom one was called “Shākyā Seng-ge.”<sup>39</sup> So any text saying that, “Shākyā Seng-ge is Dhanarakṣita,” is a corruption. In some histories on Vajrakilāya, someone with a similar name appears as, “Dhanarakṣita, or Śāntarakṣita, the son of Śri Gadhari of the royal family in Uddiyāna.” Thus I think this [theory that Dhanarakṣita is the same as Shākyā Seng-ge] leads us astray.<sup>40</sup>

So it can be clearly decided that this Dhanarakṣita is not Padmasambhava. Most sources have Dhanarakṣita as a student of Padmasambhava, which actually makes some sense because, as we have seen in the above passage from Dharmasrī, Dhanarakṣita is said to have been a Vajrakilāya expert hailing from Uddiyāna, like Padmasambhava.<sup>41</sup>

Turning to the third major figure, we have Dharmabodhi. Here is another, and perhaps *the*, key figure in these early days of the *Sūtra*. Dharmabodhi’s importance is indicated in Gnubs-chen’s colophon, where he is the sole recipient of Gnubs-chen’s supplication prayer:

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<sup>39</sup> *Yang khog bub*, 48.2 reads: *Za hor rgyal po pra bha ha sti la/ des shākyā sene/ shākyā mu tra/ shākyā pr bha gsum la bshad/ shākyā senges dha na ra shi la.*

<sup>40</sup> *Spyi don*, 50.6-51.2. *Yig rnying 'ga' zhig tu slob dpon 'di shākyā seng ge dang gcig ces gsung pa ni/ mdo'i khog dbub tu shākyā seng ges zhes pa'i rnam dbye gsum pa'i sa sgra chad de/ shākyā seng ge dha na rakṣi ta zhes pa'i yig skyon dang/ phur pa'i lo rgyus 'gar o rgyan gyi yul du rgyal rigs srig dha ri'i bu dha na rakṣi ta 'am shānta rakṣi ta zhes mtshan 'dra bar byung bas kyang 'khrul lam snyam mo.*

<sup>41</sup> It may be worth noting that Uddiyāna was located in close proximity to (directly to the west of) Bru-sha.

To he who knows the intention of the noble Lord of Secrets, he whose sun-like visage overpowers the phenomena of causality, holder of the supreme enlightenment, translator of all languages, to wise Dharmabodhi, with longing and aspiration like a mountain of gold I humble my body and mind. In the four ways to act, with the eight implements, I respectfully offer pleasing gifts and prostrate myself.<sup>42</sup>

Several short commentaries to the *Sūtra* ascribed to Indian authors are extant, found in the Peking edition of the *Bstan-'gyur*. One of particular interest is the *Gsang ba'i mdo don bsdus pa* attributed to Dharmabodhi.<sup>43</sup> Unlike other purportedly Indian commentaries on the *Sūtra*,<sup>44</sup> this one could be authentic. It is cited by everyone (though notably not by Gnubs-chen) from an early date, and both the tone and the topics discussed are characteristic of the earliest literature from this tradition. More evidence is required, but when added to Gnubs-chen's panegyric to Dharmabodhi, it begins to look like Dharmabodhi may have played a particularly crucial role in the early formulation of the *Sūtra* and its wider tradition.

Having worked through the quotation from Padma 'Phrin-las, what are we left with? In the first group—those who were not directly involved in the

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<sup>42</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha*, vol. 2, 653.5-6.

<sup>43</sup> Peking 4751. Unfortunately I have not had access to the Peking edition. For this reason my knowledge of the *Don bsdus* is based on a version located in Germano's *Bka' ma rgyas pa shin tu rgyas pa*, vol.95, 39-52. This work is not in Gene Smith's edition. It should not be confused with the useful *Bsdus don* by Zur Shakya-Senge and Dam-pa Bde-gshegs.

<sup>44</sup> Namely the three works attributed to Sthiramati also found in the Peking edition. See below for my comments on the unreliability of these works' attributions.

translation of the *Sūtra* from Burushaski—we have \*Dharmarājapāla and Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad (also called Gsal-ba'i Rgyan). Of these two, the latter, with his empowerment ritual innovations, appears to have exerted more influence upon the development of the early *Sūtra* tradition. Vasudhara perhaps also should be mentioned in this group, but I believe he was a marginal figure best understood as the one who introduced Gnubs-chen to this community of tantric innovators.<sup>45</sup> In the second group we have Che Btsan-skyes (a Tibetan expatriate translator living in Bru-sha, with possible ties to Bon-po lineages), Dhanarakṣita (teacher to all, possibly from Uddiyāna and involved in Vajrakilāya materials), and Dharmabodhi (the main link between Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, who created the *Sūtra* empowerment system, and the *Sūtra*,<sup>46</sup> and implicated in the authorship of other closely associated tantras and an early commentary).

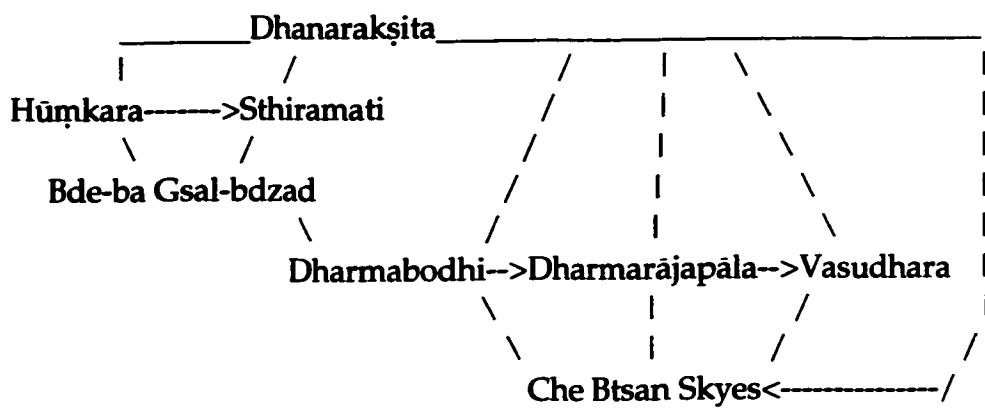
In the end, Dharmāśri's account seems fairly reliable given all the evidence. According to this source, we can trace the relationships between these figures as follows:<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Several other similarly marginal Indian figures can also be named, including Hūmkara, Jñāna Kumāra and Gtsug-lag Dpal-dge.

<sup>46</sup> Dharmabodhi, Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, and \*Dharmarājapāla all apparently came from Magadha, the latter being an Upādyāya at Nālandā.

<sup>47</sup> *Spyi don*, 50-53.



## APPENDIX THREE: THE FOUR ROOT TANTRAS OF ANUYOGA AND THEIR EARLY COMMENTARIES

The “written for export” theory put forward in Appendix One helps to explain why two hundred years later the *Sūtra* and its related tradition raised suspicions of inauthenticity among certain Tibetans. In his *Sngags log sun 'byin*,<sup>48</sup> Mgos-khug-pa Lhas-btsas claimed that, “[The *Sūtra*] of the Gathered Intentions and the *Kun 'dus [rig pa'i mdo]* and the five dharmas of the king (*rgyal po'i chos lṅga*) are corrupt because they were written by Dar-rje Dpal-gyi Grags-pa.”<sup>49</sup> The *Sūtra* is considered the “explanatory tantra” (*bshad rgyud*) to the *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*,

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<sup>48</sup> This work appears in pieces as Sog-zlog-pa argues against each passage. See his *'Brug sgra*, 475.4-488.1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 481.3. Mgos-khug-pa also says that *Sems lung chen mo* was written by a Tibetan, which is relevant because Sog-zlog-pa lists it as one of the five Sūtras, on which see below. Interestingly, Nyang-ral Nyi-ma'i 'Od-zer tells us that this Rdo-rje Dpal-gyi Grags-pa was a main teacher for Gnubs-chen (*Nyang ral chos 'byung*, 435: *khyung po'i slob ma dar rje dpal gyi grags pa/des sgregs pa sangs rgyas te yongs su grags pa dbus lugs zhes zer*). This raises the possibility that the whole trip to Bru-sha is a fabrication by Gnubs-chen and that in writing his *Armor Against Darkness* he was simply elaborating on his Tibetan teacher's apocrypha. However these same facts may also indicate that Mgos-khug-pa, in blaming Rdo-rje Dpal-gyi Grags-pa, was actually focussing his attack on Gnubs-chen. Given the untranslated Bru-sha-skad in the *Sūtra* along with all the other evidence, I tend to accept Gnubs-chen's trip to Bru-sha and thus to doubt Mgos-khug-pa's claims. In either case, this demonstrates how Gnubs-chen was a lightning-rod for both positive and negative polemics in later histories and treatises.

which is the “root tantra” (*rtsa rgyud*). Here Mgos-khug-pa is questioning the authenticity of both works, as well as several other closely associated tantras.

A few years later, the “five sūtras” came under attack again in the *Bka'* *shog* of Zhi-ba 'Od.<sup>50</sup> In this list of “syncretic” (*'dres ma*) works, the *Sūtra* and its related circle of texts, the five sūtras (*mdo lnga*), are all attributed to Rdo-rje Dpal-gyi Grags-pa. Moreover, their commentaries by Zur-che and Zur-chung are also dismissed.<sup>51</sup> Karmay gets the titles of the five sūtras from Sog-zlog-pa and lists them as follows:

1. *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*
2. *Dur khrod khu byug rol ba'i mdo*<sup>52</sup>
3. *Mdo dgongs pa 'dus pa*
4. *Ye shes rngam pa klog gi 'khor lo*
5. *Sems lung chen mo'i mdo.*

This quartet of canonical tantras represent the major surviving works produced within the wider tantric community from which the *Sūtra* sprang. What follows

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<sup>50</sup> Dated at 1092 in Karmay 1980, 13-14.

<sup>51</sup> See Karmay 1980, 15. One wonders how these five sūtras relate to the “five dharmas of the king” mentioned earlier by Mgos-khug-pa. I have not found a list of the latter five.

<sup>52</sup> Note that *Khu byug rol ba* also appears in Zhi-ba 'Od's list under the “Kilaya tantras.” That these two titles refer to the same text is likely, given that the *Khug byug rol ba* we have today differs from the other four sūtras for its focus on Kilaya. The case is strengthened further in Kah-thog-pa Ye-shes Rgyal-mtshan's commentary to Dam-pa Bde-gshegs' *Theg pa spyi bcings* (*Theg pa spyi bcings*, 113), where reference is made to one of the main *anuyoga* tantras as the *Khu byug rol pa phur pa'i mdo*.

In the main, two deities seem to have exerted influence upon the early *Sūtra* tradition: Yang-dag Heruka (who is the tamer of Rudra in the *Sūtra*'s myth) and Vajrakilaya (who is also central to the Rudra myth as well as central to the *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa'i rgyud*). It is possible that we are seeing here the individual influences of Dharmabodhi (who was associated, through Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, with Hūmkara, the great Yang-dag master of that era) and Dhanarakṣita (who we have already seen may have been a Vajrakilaya expert and possible student of Padmasambhava).

are some brief observations on the contents of each work (with the exception of the *Sūtra* itself).

### 1. *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo.*

Chapter one introduces several lists that are key to the later commentarial literature on the *Sūtra* empowerment tradition. First come the three yogas of cause, conditions and fruition.<sup>53</sup> These are discussed by Gnubs-chen in the introduction to his *Mun pa'i go cha*.<sup>54</sup> Then come the twelve “ways of arising” (*byung tshul*), which were used to organize the *Kun 'dus*'s explanatory tantra, namely the *Sūtra*, though they are listed differently in the two works.<sup>55</sup> Several pages later, the five yogas are introduced, though they are buried in a longer list of eleven yogas.<sup>56</sup> These can be understood as a tantric version of the five paths (*lam Inga*), famous from the prajñāpāramitā literature. They are followed by the ten levels (*sa bcu*), another tantric re-presentation of the well-known ten levels,<sup>57</sup> and many other less important lists. These lists are essentially the building blocks for the system that is worked out more systematically in the *Sūtra*.

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<sup>53</sup> *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*, 372.1-3. Unless otherwise specified, all references to the five sūtras are from the Mtshams 'brag edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*.

<sup>54</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 8.1.

<sup>55</sup> *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*, 380.5-7. In the final volume of his commentary, Mkhan-po Nus-ldan tries to reconcile the two ways of listing these ways of arising (see *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 56, 697.5).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.1-3.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.2-5.

In addition to these lists, several other sections that were important to the later tradition appear elsewhere. The Charnel Ground Mandala of the Supreme Secret (*dur khrod gsang ba mchog gi dkyil 'khor*) described in chapter fourteen came to be used as the uncommon wrathful mandala of the *Tshogs chen 'dus pa* that was used for the *anuyoga* section of the *Sūtra* empowerment ceremony.<sup>58</sup> Finally, the empowerment ceremony described in chapter thirty-six provides all the basic elements used in the *Sūtra* empowerment system. The four streams of empowerments are presented, with the first stream (*dbang gi chu bo*) corresponding to the first six vehicles (gods and humans through *yoga* tantra), and the second, third and fourth streams corresponding to *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga*, making nine vehicles in all. These four streams are also divided into the thirty-six root empowerments, as was common in the later *Sūtra* empowerment tradition.

## 2. *Dur khrod khu byug rol ba.*

Of the four sūtras, this is the shortest and probably the least cited in later literature. More so than the others, it is focused on the wrathful deity, Vajrakilaya (see especially chapters seven and eight).

The *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa* seems to demonstrate a particularly close connection to the *Ye shes rngam glog*. These two works share a similar style,

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<sup>58</sup> See *Spyi don*, 186. On the various sources from which was derived the Gathered Great Assembly mandala, see Chapter Three, note 19 of this dissertation.

particularly in their opening scenes (compare chapter one to chapter two of the *Ye shes rngam glog*), and both are spoken by Samantabhadra, as the *Gsang ba mchog gi bdag po*, to the *'dus pa'i 'khor tshogs*.<sup>59</sup> Chapter fourteen of the *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa* is titled, “Ordering the Supplementary Topics” (*don phyi ma rim par bkod pa*). This chapter could have been added later, as is the case with the *Ye shes rngam glog*’s final chapter, which also contains the term *phyi ma* in its title, though in the *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa*, the evidence is not as clear as it is in the latter work. Both final chapters begin with explanations of their respective titles and use similar language in doing so.<sup>60</sup> Over all, the *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa*’s final chapter exhibits a particularly strong concern with its own legitimacy and future welfare.<sup>61</sup>

The only real discussion of the *Sūtra* empowerment ceremony appears in chapter three, where six empowerments are listed.<sup>62</sup> These are the five ability empowerments (*nus pa'i dbang*) plus the secret accomplishment empowerment (*sgrub dbang*) specific to the *anuyoga* vehicle.<sup>63</sup> This is the only clue I have been

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<sup>59</sup> A further possible link appears in the Khyentse edition of the *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa*, where chapter eight opens with a passage that may refer to the two tantras by name: “dud khrod dang ni ngam ‘glog nas” (vol. da, 585.6). However, if these are the titles, they are misspelled, and the same line in the Mtshams-‘brag edition reads very differently (268.1), so this may be a dead end.

<sup>60</sup> Compare, for example, *Ye shes rngam glog*, 169.7 to *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa*, 297.7.

<sup>61</sup> See especially *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa*, 315-320. Also, note the mention of King Dza around 315.6.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 241.5-7.

able to find that this work shares the *Mdo-dbang* tradition's empowerment structure. The structure discussed is not presented in any more detail elsewhere.

### 3. *Ye shes rngam glog*.

This sūtra is sometimes referred to as another “explanatory tantra,”<sup>64</sup> presumably to the main root tantra, the *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*. Note that the famous *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* is traditionally held to be the main explanatory tantra (*bshad rgyud*).

In the *Ye shes rngam glog*'s final chapter, the empowerment ceremony is described in terms of the four empowerment “streams” (*chu bo*) that are unique to the *Sūtra* empowerment tradition. These four streams are presented according to the standard series of thirty-six main empowerments.<sup>65</sup> Though the presence of this empowerment structure in the last chapter proves a connection between the *Ye shes rngam glog* and the *Sūtra*, the chapter itself appears to have been appended to the rest of the text. This is made explicit by the chapter's title (*gsang ba'i phyi ma'i rnam par bkod pa'i le'u*). Also, chapter three provides the topics for the chapters that follow, but only through the penultimate chapter sixteen.

Apart from the final chapter, the other section that is cited regularly in the later exegetical literature is chapter five, on the “natural mandala” (*rang bzhin gyi*

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<sup>63</sup> Compare this passage to *Ye shes rngam glog*, 171.6-172.2, which is cited, in turn, in Dharmāśri, *Mdo dbang gi spyi don*, 165.1.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, *Spyi don*, 158.3 and 191.4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ye shes rngam glog*, 172.6-174.4

*dkyil 'khor*). The maṇḍala described is home to the forty-two peaceful deities, which are certainly drawn from the earlier peaceful *Māyajala* maṇḍala. The uncommon peaceful maṇḍala of the Gathered Great Assembly comes directly from this fifth chapter,<sup>66</sup> and the common peaceful maṇḍala is also related to it, though more indirectly.<sup>67</sup> Thus the maṇḍala and the empowerment chapters are by far the most heavily used in the later tradition.

#### 4. *Sems lung chen mo*.

The *Sems lung chen mo* is the anomaly. In his attack upon the Rnying-ma-pa tantras, Mgos-khug-pa treats it separately. Then in the later literature the “five sūtras” are reduced to the “four sūtras,”<sup>68</sup> and the *Sems lung chen mo* is excluded. But even more importantly, this text uses little or none of the terms that are

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<sup>66</sup> *Spyi don*, 186.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>68</sup> See Dudjom 1991, 289. In his *Khog dbub*, Dam-pa provides a list of the writings on the *Sūtra* that were circulating in his day. The last text listed is titled the *Mdo bzhi'i bye brag*, apparently being a discussion of the differences between the four sūtras. This is useful for helping us hazard a guess on when the four sūtras were settled as such. Given that Zhi-ba 'Od's *Bka' shog* refers to them as the “five sūtras” in 1092, and here, sometime around 1161 (the date for the founding of the Kah-thog Bshad-grwa), they appear as four, we can tentatively suggest that the four fundamental tantras of anuyoga were consolidated as a set in the early twelfth century. Also, Padma 'Phrin-las mentions (*Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 189.2) that Zur-che, who was active in the eleventh century, studied them as five sūtras, which supports this theory. The fact that even within the Zur tradition we can see the shift from five to four also means it was not the case that the Zurs were following a four sūtra tradition even as Zhi-ba 'Od referred to a five sūtra tradition.

standard in the other four sūtras. All this pushes it to the periphery of this group.<sup>69</sup>

The four sūtras that came to be codified as such thus share much in common. They use unique terminologies and categories, share a complex empowerment ceremony, and describe similar maṇḍalas. Generally speaking, they work to develop a doctrinal system for discussing tantra that is parallel to ones for sūtra.

If we accept the *Sūtra* as the composition of Dharmabodhi and friends in the last half of the ninth century, then the other three sūtras were probably not translated by those claimed in their colophons, all of whom date from one hundred years earlier. One must remember that the tradition holds that Gnubs-chen was a disciple of Padmasambhava, which is impossible given his dates. There is a consistent desire in the later tradition to collapse dark period (and later) developments into the royal dynastic period. Thus the claims made in the Mkhyen-brtse edition of the *Rgyud 'bum*, that Padmasambhāva and Vairocana translated the root tantra, *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo* and that Vimalamitra and Cog-ru

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<sup>69</sup> As yet further evidence that the fifth “sūtra,” the *Sems lung chen mo*, should not be included in this circle of texts, one can point to its different presentation of the nine vehicles in which *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga* are sub-divisions of *yoga* tantra. This system mirrors the presentation in *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba* that is so often pointed to as a forerunner to the nine vehicles system.

<sup>70</sup> *Dur khrod khu byug rol pa'i mdo* has no colophon. The unreliability of these attributions is further accentuated by the fact that other editions of the *Rgyud 'bum* disagree. For example, in the Sde-dge, the translators given for *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo* are Vimalamitra and Klu'i Rgyal-mtshan instead of Mkhyen-brtse's Padmasambhava and Vairocana. Mtshams 'brag gives no translator.

Klu'i Rgyal-mtshan translated *Ye shes rngam glog*, are doubtful.<sup>70</sup> Who actually translated these works must remain undecided for the time being, though given what we have seen with the *Sūtra*, it is quite possible that they were all originally written in Tibetan.

It seems that in its day this doctrinal system common to the four sūtras enjoyed some renown throughout India, Nepal, and Tibet. The sheer number of well-known figures associated with it is a first indication. The fact that Dharmabodhi's *Don bsdus* is not cited by Gnubs-chen may be evidence that other commentarial lineages were active from an early date. But even more revealing is a discussion by Mkhan-po Nus-ldan at the end of his exhaustive commentary. In writing this work, Nus-ldan had access to all the related materials that Kah-thog Si-tu Chos-kyi Rgya-mtsho had gathered during his travels through central and eastern Tibet in the early twentieth century. By analyzing these ancient manuscripts, Nus-ldan names four distinct commentarial traditions that already existed in tenth century Tibet before they were all gathered by the Zurs in the eleventh century:

Regarding this, at the end of Dam-pa [Bde-gshegs]'s *Phyag mchan*<sup>71</sup> it says, "Lha-rje Zur strove for the sake of all at the Great Commentary, which was the text for the three lords, Mda', Glan and Khyed."<sup>72</sup> Then later he

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<sup>70</sup> This work appeared in a 1999 list sent to Gene Smith of titles to be included in the new *Bka' ma rgyas pa shin tu rgyas pa*. Unfortunately, it is strangely absent from both sets that have come out so far.

authentically received it from Gong-bu-ba and Shangs-pa. And after that, [Dam-pa] Bde-shegs received it in both ways from Lha-rje, and from this excellence, I the round one (*ldom po*), received it.” Thus when the Lord of Secrets, Sgro-phug-pa, first received it in earnest from Mda’, Glan, and Khyed, it was mainly in the system of the Great Commentary, the *Mun pa'i go cha*. Later, when he received it from Gong-bu-ba and Shangs-pa, it was mainly in the system of the *Lung bstan skor*.<sup>73</sup> After that, the Omniscient Dam-pa Bde-shegs received it from Lha-rje Smar and Gtsang-pa in both systems. And then that excellent lord of dharma passed it on to Gtsang-ston Rdo-rje Rgyal-mtshan...

After the annotated text revealed by Panchen Situ Rinpoche at Dwags-lha Sgam-po, it says, “The intermediate<sup>74</sup> notes of Lha-rje Sgro-phug-pa, Mda’-tsha, and Hor po, have been preserved for some time by the discussions of Mda’, Glan and Yang-Khyed. They have been looked over by the Bande of Gru-gu, Dbus-pa Jo’bum, who gave his approving recommendation. May they continue for the welfare of beings.”<sup>75</sup>

Also, at the end of yet another recently discovered<sup>76</sup> ancient annotated text, it says that of the four different commentaries on the great sūtra, ‘Gar-ston Bzang-po followed the system of the great scholar Sthiramati when he taught Rong-zom Paṇḍita. And from the latter it was received by Ruyong Rin-chen ‘Bar. Then it passed to Bdag-’dra ‘Brom-ston ‘Theng-po, who is said to have produced a newly annotated edition.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> According to *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 247, these are the three from whom Sgro-phug-pa received it. This means that the Lha-rje Zur mentioned here is Sgro-phug-pa, a.k.a. Zur Shākyā Seng-ge.

<sup>73</sup> It appears that this was the lineage offshoot associated with the Mar-pa family, mentioned in *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 254. See Chapter Two for a more extensive discussion of this section of the lineage.

<sup>74</sup> I.e. not of the early period of Sthiramati, Dharmabodhi, Gnubs-chen etc. and not of the later tradition. Note that Padma ‘Phrin-las uses this term (*bar skabs*) to refer to a different period, namely that between the Gnubs clan and Sgro-phug-pa—see *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 255.1.

<sup>75</sup> This seems to mean that the annotated text being quoted here (from Dwags-lha Sgam-po and by Dbus pa Jo’bum [an attribution confirmed by Nus-Idan in his *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 55, 417.5]) was based upon three sets of notes—by Zur Shākyā Seng-ge, Mda’-tsha, and Hor-po respectively—all from the “intermediate” period of the Sūtra’s history. (Yang-khyed appears elsewhere in Nus-Idan as Lha-rje Yang-khyed.)

<sup>76</sup>All by Situ Rinpoche, apparently.

<sup>77</sup> *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 56, 702.4-704.6. ‘dir kun mkhyen dam pa rin po che'i phyag mchan gyi mjug tu/ mda' glan yang khyed dam pa'i rje gsum gyi/ phyag dpe 'gel chen kun don la/ lha rje zur gyis nan chags

Thus we can identify three of these “four different commentaries” as those by Sthiramati (taught to Rong-zom), Gnubs-chen, and King Dza (the purported author of the *'Grel pa lung bstan ma'*). We cannot know for sure what the fourth one would be—probably the *Don bsdis* of Dharmabodhi.

The Sthiramati commentaries, like the *Don bsdis*, are found together in the Peking edition of the *Bstan-'gyur*.<sup>78</sup> As mentioned above, I have only examined one Sthiramati work.<sup>79</sup> This work is almost certainly a Tibetan composition, falsely attributed to the Indian Yogācāra author. It does appear to be an early work, however, since it is a short text (much like the *Don bsdis*) and makes little

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byas/gong bu ba dang shangs pa la/phyis ni yang dag zhus pa'o/rjes su lha rje rnam gnyis la/bde gshegs kyis zhus dam pa la/lDom po bdag gis zhus pa'o/zhes gsung pas/gsang bdag chen po sgro phug pas sngon du mda' glan yang khyed gsum la gsan pa nan chags su byas pa ni gtso bor/grel chen mun pa'i go cha'i lugs yin la/phyis su gong bu ba dang shangs pa las gsan pa ni gtso bor lung btan skor gyi lugs yin no/de rjes lha rje smar dang gtsang pa rnam gnyis la kun mkhyen dam pa bde gshegs kyis zhus shing/chos rje dam pa rin po che la gtsang ston rdo rje rgyal mtshan gyis zhus par gsungs pa'o/skyabs rje rgyal tshab rin po che'i zhal nas/sngon smon thugs bskyed sky a rengs kha lo yis/nyer drangs nges gsang bstan mchog mkha' dbyings su/legs bshad 'dod rgu'i snang ba 'bum 'jo bas/chos kyi rgya mtsho nyin mor byed gang rgyal/zhes bsngags pa ltar pan chen si tu rin po ches dwags lha sgam po'i phyag dpe mchan can gdan drangs pa'i gsham du/lha rje sgro phug pa mda' tsha hor po'i mchan 'bring po la mda' glan yang khyed gsum gyi gsung sgros kyis zhabs tog bag tsam byas te/gru gu'i bande dbus pa jo 'bum gyis bltas pas chog par nan tan bgyis pa lags so/'gro don du gyur cig/ces gsungs so/yang dpe rnying mchan ma gcig gdan drangs pa'i mijug tu/ mdo chen po'i/grel pa'i bye brag bzhi las mkhas pa chen po sthi ra ma ti'i lugs ltar 'gar ston bzang po las rong zom panditas gsan zhing de las ru yong rin chen 'bar gyis zhus pa la bdag 'dra 'brom ston 'theng pos zhus te phag dpe mchan bcas gsar du bzhengs par gsungs so. The last line implies that this set of notes being discussed was written by the last in this line just traced, namely, Bdag-'dra 'Brom-ston 'Theng-po. So far this makes three manuscripts discovered by Situ Rinpoche: one by Dam pa, one by Dbus-pa Jo-'bum, and one by 'Brom-ston 'Theng-po.

<sup>78</sup> Including the *Don bsdis*, these *Sūtra*-related works fill folios 597b8-644a8. The three attributed to Sthiramati are:

P.4752- *Skabs 'grel bye brag rnam par bshad pa*

P.4753- *Byang chub sems kyi ljon shing*

P.4754- *Rgyan dam pa sna tshogs rim par phye ba bkod pa* (trans. Klu'i rgyal mtshan)

<sup>79</sup> Namely, the *Skabs 'grel bye brag rnam par bshad pa*, which is also found in the *Bka' ma rgyas pa shin tu rgyas pa* collection currently held by David Germano.

use of the elaborate exegetical apparatus that developed in later years. In addition to its Tibetan use of language, the most obvious clue that its Sthiramati attribution is false is a quotation from Bde-ba Gsal-mdzad, who was supposed to have been the student of Sthiramati.<sup>80</sup>

It is unfortunate that the '*Grel pa lun bstan ma*' attributed to King Dza is no longer extant. It is cited regularly throughout the *Sūtra* empowerment tradition and was clearly an influential work from an early date.

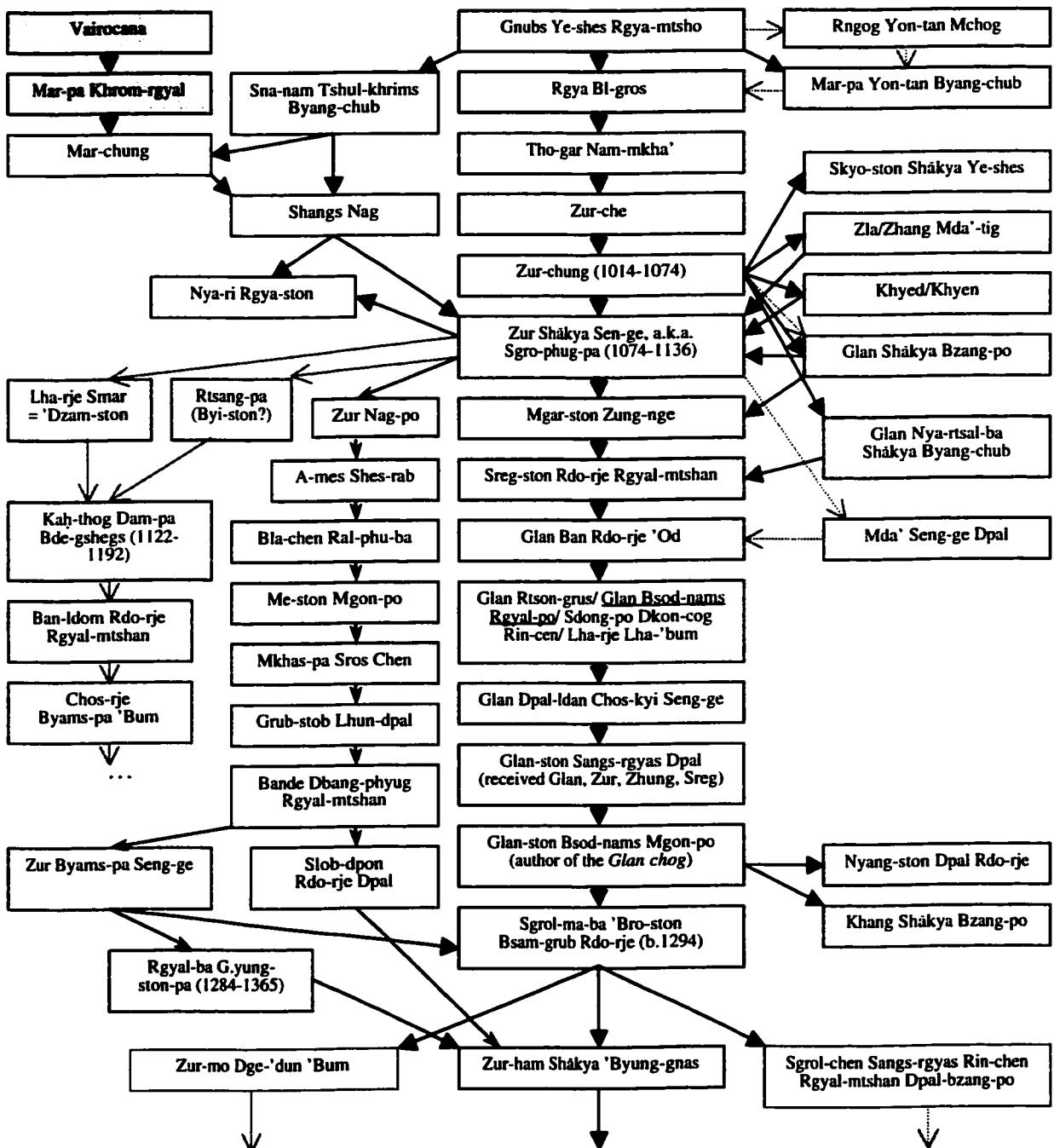
Gnubs-chen's "Great Commentary," the *Mun pa'i go cha*, was by far the longest commentary on the *Sūtra*, filling two volumes. He purportedly wrote it on the basis of his studies with Che Btsan-skyes in Bru-sha. He also completed a meditation retreat at Rtsal-chen Nyug-gi Rdo-rje Sgrom-bu, which appears to have been around Sgrags Yongs-rdzong, above his birthplace in Srag valley. This became the main pilgrimage place for accomplishing the *Sūtra* system. Gnubs-chen's *Mun pa'i go cha* remains crucial to understand the obscure language and complicated doctrinal systems of the *Sūtra*.

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<sup>80</sup> See *Skabs 'grel bye brag tu bshad pa*, 31.

## APPENDIX FOUR

### LINEAGE TREE



### **Key to lineage map:**

- Main lineage according to Padma 'Phrin-las's *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*.
- According to the *Gtad rgya gsang mtshan ma'i dbang chog*, composed by G.yung-ston (summarized in *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 253).
- Main lineage according to Sog-bzlog-pa's *Shel gyi me long*, 370-380.<sup>81</sup>
- Main lineage according to the Kah-thog tradition. See Dam-pa Bde-gshegs's *Yang khog dbub*, 47.5-49.6, and Rmog-ston Dpal-bzang's *Sbrang rtsi'i chu rgyun* 64, 63-68.
- Separate *rdzogs-chen sems-sde* lineage according to *Brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 254.2-4.

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<sup>81</sup> Note that after Glan-ban Rdo-rje 'Od, Sog-bzlog-pa is unclear on the order, but the names he lists match many of those in Padma 'Phrin-las' lineage.

## **APPENDIX FIVE:** **DOCTRINAL ISSUES AND** **THE SŪTRA'S PLACE IN 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TANTRA**

The *Sūtra*'s historical place in the development of Buddhist tantra is a unique one. It stands midway between the nascent systems of *rdzogs-chen* and *mahāyoga* seen in eighth century tantras, and the fully-developed *rdzogs-chen* and *anuttarayoga* practices that came onto the scene beginning in the tenth century. The *Sūtra* exhibits many of the themes that came to be elaborated over the following century. This appendix takes an initial look at the *Sūtra*'s position vis-à-vis two aspects in tantra's evolution: first, the development of detailed *rdzogs-chen* practices involving specific techniques and theories, and then the sexual yoga practices and subtle body theories of the perfection phase (Skt. *sāmpannakrama*, Tib. *rdzogs rim*).

## I. *Rdzogs-chen* practices in the *Sūtra*<sup>82</sup>

In terms of the *Sūtra*'s doctrinal developments, the most important chapters fall under the twelfth "ways of arising," called the "complete discussion of the intention" (*dgongs pa rnam par bgro ba*). This is the final way of arising, and it covers all of the *Sūtra*'s last thirty chapters. Of these, the most technically interesting are the first twelve, chapters forty-five through fifty-six, which, according to the Zurs' commentarial tradition, comprise an extended discussion of "entering the treasury."<sup>83</sup> The importance of these twelve chapters is indicated by the fact the Gnubs-chen begins his introduction with a discussion of them.<sup>84</sup> As a way to broach some of the doctrinal issues raised in these chapters, we can begin with Gnubs-chen's introduction.

Gnubs-chen begins with the three yogas—action yoga, action-performance yoga, and actionless yoga (*bya ba'i rnal 'byor*, *bya ba byed pa'i rnal 'byor*, *bya ba med pa'i rnal 'byor*).<sup>85</sup> He explains that these can be understood as the ground, cause, and fruition (*gzhi*, *rgyu*, *'bras-bu*) respectively, "like the seed, the farming and efforts, and the heaping harvests that are reaped."<sup>86</sup> Gnubs-chen covers action

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<sup>82</sup> This topic is far too large to be addressed in the present appendix and deserves a study in its own right. Unfortunately, a more complete presentation of my research into this area must remain the future. What follows can only serve as an introduction to some of the issues at stake, as well as a general guide to the doctrinal structures used in the *Sūtra*.

<sup>83</sup> See Dam-pa's *Bsdus don*, 133.1

<sup>84</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 6-27.

<sup>85</sup> These appear throughout the *Sūtra*, but are addressed extensively in chapter sixty-nine.

yoga quickly, describing it as the undescribable. Action-performance yoga he leaves to be addressed later, "since it is the principle teaching of the secret tantra."<sup>87</sup> Then he turns to the actionless yoga, which is, "the complete attainment of one's own aims, the effortless perfection of all the activities of others, and free of the time continuing in doing so."

At this point Gnubs-chen moves into a more extensive discussion of this actionless yoga. The *Sūtra* organizes this topic into three sections, or three "doors:" the door leading to practice, the unification door of means, and the secret door of ascertainment (*spyod pa'i 'dren sgor 'jug pa, thabs kyi sbyor sgo, nges pa'i gsang sgo*). The first two doors are discussions of hermeneutics and reasoning that are the necessary precursors to entering the path. Not surprisingly, however, emphasis is laid upon the final door, which is addressed in chapters forty-seven through fifty-six, and to which we now turn.<sup>88</sup>

Each door has three "keys," one for opening, one for explaining, and one for releasing, each of which consists, in turn, of six branches, four sūtras, and

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<sup>86</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 8.4. These three yogas also appear in chapter one of *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*, where, as Gnubs-chen points out, they are discussed in terms of cause, conditions and effect

<sup>87</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 9.

<sup>88</sup> In his introduction, when Gnubs-chen first introduces the "three doors," he tells us that they can also be called "tantra, precept and pith instruction" (*rgyud lung man-ngag*): "Tantra is the six branches for opening the door... The essences of the four sūtras, and the three roots are explained as the precepts and the pith instructions" (*Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 12). In the later Rnying-ma-pa exegetical tradition, this *rgyud lung man-ngag* triad is firmly associated with *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga*. Given the historical importance of the *Sūtra* in the formation of the nine vehicles doxography and thus of the *mahā-anu-ati* categories, it seems likely that this same text is also the *locus classicus* for the *rgyud lung man-ngag* threesome as well.

three roots ('byed pa'i lde mig yan lag drug, dgrol ba'i lde mig mdo bzhi, 'byin pa'i lde mig rtsa ba gsum). These latter three sets are crucial for understanding how the *Sūtra* is organized. They are called upon repeatedly in various settings.

For the third door, the secret door of ascertainment, the first key's six branches are: cause, root instigation, purpose and relation, guiding words, ascertainment, and applications (*rgyu, rtsa ba gleng bslang ba, dgos 'brel, tshig, nges pa, sbyor ba*). Mkhan-po Nus-l丹 summarizes these most succinctly:

The *cause* for the tantra to arise is the setting. The conditions are the *root* instigation which is the basis for the discussion. The *purpose and relation* for stopping debate are four. The *words* for leading to the practice of the meaning are ten. The branches of *ascertainment* are twelve. The *applications* are sixty-one. Through [all] these one is unified with the perfect level.<sup>89</sup>

Thus these six branches are essentially six ways for discussing the *Sūtra* itself. The cause is the three settings (*gleng gzhi*) we see in the *Sūtra*, that of Rudra's taming on Mt. Malaya, that of the transmissions in the pure-lands, including Śākyamuni's deathbed prophecy (which are all described in the so-called "root" text of chapters one through three), and that of Vajrapāṇi's teaching to the five excellent ones (*dam pa lnga*) on Mt. Malaya. The root instigation requires the combined presence and motivation on the parts of the teacher, the audience, and the scribe/compiler (*sdud pa po*—in the case of the *Sūtra*, this is Rāvaṇa). The

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<sup>89</sup> *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 54, 635.2-3.

relation and purpose includes the expressed meaning of the tantra, the expression by Vajrapāṇi, the relation between these two, and the purpose “to manifest the clear light mandala of mind.”<sup>90</sup> The branch of the words that are expressed brings a poetic discussion of how to read a tantra:

There are ten kinds of words of this branch of illumination: (1) With the words of the natural view, one soars higher and higher through realization, like a garuda soaring in the sky. (2) With the words which completely open the door to thusness, one divides it into an outline (*sa gcod*) that fits with the meaning, like the leaps of a tiger. (3) With the words which gather the general meaning, one settles the structure (*khog dbub*), like the jump of a lion.<sup>91</sup> (4) With the words which are united with the relation, one arranges it into sequential chapters, like the waddle of a goose leading [its goslings]. (5) Word-by-word one pays attention to the various [grammatical] conditions, breaking it down into the syllables of the text, like the progress of a tortoise. (6) With the words of the pith instructions on the hidden meanings, one explains what does not fit (*mi mtshams*) so as to fit, like a kid goat climbing a rock. (7) For what is called “important,” with the words which clear obstacles like blood-letting,<sup>92</sup> one cuts all doubts, like an eagle swooping down to devour. (8) With the words of an authentic teaching system, one is uncontrived and uncontaminated, thus attaining trust and confidence in suchness, like a timely thundering rain. (9) With the words of illustrative metaphors, one intricately unites the harmonious and unharmonious extremes, whereby it is made easy to believe and understand, like a mirror.<sup>93</sup> (10) With the words which unite, combine, suggest and resolve whatever has become

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<sup>90</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 567.6.

<sup>91</sup> Mkhan-po Padma Shes-rab notes that the difference between the leap of a tiger versus that of a lion is that the lion looks back as he lands, in that way keeping in sight the beginning and thus the whole overview.

<sup>92</sup> This seems to mean that the blood that is let is the doubts. Tib: *gal po zhes gtar ka gegs sel gyi tshig gis the tshom gcod pa nyid glag gzan la 'jums pa lta bu dang*.

<sup>93</sup> Just as it is easy to see your face when you look in a mirror. In this case, the words would be the mirror.

instable or chaotic, one reckons and puts in order the connections between what was expressed earlier and what was expressed later, like weaving or like a lion-cub in training (*rtsal sbyong*). By joining these ten illustrating metaphors, ten mirrors, with the ten points of their illustrated meanings, the way of being is realized.<sup>94</sup>

The branch of the twelve ascertainties consists of the four piṭakas, the four dharmas, and the four meanings. The sixty-one applications are all types of practice-related lists, such as the four stages of propitiation and accomplishment (*bsnyen grub bzhi*), the four tantric activities (*las bzhi*), and so forth.<sup>95</sup> Taken together, these six branches provide a comprehensive method for analyzing the *Sūtra*'s content.

The second key is the four sūtras, of hearing, of realizing, of actualizing, and the final sūtra. These are covered in brief in chapter fifty-three. They are also called the four renunciations (*nges par 'byung ba*): renunciation through hearing, seeing, direct perception (*mngon sum*), and the non-existence of renunciation. They are basically four stages of increasing subtlety leading to buddhahood, but the discussions are unfortunately rather nondescript.

The third key is the three roots, addressed in chapters fifty-four through fifty-six. These are the roots of illustrative metaphors, of the mistake of disharmony, and of definitive meaning (*mtshon pa dpe'i rtsa ba, mi mthun pa skyon*

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<sup>94</sup> *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 54, 637.7-639.2.

<sup>95</sup> As Nus-Idan points out, Zur Shākyā Seng-ge's list (as represented in Dam-pa's *Bsdus don*) of these is quite different from Gṅubs-chen's.

*gyi rtsa ba, don nges pa'i rtsa ba*). As we turn to these three roots, it is important to note that for Gnubs-chen, “all the dharmas of *atiyoga* are gathered within these three.”<sup>96</sup> This makes the section crucial for our understanding of the development of early *rdzogs-chen* literature. In other works dating from this period, it is unusual to find such detailed discussions about the theory and practice of *rdzogs-chen*. Most of the *sems-sde* texts that represent, generally speaking, the earliest phase of *rdzogs-chen* limit themselves to negative descriptions of meditation—not this, not that, and so on.

Gnubs-chen, at the beginning of chapter fifty-four, classifies these three roots/*atiyoga* as sudden (*gcig char*): “After the teaching on the four sūtras come the various questions on the great object of the sudden.”<sup>97</sup> But then, when one reaches the sub-section on *samādhi*, two approaches are possible—gradual or sudden.<sup>98</sup> One is left wondering about the status of *atiyoga*—is it sudden or both?

Either option contradicts Karmay’s work on Gnubs-chen’s later *Bsam gtan mig sgron*. In this text, Gnubs-chen presents *rdzogs-chen* and *gcig-char* in separate chapters.<sup>99</sup> This distinction prompts Karmay to criticize other scholars for

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<sup>96</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 51, 14.3.

<sup>97</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 661.5. *mdo bzhi bstan ma thag par gcig char ba'i yul chen po rtsa ba gsum dri ba mi mthun pa*.

<sup>98</sup> The gradual section begins on *Mun pa'i go cha* 51, 25.3, and the sudden section begins on 38.3.

<sup>99</sup> Chapters four through seven are titled as follows: ch. 4: *tsen man rim gyis 'jug pa'i gzhung bstang pa'i le'u ste bzhi pa'o*; ch. 5: *ston mun cig car 'jug pa'i lugs bshad pa'i le'u*; ch. 6: *rnal 'byor chen po'i gzhung bshad pa'i le'u*; ch. 7: *rdzogs pa chen po'i gzhung rgyas par bkod pa'i le'u*.

conflating the sudden and *rdzogs-chen* doctrines.<sup>100</sup> Karmay was unquestionably right in doing so. However, we must be careful not to take Gnubs-chen's distinction between sudden and *rdzogs-chen* too far by treating the "sudden" and the "gradual" as if they were clearly defined schools in ninth and tenth century Tibet. The supposed "debate" over this issue held at Bsam-yas was only one instance in which the two terms appeared, and it is problematic to assume that over a century later the terms were still being understood in the same way and across all contexts. Gnubs-chen's *Mun pa'i go cha* seems to indicate that the situation was not so simple and his later *Bsam gtan mig sgron* should be reevaluated with this in mind. If in his later work, Gnubs-chen really did consider gradual, sudden, *mahāyoga* and *rdzogs-chen* as four distinct doctrines, then we must conclude that either his use of the terms changed markedly between the writing of his two major works, or in both works he was working with a more nuanced (or perhaps simply chaotic) model than present research has suggested.<sup>101</sup>

Within Gnubs-chen's *Mun pa'i go cha* alone, the terms are used in a number of different ways. As we have seen, *atiyoga* is "the great object of the sudden," while also offering the possibilities of both gradual and sudden

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<sup>100</sup> See Karmay 1988, 86-90, where he criticizes Tucci and others for conflating the two.

<sup>101</sup> Further research on this point is required. Karmay (Karmay 1988, 86) claimed that the *Bsam gtan mig sgron* "is the only work which gives a detailed account of the doctrines of the Rim gyis pa... and Cig car ba." Given the extensive sections on these subjects appearing in the *Mun pa'i go cha* (which was not really available at the time of Karmay's study), this is no longer the case.

approaches. The situation is further complicated when, in this same section on the three doors, Gnubs-chen classifies *mahāyoga* as a “gradual approach” (*rims su 'jug pa*)<sup>102</sup> and *anuyoga* as “a natural view with a sudden object” (*lde'u mig gnyis pa gcig char ba'i yul rang bzhin lta ba*).<sup>103</sup>

It is commonly held, both in the *Sūtra* and throughout the tradition, that *mahāyoga* emphasizes the generation phase (*bskyed rim*) in which the visualization is gradually perfected over an extensive period of practice. *Anuyoga* emphasizes the completion phase (*rdzogs rim*) in which the visualization is produced suddenly, “like a fish leaping out of the water.” And like *anuyoga*, *atiyoga* involves no gradual contrivance of any meditative state whatsoever. Here, Gnubs-chen writes that *atiyoga*’s sudden object—complete enlightenment that has always been primordially present—can be approached suddenly or gradually.<sup>104</sup>

The section on the gradual approach to the three roots/*atiyoga* begins by describing how to cultivate the samādhi. First one identifies the correct meaning of secret mantra through intellectual study. Then one cultivates that view:

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<sup>102</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 656.2

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 656.6-657.1. And the situation is even further complicated when, in chapter sixty-eight, gradual is used to refer to the causal vehicles and sudden for all six tantric vehicles, from *kriyā* on up. See *Mdo*, 532.3-4 and *Mun pa'i go cha* 51, 425.2.

<sup>104</sup> And the latter paradox—a gradual approach to a sudden object—brings with it all the contradictions and playful turns of phrase that pervade *rdzogs-chen* literature. It should also be noted that in the later tradition, *rdzogs-chen* is considered to have a sudden and a gradual component, corresponding to the practices of *khregs-chod* and *thod-rgal*.

When the time comes for cultivating [the meaning], one ties the constantly engaging [monkey-like] mental consciousness to the pillar of wakefulness and attention. Then, similarly, one catches the illusory conceptualizations of the [thieving-cat-like]<sup>105</sup> afflicted mind consciousness. Without engaging even the slightest bit in the doors of the five assemblies [of physical sense consciousnesses] reaching out to objects, one employs the state of not perceiving the skandhas of the [physical] elements, the āyatanas and the subject-object conceptualizations. Then the good qualities of the great equality ground-of-all, the spontaneously accomplishing reality, are illuminated.<sup>106</sup>

Here, the practice of *rdzogs-chen* meditation is described using the eight consciousnesses that were first developed in Yogācāra writings.<sup>107</sup> In fact, throughout the *Sūtra*'s discussions of *rdzogs-chen*, these eight play a central role. The main idea seems to be that one withdraws into the ground-of-all (Skt. *alāyavijñāna*, Tib. *kun gzhi*) consciousness until enlightenment spontaneously dawns.

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<sup>105</sup> This metaphor is explained by Nus-l丹 (*Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa*, 55, 119.3) as follows: When creeping up on a mouse, first the claws are extended, ready for the pounce, then it grabs. Thus *nyon yid* would be the cat ready for the pounce.

<sup>106</sup> Gnubs-chen, Vol.2, 25.6-26.2: *bsgom pa'i dus na/kun tu 'jug pa'i yid kyi dran rig dmigs pa'i ka ba la btags nas/ nyon mongs pa'i yid dang rtog pa'i rgyu 'grul snga ma bzhin du gzung ngo/tshogs lnga'i sgo cung zad yul la 'phror mi gzhug par/khams dang skye mched dang gzung 'dzin gyi rtog pa'i phung pa mi dmigs pa'i ngang du bkol la/kun gzhi mnyam pa chen po'i yon tan lhun gyis grub pa'i chos nyid gsal bar byed de*. The animal metaphors are added in from the root text. Translation in places follows Nus-l丹's comments rather than the Gnubs-chen's own words. See *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 55, 119.2-121.1.

<sup>107</sup> These are the consciousnesses of: (1) the ground-of-all consciousness, (2) the afflicted mind consciousness, (3) the mental consciousness, (4-8) and the five physical sense consciousnesses (*kun gzhi*, *nyon yid*, *yid shes*, and so forth).

In cultivating this *samādhi*, a number of problems (*skyon*) can arise. These can be of three kinds: conceptualizations, mental wavering, and obscurations (*rtog pa, g.yeng ba, sgrub pa*), listed in order of increasing subtlety and each subdivided. The drawbacks (*nyes dmigs*) of these problems are the various rebirths to which they lead. Thus, each conceptualization brings one to a corresponding rebirth, from the lower realms to the god-realms. The mental wavering lead one to become a *tirthika* ('heretic'). And the respective obscurations lead to the form realm, the formless realm, and to the lower vehicles of *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *cittamātra*. In this way, the "cure" for each of these problems, which is an analytic meditation on the causes behind it, brings one to a progressively higher state, so that one can be carried higher and higher through increasingly subtle philosophical levels.

Next, the *Sūtra* turns to the experience of this ideal *samādhi*. This section sounds remarkably similar to what became known in later *rdzogs-chen* discourse as *khregs chod*:

Body and mind are relaxed and open, left totally natural. Without tightness emerging for any purpose, simply without separating or slipping from equanimity, with an easy mind and without thinking of anything at all, rest. Persevere in that for longer and longer periods.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 51, 34.2-3. *Ius sems khong klod bag bdal te yang bags su bzhag la/ ched du grims phyung ba med par btang snyoms kyis ma bral ma shor tsam du blo dal bar cir yang mi bsam par bzhag go/de le yun je ring du 'bad do.*

As the durations extend, five signs of progress (*don la nyé ba'i rtags*) will arise: heat,<sup>109</sup> omens, magical displays, higher perception, and wisdom (*drod, rtags, cho phrul, mn̄gon shes, ye shes*). These five signs arise as the coarse and subtle objects, the coarse and subtle subjects, and the latent predispositions (*bag la nyal ba*) are purified.<sup>110</sup> Finally, one comes to possess the eye of wisdom, “and is able to pour forth the profound teachings through the dynamism of one’s reason, without having studied in words.”<sup>111</sup>

All of the above is of particular note because it provides an idea of how detailed theories and precise practices first began to return to the rhetorical space of “pristine absence,” that had been cleared out by the earlier *sems-sde* denials of all such structures.<sup>112</sup> And yet we should not think of Gnubs-chen and his *Sūtra* as the radical cutting-edge in *rdzogs-chen*. There are a number of indications that precisely the opposite was true—that he was a conservative resisting the returning tide of complex theories, practices, and visions into *rdzogs-chen*. We

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<sup>109</sup> Experiences of heat (*drod*) play a particularly prominent role throughout the *Sūtra* and the other three of the four *anuyoga* root sūtras. The term is noticeably absent from *Sems lung chen mo*, the “fifth sūtra,” further proof of its marginal role in this set of teachings (see Appendix Three on this point).

<sup>110</sup> See *Dgongs 'dus 'grel pa* 55, 136.6.

<sup>111</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 51, 37.1.

<sup>112</sup> See Germano 1994, 209-210.

see his conservatism in his explanation of *atiyoga* that appears in his commentary to chapter forty-four's presentation of the nine vehicles:

As for the system in which all is perfected as the great identity by means of the system of the ultimate yoga, *atiyoga*: Dualistic phenomena, such as "totally afflicted vs. completely pure," are illuminated within the naturally and spontaneously established state, originally un-illuminated and un-displayed. There is absolutely no comprehension of any logical paradigms for evaluating things. Simply by not settling on, thinking about, nor analyzing any ideas at all, the meaning of suchness becomes seen without seeing. In the *Rdo rje sems dpa' nam mkha' che* it is said, "Freed by liberation through non-action, effortless self-arising wisdom also teaches the path of freedom from liberation." Thus sheerly by not practicing the activities of evaluating things or seeking meanings, one is said to be, merely in terms of a linguistic designation, "free." This is because confining phenomena are not perceived [in the first place]. There is at essence no object, and the mind has no basis at all within the nonduality of space and wisdom. So there is nothing to understand apart from the ropes of the mind.

Someone might object: "Well then, if there is absolutely nothing to understand, how do phenomena become suchness?" When one knows that there is nothing whatsoever to know, then in the sense of linguistic designations used in expressions like, "realize without realizing" or "see without seeing," one is said to "realize." This is training without training. Whoever holds, with such an indwelling confidence, the meaning that embraces what is being explained, has exhausted the three doors [of body, speech and mind], thus accomplishing nothing.

Regarding the stem of this fruit, this forefather for all the conquerors of the three times: Because one's own mind has been illuminated as suchness, even when cultivating in that way, gnosis does not follow after suchness, does not hold, does not think about or analyze, does not perceive, does not actualize, does not seek, does not wish for the intellect to arrive, and is beyond objects of meditation. In this way one encounters the grandmother reality of the utter non-existence of thought. And for that reason, as a term for the utter lack of any desire for those [mental activities], one uses "non-conceptual." In that way, there is no wavering at all and there is nothing to cultivate. Similarly, there is not even

cultivating *not* blocking one's cultivation; that is the great cultivation without sessions.

One great person of today is [said to be] the foundation of the dharma. But this person thinks that in *atiyoga* there is a need to perceive something. In the pith instructions of [this teacher] who perceives a method, it is called, "liberation." But clearly he has not attained confidence in the meaning of thusness. That blind man is like one who wishes to open the treasury (?) with a bone.<sup>113</sup>

Thus it is only at the end of the passage that its purpose comes out. The whole explanation is a carefully constructed argument against a contemporary of Gnubs-chen's. This person was giving private advice to his students that in the state of non-dual reality there are certain visions, and he was calling this method "liberation." In the first paragraph Gnubs-chen tells us there are no

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<sup>113</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 511.4-514.1. *shin tu rnal 'byor a ti yo ga'i lugs kyis ril bdag nyid chen por rdzogs pa'i lugs ni/ kun nas nyon mongs pa dang rnam par byang ba zhes bya ba la sogs pa gnyis kyi chos rnames gdod nas ma bsal ma bkod par rang bzhin lhun gyis grub pa'i ngang du gsal ba la/ dngos po gzhal ba'i grub mtha' khong du chud par byar yang med de/ 'du shes gang du'ang ma zhugs ma bsams ma dpyad pa nyid kyis ji bzhin pa'i don mthong ba med par mthong bar 'gyur te/ rdo rje sems dpa' nam mkha' che las kyang/ bya ba med pas grol bas grol/ rang byung ye shes btsal med pas/ grol nas grol ba'i lam yang ston/ zhes gsungs pas/ dngos po gzhal zhing don tshol ba'i bya byed med pa nyid kyis tha snyad tsam du grol zhes kyang bya ste/ de la bcings pa'i chos ma dmigs pa'i phyir ro/ de bas na ngo bos yul bral ba la dbyings ye shes gnyis su med pa la'ang yid mi rten pas/ sems thag pa nas gud nas go bar byar med do/ 'o na gdan nas go ba byar med na chos ji bzhin pa nyid du ji ltar 'gyur zhe na/ ci la'ang rig par byar med par rig na ma rtogs par rtogs/ ma mthong bar mthong ba'i bla dwags tshig gi tha snyad du rtogs zhes bya ste/ bslab pa med pa'i bslab pa'o/ de lta bu'i gdeng chud pa la 'chad pa'i zin pa'i don dang ldan pas sgo gsum sha thang bas bsgrub pa med do/ dus gsum gyi rgyal ba ril gyi spyi mes 'bras bu'i sdong po ni/ rang gi sems ji bzhin par gsal ba nyid pas de lta bu'i bsgom pa'i dus na'ang/ rig pa ji bzhin pa'i rjes su 'brang ba med/ 'dzin pa med/ bsam pa dang dpyod pa med/ dmigs pa med/ mnong du mi byed/ ched du mi gnyer/ blos phebs par mi 'dod de/ bsgom pa'i yul las 'das pa'o/ de ltar cir yang bsam du med pa nyid phyi mo'i chos nyid thog tu bab pas/ de dag nyid du 'dod pa'ang med pa'i bla dwags su rnam par mi rtog pa zhes kyang bya ste/ de lta bu la ni yengs pa'and med bsgom rgyu'ang med do/ de ltar rtogs na bsgom pa mi 'gog bsgom pa'ang med de/ thun mtshams med pa'i bsgom pa chen po'o/ dus deng sang gi gang zag rab gcig de ni chos kyi gzhi yin no/ gang zag gi bsam pas a ti yo ga la dmigs dgos pas/ thabs dmigs pa can gyi man ngag gis 'grol zhes smra ba ni/ de nyid kyi don gyi gding ma rnyed par gsal te/ mdongs pa de ni dper na dong rwa'i lde'u mig gis bang mdzod tha ram 'byed par 'dod pa dang 'dra'o/ de lta bu'i don chen po ni/ ril ma btsal lhun gyis rdzogs pas rdzogs pa spyir chibs kyi sa'o.*

illuminations or displays, and he cites the *Nam mkha' che*, perhaps the most widely-respected *rdzogs-chen* tantra of his day, saying that there is not even “liberation.” In the second and third paragraphs he answers the imagined objection (of his opponent, one assumes) that some method must be required. No method is needed because from *atiyoga*'s point of view there is no problem in the first place.

Unfortunately it is impossible at this point to know who the teacher in question might have been. At the time Gnubs-chen was writing, Tibet was in the midst of its “dark period,” and little is known of Buddhism apart from Gnubs-chen's writings. However, a century and a half later, as the dark period receded, new texts were revealed that were teaching all sorts of visual displays illuminating in the sky of the non-dual reality. While these *snying thig* ('seminal heart') teachings gradually gained in popularity over the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the direct inheritors of Gnubs-chen's lineage were the renowned teachers of the Zur clan. Evidence suggests that the patriarchs of this clan held a conservative position regarding these radical new teachings and stuck to what became known as the *sems sde* and the *klong sde* over and against the *man-ngag sde*, which contained the new teachings.<sup>114</sup> Given all these facts, the above passage may be evidence of this same disagreement in its nascent form, as far back at the turn of the tenth century. Even as he dared to write on *rdzogs-chen*

under his own name, Gnubs-chen seems to have held a conservative position within the dark period *rdzogs-chen* movement.<sup>115</sup>

Gnubs-chen's presentation of these nine vehicles provides a useful window into the development of the *rdzogs-chen* in one other way. Germano has suggested that *rdzogs-chen* began in the late eighth century as a part of the "generation-perfection-great perfection trio" (*skyed rdzogs gsum*), all of which were originally gathered under *mahāyoga*.<sup>116</sup> As Karmay has pointed out, some Tibetans writing after the dark period were disturbed by the separation of what they saw as mere phases into three distinct vehicles. Such arguments, Karmay writes, had "the echo of a distant tradition in the past where *Atiyoga* was not considered to be a *theg pa*."<sup>117</sup> Karmay goes on to point out that in none of the

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<sup>115</sup> Gnubs-chen's position in the development of Tibetan Buddhism deserves a study of its own. In several places Gnubs-chen give advice to his contemporaries in a remarkably authoritative tone. It is clear he commanded considerable respect even in his day. His conservatism in the passage cited above is offset by a certain recklessness exhibited elsewhere in his writings: "The Conqueror said that the things of samsara are the suchness reality. But the mantrikas of today who don't see the meaning of that are addicted to perception with their cowardly intellects as if dribbling bit-by-bit. They, without having seen the great meaning in their own experience, say that actionlessness is not a basis for dharma nor an adequate object of practice. And they say the beginners should think and analyze. These people are not worthy of the sudden approach free from the great means. Alas, such cause for compassion." (*Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 675.2. 'khor ba'i dngos pa de kho na nyid chos nyid yin par rgyal bas gsungs so/de lta bu'i don ni ma mthong ba'i dus deng sang gi sngags pa blo phod rdul du snyung blugs pa ltar dmigs pa la dga' ba dag/don chen pa ma mthong ba'i rang nyams kyis bya ba med pa ni chos kyi gzhi dang las su rung ba'i spyod yul ma yin no zhes smra zhing/ las dang po pas bsam dpyod dgos so zhes zer ba ni thabs chen po dang bral ba gcig char 'jug pa'i skal ba med pa yin te/kye ma thugs rje'i gnas su gyur pa'o.) On the one hand Gnubs-chen is conserving *rdzogs-chen* as a sphere free from thinking, but on the other hand he seems to be promoting the practice of introducing students to this state early in their practice.

<sup>116</sup> See Germano 1994, 213.

<sup>117</sup> Karmay 1988, 148.

early presentations of the nine vehicles are *mahā-anu-ati* labeled as “vehicles.”

Given what we have seen in the *Sūtra* and Gnubs-chen’s *Mun pa’i go cha*, we can safely say that *rdzogs-chen* had been articulated as an independent vehicle by the late ninth century and that what should be included in this *atiyoga* was being hotly contested.

## II. Perfection phase practices in the *Sūtra*

The later Tibetan tradition classified the *Sūtra* under *anuyoga*, which leads one to wonder how the *Sūtra* viewed its own position in relation to the triad of *mahā-anu-ati*. After extensive searching, nowhere does the *Sūtra* agree with its later exegetes that it is a work of *anuyoga*. It definitely considers itself “secret mantra,” but this seems to include all three vehicles of *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga*, and *atiyoga*.<sup>118</sup>

The original purpose of the *Sūtra* was not to set forth the vehicle of *anuyoga*, but to create a complete system of doctrines, myths, and rituals to explain all the tantric vehicles, and the highest three especially.

If the *Sūtra* does not see *anuyoga* as representative of its own system, how does it see *anuyoga*? The clearest exposition of the vehicle as a whole comes, once again, in chapter forty-four’s presentation of the nine vehicles:

As for the system of *anuyoga*, practicing the method of perfection: When one realizes, just as it is, the meaning in which all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are illuminated, without fluctuations in degree, as the son [mandala], the great-bliss mind of enlightenment, at that time, the

*dharmadhātu* is utterly without any action nor basis for perception. Sheer gnosis is illuminated in the likeness of an essence unestablished. Since everything is realized as essentially non-dual, all phenomena are known in their thusness to be distinct yet perfect and are illuminated through the three times in the oneness of all the phenomena of causality. Thus there is not the slightest gradual generation of the maṇḍala nor adherence to deliberate practice.<sup>119</sup>

Several points can be gleaned from this description. First and foremost, that *anuyoga* involves “the method of perfection” seems to confirm that the *Sūtra* agreed with the later tradition that *anuyoga* is to be associated with the perfection phase. Second, the description of the maṇḍala appearing “just as it is,” “without fluctuations in degree,” and “utterly without action,” is quite unlike the description used in discussing *mahāyoga*, which reads: “cultivate the gradual generation of the deity’s maṇḍala.”<sup>120</sup> This too fits with the later tradition’s view of *anuyoga*. It is often said, for example, that in *anuyoga* the maṇḍala is not constructed through painstaking concentrative effort, but appears in a flash, “like a fish leaping out of the water.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 510.4-511.3. *a nu yo ga rdzogs pa'i tshul du spyod pa'i lugs ni/ 'khor ba dang mya ngan las 'das pa'i chos rnams sras byang chub kyi sems bde ba chen por che chung med par gsal ba'i don ji lta ba bzhin du rtogs pa'i dus na/ chos kyi dbyings bya ba tsam la'ang dmigs pa'i rten mi 'cha' ste/ rig pa nyid ngo bo ma grub bzhin gsal bas gnyis med pa'i ngo bor ril rtogs pas chos so cog/ de nyid du ma 'dres rdzogs par mkhyen cing/ rgyu 'bras kyi chos thams cad kyi bdag nyid yin par dus gsum du gsal lo/ de lta bu la dkyil 'khor rim par bskyed pa dang/spyod pa ched du bsten pa'ang med de.*

<sup>120</sup> *Mun pa'i go cha* 50, 510.3.

<sup>121</sup> Norbu 1984, 32-33.

The above description of *anuyoga* does lack one piece that is central to later formulations of *anuyoga* and the perfection phase, that is, any mention of *rtsa rlung* practices. After the tenth century, a perfection phase practitioner would be overwhelmingly concerned with these manipulations of the subtle bodily energies, but here they are conspicuously absent. In fact, these practices are barely present at all in the *Sūtra*.

One piece of evidence appears at the opening to chapter fifty-five. Doctrinally speaking, this chapter is the heart of the *Sūtra*. It addresses the second of the three roots and is an extended discussion on the “root” of enlightenment, namely the ground-of-all consciousness, and the non-realization of that root, which is the state of “darkness.”<sup>122</sup> The entire chapter takes place in a new setting (*gleng gzhi*), that of the secret body, that is introduced at the beginning of the chapter as follows:

Then in this way the Bhagavan Lord of the supreme secret, rested for an instant in the secret place called “the lotus-endowed,” the supreme secret palace of the illusory womb that is transformed by the wheel of the [vajra] uṣṇīṣa. At the time of that temporality,<sup>123</sup> the immeasureably excellent beings’ doubts regarding suchness, the supreme secret, were cut. There was melting all the way. And the melting was held up. The doubts

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<sup>122</sup> The importance of this chapter is perhaps indicated by the title of Gnubs-chen’s commentary (“Armor Against Darkness”), which appears in the last line of the chapter: “The explanation herein of the darkness side should be considered an armor to be worn” (*Mdo*, 440.3-4). It is also the longest chapter in Nus-ldan’s commentary, filling almost 300 folio sides. Unfortunately, a discussion of this chapter will have to be left for later.

<sup>123</sup> *de'i dus de'i tshe na*, referring to the fourth time of the eternal present that is neither the same as nor apart from past, present and future. This phrase plays a recurring role throughout the *Sūtra*.

having been cut, when it arose once more, he was gathered in that [assembly].<sup>124</sup>

Here we have the clearest evidence the *Sūtra* included a tradition of *rtsa lung* practices. The combination of sexual elements with the melting of the *thig-le* here indicates that the basics of the *rtsa lung* practices were in place. This passage is vague though, and even Nus-Idan must resort to “today’s treatises on [sexual] union” to make sense of it. I have not found any other explicit mention of subtle body teachings in either the *Sūtra* or Gnubs-chen’s commentary.<sup>125</sup> While the above quotation indicates that these teachings were in the background, the lack of other similar passages seems to indicate that they were not yet being committed to writing in any detail. Thus when Gnubs-chen reaches the opening passage to chapter fifty-five, he passes over the description of sexual yoga in silence,<sup>126</sup> apparently reluctant to discuss these practices in writing.

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<sup>124</sup> *Mdo*, 414.5-415.1. Additions based on Nus-Idan’s commentary (Vol.3, 156.5-158.1). I leave this passage unexplained since these complicated details are not the focus of the *Sūtra* and thus not the focus of the present dissertation. ‘di ltar bcom ldan ‘das gsang ba mchog gi bdag po de/ gsang ba’i gnas padmo can zhes bya ba/gtsug tor ‘khor los sgyur ba’i sgyu ma’i lhums gsang ba mchog gi pho brang na/skad cig bzhugs pa de’i tshe de’i dus na/gang skyes bu dam pa dpag tu med pa dag de kho na nyid/ gsang ba dam pa’i the tshom gcod pa dang/yongs su zhu ba dang/zhu bar dog [Nus-Idan reads *bsdog*] dang/the tshom chad nas slar dong ba na/gang kho bo der ‘dus par gyur pas.

<sup>125</sup> There is an interesting set of *samādhi* practices found at the end of chapter seventy-three in which, seated on a moon or a sun disc, one is forcefully ejected out the penis to travel through the buddha-fields. But these practices’ main focus is to gain worldly powers like walking on water. There are some parallels between some of them and the *rdzogs-chen* preliminary practices. Compare to Germano 1997, 324-5.

<sup>126</sup> He writes only, “The secret body of the teacher, the king of secret mantra, rested in the place of the consort’s space” (*Mun pa’i go cha* 51, 46.5-6).

The possibility is raised that, for a brief time in the second half of the ninth century, the perfection phase *rtsa lung* practices may have been transmitted orally.

## APPENDIX SIX: DESCRIPTION OF THE SPOKEN TEACHINGS FESTIVAL

What follows is a brief description of this festival as it was performed on two recent occasions, first at Rnam-grol-gling monastery in June of 2000 and then at Dpal-yul monastery in June of 2001. Both of these monasteries are presently overseen by Penor Rinpoche, the head of the Rnying-ma school. The description is slanted so as to highlight how the various Spoken Teachings rituals, almost all of which were composed at Smin-grol-gling in the late seventeenth century, are put together to form the festival. For this reason, certain descriptions are excluded in favor of others. The inner workings of a given *sādhana*, for example, will be ignored so as to focus on how the *sādhana* as a whole fits into the larger scheme. Additional detail is provided on those sections that bear directly on the *Sūtra* ritual tradition.

### **Day one: the root dance (*rtsa 'chams*).**

The instructions for this first dance are contained in its dance notes ('*chams yig*), which are entitled the *Khrag 'thung khro bo'i grub 'chams kyi brjod byang kun bzang rnam par rtsen pa'i rol pa*. The text has been reproduced only informally, as hand-

written copies made by the individual dancers involved. During the Chinese invasion, the dance notes for this and the other two dances in the festival were lost, so when Thubzang Rinpoche went to south India to help revive the festival at Rnam-grol-gling, he composed new dance notes for this root dance and for the wrathful dance, deriving both from the *Māyajala* system. The offering dance (*gar 'chams*) is drawn from another important Spoken Teachings deity, that of Sangs-rgyas Mnyam-sbyor (Skt. Samayoga).

Called the “root” because it opens the festival, this first dance is the longest of the three. The dancers wear only hats. No masks are worn, though they are visualized by the dancers, each deity having three faces, six arms and four legs. The dance is divided into two parts. In the morning the peaceful section is performed, in the afternoon the wrathful. As with all three dances, it is performed outside in the monastery’s largest courtyard. A large number of laypeople typically gather to watch, and along one side, upon a raised platform, sit the presiding lamas and the musicians bearing the long horns and huge drums. At the center of the dance space stands a large shrine holding offerings and ritual implements. This is supposedly the same table that will later hold the peaceful *Māyajala* sand mandala, though in practice a different table is used. In this sense, then, the root dance prepares the ground for the mandalas. Around this central shrine are four smaller shrines, each holding the seven traditional offering bowls and arranged in one of the four directions, each with a brocade

cloth colored according to the direction: blue in the east, yellow in the south, red in the west, and green in the north.

The performance begins with a single figure ritually pouring the “golden libation” (*gser skyems*), onto the ground as an offering to the local land spirit (*sa bdag*) for his permission to use the space. Such golden libation offerings are extremely common at the start of ritual dances. Then the dancers enter and dance, each holding a dagger and skull-cup.<sup>127</sup> Eventually they break into the four directions, with seven dancers standing in each group, arranged in a line facing the center. These four groups of seven are the twenty-eight wrathful Ísvari goddesses, the gatekeepers for the forty-two peaceful deities of the *Māyajala*. Each group wears robes colored to match the shrine table in its corresponding direction. Before the central shrine is seated the main deity wearing black robes and facing east with a parasol (*gdugs*) held over him. This is the dance leader (*'chams dpon*), and he must be an incarnate lama (*sprul sku*). Thus there are twenty-nine dancers in all. With the gatekeepers arranged as they are, guarding the doors of the four directions, this is in effect a portrayal of the

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<sup>127</sup> These ritual dances are in fact a series of smaller dances seamlessly strung together, all of which begin and end on the same pose. Thus, for example, the morning’s peaceful dance starts with the dance for the dharmadhātu (*chos dbyings 'chams*), followed by the dance for overpowering all existing appearances (*snang srid dbang du 'dus*), followed by the dance for generating the noble sky-walkers (*mkha' 'gro dpal skyed*), and so on. All these are laid out in the dance notes.

*Māyajala* maṇḍala of peaceful deities.<sup>128</sup> The central deity reads an initial offering prayer, then turns to read a similar prayer to each of the four directional groups.

After these prayers are finished, the main deity returns to dance before the central shrine, first alone, then joined by the twenty-eight Īsvari who remain in their four lines. The music starts quietly with soft drumbeats only, then the symbols join in, though still relatively quiet. Then, suddenly, with a crash of drums breaking the almost hypnotic scene, in rush six troublesome demons. They dance chaotically with loud music and then run out, apparently tamed, leaving the twenty-nine deities still dancing more energetically than before their arrival.

After a short tea break, the twenty-nine dancers spread into a circle to dance all together. While they dance, a door in the fashion of those seen on maṇḍalas is drawn in chalk in the northern direction. As the circle turns, each deity symbolically enters the maṇḍala by dancing around the outline of this door. After some more dancing, they all exit in a sudden, mad dash, as if to excuse the need to end the dance. Thus ends the peaceful section.

After lunch comes the wrathful root dance, still based upon the *Māyajala* system. It takes far less time than the morning's dance. The dancers wear the

<sup>128</sup> De Nebesky-Wojkowitz (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, 12) mentions a "root dance of the peaceful and wrathful deities" (*zhi khro'i rtsa 'chams*) that "can be held only in the richest monasteries since masks and garments for over one hundred participants are required. The monastery of Mindroling is known for staging this dance on an especially grand scale." This would seem to be closely related to our own root dance. If so, our Root Dance may also, under ideal circumstances, require "over one hundred participants," representing the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities of the maṇḍala. Today the number has been reduced to include only the gate-keepers and the central deity.

same costumes and hold the same implements, and again the purpose is to prepare the ritual for the festival's performance. Before the dance begins, the four shapes (a circle, square, semi-circle and triangle), symbolizing each tantric activities of pacification, expansion, overpowering and wrath, are drawn on the ground, each in its corresponding direction. Around these, in the circle formation, a series of dances is performed.

Next, the dance leader moves to the center. He is handed a hammer, and one-by-one he nails ten ritual daggers (*phur pa*) into ten triangular boxes. During each nailing he reads a text providing the necessary visualizations, prayers and the Vajrakilaya mantra. This ritual is meant to subjugate any demons who might disturb the ritual space. As each dagger is completed, the box holding it is carried over to its corresponding direction and placed on the ground. Finally all the daggers are removed and the dancing recommences. Soon after, they file out, slowly this time. Following the dance, the ten daggers in their ten boxes are placed under the table upon which the wrathful *Māyajala* mandala is laid out. As noted above, the primary purpose of this root dance is to prepare the ground for the mandalas to be built.

#### **Day two: the drawing ritual ('*bri chog*).**

Day two begins early. At 5:30 a.m. the drawing rituals specific to each mandala are performed simultaneously in each hall. If the festival were performed in full,

it would require a maṇḍala for each of the thirteen principal deities of the Spoken Teachings:

1. The Gathered Great Assembly maṇḍala (*Tshogs chen 'dus pa*)
2. The peaceful *Māyajala* maṇḍala (*Sgyu 'phrul zhi ba*)
3. The wrathful *Māyajala* maṇḍala (*Sgyu 'phrul khro bo*)
4. *Sangs-rgyas Mnyam-sbyor*
5. *Dong-sprugs 'khor-ba kun-sgrol*
6. *Yang-dag zla-gam dgu-pa*
7. *Rog Phur-pa*
8. *Rong-zom phur-pa*
9. *Gshin-rje gshed-dmar*
10. *Gshin-rje gshad Kha-thun nag-po*
11. *Gshin-rje gdong-drug*
12. *Padma brgya-ldan*
13. *Lung-lugs tshe-dpag-med*<sup>129</sup>

There is in fact a fourteenth maṇḍala that is secretly present, that of Legs-ldan, the protector for the entire Spoken Teachings. (Note that Legs-ldan was the name Rudra received after his subjugation.) No separate maṇḍala is constructed

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<sup>129</sup> See Zangpo 1988, 97.

for Legs-Idan, but he is secretly present in the combination of the Yang-dag and the Phur-pa mandalas.<sup>130</sup>

Although all these mandalas are supposed to be accomplished for this festival, since the Chinese invasion no monastery has had the resources to do so. Therefore, for the past few years at Dpal-yul, only the first seven listed above are accomplished (as well as Legs-Idan, since Yang-dag and Phur-pa are present). At Rnam-grol-gling, Dong-sprugs is not practiced, but Gshin-rje is.<sup>131</sup>

The drawing rituals are performed from about 5:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. in each hall simultaneously. In the main hall, where the Gathered Great Assembly mandala is practiced, the drawing ritual text used is the *Dri med 'od kyi 'phreng ba* by Gter-bdag Gling-pa. Immediately following an recitation from this text, the

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<sup>130</sup> This according to Thubzang Rinpoche, who adds that the hidden presence of this fourteenth mandala is explained by Dharmasri in his writings on the Spoken Teachings. More research should be done on this, but for now it may be worth noting that Appendix Three identifies Phur-pa and Yang-dag as the two principal influences acting on the *Sūtra* tradition in its earliest days. These two deities also play the two central roles in the final taming of Rudra. Could the early influence of these two deities in the *Sūtra* tradition explain Legs-Idan's connection to these two mandalas?

<sup>131</sup> I was unable to determine which of the three possible Gshin-rje forms is used.

At Dpal-yul the Gathered Great Assembly is practiced in the main hall, while the remaining six are practiced two-to-a-hall in three other halls. The two *Māyajala* mandalas are accomplished in opposite corners of the Śākyamuni temple, Dong-sprugs and Sangs-rgyas Mnyam-sbyor are practiced in the Guru temple, and Phur-pa and Yang-dag in the Vajrasattva temple. At Rnam-grol-gling all seven mandalas have their own temple, with the Gathered Great Assembly in the main hall.

According to Rmong-rtsa Sprul-sku, Zhe-chen in Tibet practices only five mandalas: (1) the Gathered Great Assembly, (2) wrathful *Māyajala*, (3) Yang-dag, (4) Sangs-rgyas mnyam-sbyor, and (5) Dong-sprugs. At Kah-thog all the mandalas are practiced, though all in the same hall, arranged in a circle around the Gathered Great Assembly mandala. At each of the thirteen mandalas, 15-30 monks are seated to accomplish the *sādhana*.

monks arrange the substances that will be used in constructing the mandala in one corner of the mandala table.

This done, all halls empty outside to meet in the courtyard, where they perform the sacrificial cakes (*gtor ma*) offering, with much ringing of bells, taking about ten minutes in all. Then all return to their respective halls. The *vajrācārya* (at Dpal-yul, this was Karma Sku-chen, the head sprul-sku residing at the monastery) sits before the mandala table and purifies the colored sands and other substances arranged upon the lotus flower, while the other monks chant along. Then he blesses the table itself, sprinkling water from the vase just purified. Next he and his assistant (*mchod g.yog*) twist together the colored strings and ritually act out laying the basic lines of the mandala—the four cardinal and intermediate lines and the four sides. Then the deities are placed (*lha'i sta gon*) by the *vajrācārya* dabbing with one finger the blessed saffron water on each site on the mandala and the assistant immediately placing one grain of rice upon each dab. Given the number of deities in the Gathered Great Assembly, this takes some time.

Next comes the vase consecration (*bum pa'i sta gon*). The vase is placed at the center of the table, with the skull-cup on top of it. A string tied to it leads to the *vajrācārya* who holds it to his heart. After the prayers and mantras are recited, the waters from the skull are added to those in the vase. The empty skull-cup is turned upside down upon the table. According to Karma Sku-chen

this signifies a job well-done. Finally the *vajrācārya* returns to his throne to close the rite. This ends by around ten a.m. The skull cup is left where it is until the *vajrācārya* examines his dreams that night for signs of any problems.

### **Day three: pouring the sands.**

Day three is spent on the task of creating the seven mandalas out of the colored sand that were prepared the day before. The descriptions for all the Spoken Teachings mandalas are described in a short work (thirty-four folios) entitled the *Snga 'gyur bka' gter sgrub dkyil nyer mkho rnam kyi thig chog rab gsal kun dga'i mdzes rgyan*. On folio nine it describes the two levels (peaceful and wrathful) at the center of the Gathered Great Assembly mandala. The peaceful mandala is above the wrathful and is simply described as "like the peaceful *Māyajala* mandala." The lower wrathful mandala is then described in more detail.

### **Day four: building the offering cakes and inviting the deities.**

The morning of the fourth day is spent building the offering cakes, which are then arranged a the shrine built in front of each mandala. In the evening each team congregates in their respective hall to perform a brief ten minute ritual to call down the deities into the now completed mandala. Though this is considered the beginning of the accomplishment ritual, the body of the *sādhana* is not recited until the next morning.

### **Days five - eight: *sādhana* practice.**

Every day the *sādhana* is recited twice. Its title is *Tshogs chen 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs dngos grub char 'bebs*, and it is written by Gter-bdag Gling-pa. A few pages have been added at the beginning of the original text to include prayers to the lineage holders who have lived since the author's day. Unfortunately, an analysis of the *sādhana* is beyond the scope of this study. Simultaneously, the *sādhanas* for each of the other mandalas are performed.

### **Day eight: the ritual dance (*Gar 'chams*).**

This is the shortest of the three dances performed. As mentioned above, it is drawn from the Spoken Teachings system of *Sangs-rgyas Mnyam-sbyor*. Like the root dance, it involves twenty-nine dancers, though I was told that the number is arbitrary, determined only by how many costumes are available. They are dressed in pairs, wearing colored masks and headdresses to appear as offering sky-walkers (Skt. *dākini*, Tib. *Mkha'-gro*). In other ritual dances, actual offering substances may be used, but here they are all visualized (*yid gyi 'phrul ba'i mchod pa*). The dance notes I was shown were hand-written with no title.

### **Day nine: the wrathful dance (*khro 'chams*).**

This final dance is the most action-packed of the three. It is performed with masks and includes the “deliverance rite” (*sgral las*) in which the subjugation of Rudra is reenacted. Like the root dance, it is based upon the *Māyajala* system. The dance notes are entitled *Khrag 'thung khro bo'i grub 'chams kyi brjod byang gar dgu'i glog gi phreng ba*. The colophon confirms that it was composed by Thubzang Rinpoche at Rnam-sgrol-gling when he came there from Tibet to teach this dance.

The evening before, the Rudra effigy (*ling ga*) is made out of dough. This is done in an informal atmosphere, with monks milling about and joking. The effigy is dark blue and modelled as if chained to a board. Its face wears a distressed expression, hands tied behind its back and feet chained together with his knees bowed. Inside the distended belly is a bladder filled with fake blood.<sup>132</sup> The monks building the *ling-ga* him call him Rudra Maratra, a name seen repeatedly in the *Sūtra*'s Rudra-taming myth.

The dance begins with an entrance procession of monks bearing flags. After everyone settles into place, the Rudra effigy is carried into the center of the space with a small carpet before it.<sup>133</sup> It is placed before a single figure who performs the golden libation offering and then exits. Then a dozen monks enter,

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<sup>132</sup> A similar case is described in de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976, 106.

<sup>133</sup> Elsewhere this carpet is an animal skin. See for example *Ibid.*, 18.

wearing the high *pandita* hats, bearing incense, and followed by the dance leader who wears a golden mask and high headdress. The monks stand back to allow all the other dancers to enter, dancing, and join the dance leader. According to the Rnam-sgrol-gling ritual master, Tara Lama, this gold-masked dancer represents Che-mchog Heruka. The other dancers are dressed in pairs sharing the same colored masks. There are thirteen pairs, making twenty-six dancers, plus six smaller dancers wearing animal masks, presumably representing the *phra-men* (Skt. *piśāci*) deities of the wrathful *Māyajala*. Again I was told the number of dancers was determined only by the costumes available. All hold a skull-cup and ritual dagger.

The thirty-three dancers continue to dance for some time until finally Che-mchog approaches the effigy at the center of the circle. A monk is assisting at a small table that has been placed next to the effigy during the dancing. On this table are the necessary implements. The assistant gives Che-mchog a drink of "blood" from a skull cup. The other dancers kneel all around and begin whistling loudly, inviting any interested spirits. Then Che-mchog is handed a special ritual dagger. He dances with it briefly, with the trumpets building to a crescendo, and then kneels on his right knee. The trumpets are now in a frenzy. He holds the dagger with both hands and sticks it into Rudra's heart. Pulling it out, he hands it to the assistant, who now gives him a sword. The others now stand and all dance, with Che-mchog circling the effigy. Completing one round,

Che-mchog hacks several times at Rudra's distended stomach, releasing the "blood." He returns the sword to the assistant, gets back his original skull-cup and dagger, and returns to the outer circle of dancers. All dance while the assistant rips out Rudra's hair to wipe the sword clean with much drama, and then resheathes the sword. Then he puts the head and hair into a triangular box with a lid and takes it away with the small table.

Now everything becomes quiet. The dancers are frozen for a while. Four fools, who have been watching the whole dance from afar, now wander inside the circle for the first time. They approach the corpse and pick nervously at it. Eventually they pick it up and carry it out of the courtyard. The dancers are still quiet with only occasional movement. The fools return with the empty board, and the dancing picks up again. After some time, the dancers exit in pairs, led by Che-mchog who leaves alone.

**Day ten: fire offering (*sbyin sreg*) and blessing distribution (*dngos sgrub len*).** The final day of the festival begins with a fire offering on a grand scale. In fact, four separate fire offerings are performed simultaneously in the same courtyard, one for each of the four activities. In each direction a platform for the fire is built in the appropriate shape (circle, rectangle, semi-circle, triangle). On either side of the fire are tables draped in the corresponding color (white, yellow, red, black) and holding the offering substances. Behind each fire pit is seated the presiding

lama on a high throne. In front, two facing rows of seated monks (with instruments) stretch out towards the center of the courtyard. At the very center are two long horns.

Each of the four fire offering rituals derives from a different Spoken Teachings system: pacification from the peaceful *Māyajala*, expansion from the Gathered Great Assembly, overpowering from Yang-dag, and wrath from the wrathful *Māyajala*. Of particular note is the presence of the triangular box containing Rudra's head from the day before, which appears on a table at the wrathful fire offering. In the midst of the ceremony, the head is sacrificed into the fires.

After lunch, the blessing ceremony is performed. All the local lay people attend this, and there is a festive atmosphere. It is clearly the culmination of the whole ten days. The ceremony takes place in the main hall where the Gathered Great Assembly mandala still stands. In the middle of the hall are many long tables laden with mountains of food. The team that has been accomplishing the Gathered Great Assembly is seated as usual and the rest of the hall is filled with other monks, nuns and laity. One at a time, each of the other halls with the other mandalas empty out as each team proceeds to the main hall. Each team enters ceremoniously in single file, bearing incense and all the blessed objects from their mandala shrine. They progress up the aisle to the *vajrācārya* seated on his throne. The *vajrācārya* is blessed with each object before the next team enters and does

the same. Once all the blessings accumulated over the past days of recitations have been gathered into the one person of the *vajrācārya*, they are then redistributed to the monks and the laity present. The mountain of food is distributed to all assembled, and the people eventually disperse.

As evening falls, a brief butter lamp offering is performed in the same main hall, leaving a sense of peaceful closure. The next morning the mandalas are disassembled, and the sands together with the sacrificial cakes are carried down to the river to be returned to the *nāgas* living there.

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