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bKa' brgyud Treasure and rNying ma Revealer: The *Sras mkhar ma* of Mar pa Lo tsā ba

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Mar pa Lo tsā ba Chos kyi blo gros (1000?–1081?)² is considered the Tibetan founder of the bKa' brgyud tradition. He went to India several times in order to receive from the greatest *siddhas* of his time the latest development in the Yoginī *tantras* that were then in fashion. The collection presented in this article is representative of the teachings that he brought back to Tibet and that contributed to the renewal of Buddhist teachings there from the 11th century onwards. However, the collection was transmitted in a somewhat unusual way, leading us to question several of our assumptions about Mar pa's life-story and the way treasures (*gter*) are defined in Tibet. In the Western world, it was largely unknown until now,³ although it is present in several famous Tibetan collections. It comprises fifteen scrolls of teachings said to have been concealed by Mar pa in the walls of his house, *Sras mkhar*, and revealed by Guru Chos dbang (1212–1270) after five generations. In the following article, I shall discuss the content of the collection, the light it sheds on Mar pa's life and legacy, and its status as a treasure. Some of my conclusions are necessarily tentative, and the data on which they are based could be investigated in more detail in the future, but I hope that this introduction to that mysterious collection

¹ I wish to thank the scholars who helped improve this article, including Lewis Doney and Per Sørensen who were at the ISYT, Robert Mayer and Anne-Marie Blondeau who later shared their thoughts with me, and the two anonymous reviewers. I also thank the CRCAO and the EPHE for their financial help.

² Securely dating the birth and death of Mar pa seems to be a distant dream, since none of the biographies agree on the subject and no outside information can help us ascertain which is correct. Andrew Quintman (2013 (2015)) studies the issue of Mi la ras pa's dates and concludes that Tibetan biographers and historians eventually formulated three main traditions: 1028–1111; 1040–1123; and 1052–1035. The same three traditions emerge from the study of Mar pa's biographies: 1000–1081; 1012–1097; and 1024–1107. I tend to prefer the earlier dates, which correspond with what early biographies state and what late bKa' brgyud historians finally decided on.

³ It is mentioned without further detail in Martin 2001: 26.

may help advance our knowledge of the development of the various Tibetan Buddhist traditions in the first centuries of the second millennium.

My own story of how I discovered this teaching may serve as a short introduction to the various versions, although much more may actually be necessary to give a full account of the variants of this 150-folio long collection. The first time I heard of it was when I was researching Mar pa's biographies for my Master's thesis.⁴ While checking "Nāropā"⁵ in Dan Martin's *Tibskrit*, I found Martin's note on the *Fifteen Scrolls on the Six Doctrines from mkhar kha ma*, which, he said, contained an autobiographical account of Mar pa. I returned now and again to those biographical passages in the *Indian Mahāmudrā Works*,⁶ but finally decided that the autobiographical passage in question was decidedly not in line with Mar pa's biographies, and I so decided to put it aside for the time being. Then, a few years later, dPal brtsegs published the *lHo brag mar pa lo tsā'i gsung 'bum* (henceforth "MPSB"). As often with their publications, it contained a large amount of texts recently dug out from the gNas bcu Temple in 'Bras spungs Monastery, where it had laid dormant since the Fifth Dalai Lama's (1617–1682) time, as well as everything related to Mar pa that the editors collected from various sources. Of particular interest, the sixth volume contains a *Chos drug mkhar khang ma*,⁷ as well as a *Chos drug sras mkhar ma*.⁸ The former is probably the

⁴ The result of that research can be read in Ducher *forthcoming*.

⁵ Although Mar pa's master is generally named "Nāropa" in Tibetan-derived sources, I write "Nāropā" on the basis of a Sanskrit manuscript on the cult of Vajrayoginī discovered by Sylvain Lévi in Nepal in 1928. It indicates that the *pa* in the Tibetan version of "Nāropā" (*nā ro pa*) is not a Tibetan rendering, but a Sanskrit abbreviation of *pada*, and should therefore be written *pā*. See Lévi 1931.

⁶ *Chos drug mkhar kha ma'i shog dril bco lnga pa*, found in *Phyag chen rgya gzhung*: 105–215 (henceforth "*Indian Mahāmudrā Works*"). The "autobiographical descriptions" are on pp. 106–108. This one-volume collection contains mainly texts from the Mar pa bKa' brgyud tradition. Although half of the volume is made up of translations of Indian texts by Tilopā, Saraha, Nāropā and others, some of them on Mahāmudrā, the other half is made up of the writings of Mar pa, several Karma pas and others, and deal mainly with tantric topics. As suggested by some colophons, annotations and authors included in the collection, it may have been compiled by a holder of the rNgog pa bKa' brgyud transmission in the late 15th or early 16th century. At the time, the rNgogs themselves were waning in sPre'u zhing, but their transmission went into the hands of Khirms khang Lo tsā ba bSod nams rgya mtsho (1424–1482) and his disciple, the Fourth Zhwa dmar Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524), whose writings are the last recorded in the collection.

⁷ *Chos drug mkhar khang ma'i gter gyi kha byang* (henceforth "Drepung"), directly preceding the fifteen scrolls. Found in MPSB, vol. 6: 1–102.

⁸ *rJe btsun mar pa lo tsā'i gdams pa chos drug sras mkhar ma'i skor rnam* (henceforth "RT"). Found in MPSB, vol. 6: 103–208.

version mentioned in the *Drepung Catalogue* and coming from the gNas bcu Temple.⁹ The latter most attracted my attention: its level of detail, harmony and completeness was truly amazing. It was only later that I understood why: it is an exact copy of the *Sras mkhar ma* found in 'Jam mgon Kong sprul's (1813–1899) *Rin chen gter mdzod* (RT),¹⁰ and it displays all the usual qualities of that author. The authoritative and slick dimension of Kong sprul's compilations, however, should not make us forget the fact that his editing habits often hide the complex history that lie behind his compilations. Finally, I found another rather detailed version within Nāropā's collected works from the *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*.¹¹

1. The Content of the *Sras mkhar ma*

The four versions of the collection are quite different from one another in terms of content, sequence, wording and lineages of transmission. Despite this diversity, one can basically distinguish four elements, present in the various editions as follows:

	RT	DK-DZO	Indian Mah. Works	Drepung
Chos dbang's inventory	x			
Mar pa's inventory	x	x		x partial ¹²
Introduction	x	x	x	
15 scrolls	x	x	x	x

⁹ *Drepung Catalogue*: 643.

¹⁰ *rJe btsun mar pa lo tsā'i gdams pa chos drug sras mkhar ma'i skor rnams*. Found in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 85: 51–201. See Everding 2008: 93–98 for a German translation of the titles and colophon of the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, but containing no background on the history of the *Sras mkhar ma*.

¹¹ *rJe na ro dang mar pa'i thugs kyi nying khu chos drug rdo rje'i tshig 'grol chen mo 'am chos drug sras mkhar ma* (henceforth DK-DZO). Found in *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, vol. 4: 373–511.

¹² I characterise the Drepung version of the “inventory” (*gter gyi kha byang*) as ‘partial’ since it shares a few sentences in common with RT and DK-DZO but is actually quite different from, and much shorter than, these two.

Guru Chos dbang's Inventory

This describes how Mar pa's inventory was transmitted by previous generations and given to Chos dbang, how Chos dbang discovered the treasure in Sras mkhar, and how he disseminated it.¹³

Mar pa's Inventory

In this versified part, Mar pa describes the offerings made to receive the fifteen scrolls from Nāropā, Maitripa and the woman named Endowed with Human Bone Ornaments (*mi rus rgyan can*),¹⁴ and how he was instructed by Nāropā to make several copies and conceal them. He gives the titles of the fifteen scrolls and describes their content. Chos dbang claims in his inventory that Mar pa's inventory was shown to him by the owner of Mar pa's mansion, Se bro Gyang gsar pa.¹⁵

The Introduction of the Treasure

The introduction is an integral part of the treasure revealed by Chos dbang. In it, Mar pa describes the circumstances of his journeys to India and how he received instructions from his masters. Three masters in particular gave him these instructions: One Who Shows the Path to Liberation (*thar pa'i lam ston*), i.e. Nāropā, Display of Great Bliss (*bde chen rol pa*), i.e. Maitripa, and Endowed with Human Bone Ornaments.¹⁶

The Fifteen Scrolls

The scrolls (*shog dril*) make up the core of the treasure and most are present in all editions. They are held to be small scrolls of paper hidden in *tsatsa* within a wall of Mar pa's house and contain short texts dealing with the most important traditions brought by Mar pa from India to Tibet, especially means of practice associated with the creation phase (*sādhana*s) and the perfection phase (the Six Doctrines). All scrolls are said to be translations made by Mar pa while he was in

¹³ RT, vol. 85: 52–57 (MPSB, vol. 6: 103–106).

¹⁴ The identity of Endowed with Human Bone Ornaments is not certain. She was the fifth of Mar pa's main gurus and he received Catuspīṭha from her. She may or may not be the same as Cluster of Banana Trees (*chu shing gi nye ma can*), who is in some sources considered to be Maitripa's consort (more details on Mar pa's masters will appear in my forthcoming PhD dissertation).

¹⁵ RT, vol. 85: 58–63 (MPSB, vol. 6, 107–10); DK-DZO, vol. 4: 373–78.3.

¹⁶ See e.g. RT, vol. 85: 62.3–4.

Tibet and some have a colophon with a transmission lineage. The scrolls are not found in the same order in all versions. It is only in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* that the sequence of the scrolls and their titles correspond exactly with Mar pa's inventory, which may be a mark of Kong sprul's editing. Each scroll contains at least one transmission (sometimes an additional one is given) and is given a *vajra* title, for instance Vajra Greed for the *sādhana* of Vajravārāhī. In the conclusion of his edition of the collection, Kong sprul presents the content of the fifteen scrolls as threefold:¹⁷

The maturing empowerment is the great empowerment, the *Scroll of Vajradhara* (1).

The liberating path has three aspects:

The view: this is the view [described] in the *Scroll of Vajra Space* (2)

The phase of creation:

The *sādhana* of the glorious Cakrasaṃvara—the Indian text of the *Scroll of the Vajra Destroyer* (3), together with its supplement.

The *sādhana* of the glorious Hevajra as a Single Hero—the Indian text of the *Scroll of the Unshakeable Vajra* (4), composed by Master Padmavajra, together with the condensed *sādhana*.

The *sādhana* of the glorious Vajravārāhī, the *Scroll of Vajra Greed* (5), together with the related zodiac period calculations and the *homāḥ* of the four activities, to complete the ancillary activities.

The phase of completion:

The upperdoor inner heat *Scroll of Vajra Desire* (6)

The lower door path of methods, *Scroll of Vajra Activity* (7)

The illusion body, *Scroll of Vajra Illusion* (8)

The luminosity, *Scroll of Vajra Dullness* (9)

The dream, *Scroll of Vajra Jealousy* (10)

The ejection, *Scroll of Vajra Aversion* (11)

The intermediate state, *Scroll of Vajra Pride* (12)

Entering another's body, *Scroll of Vajra Illusion* (13)

¹⁷ RT, vol. 85: 200–201 (MPSB, vol. 6: 207–208): *smin byed dbang/ grol byed lam/ bka' srung chos skyong gi skor rol/ dang po ni/ dbang chen rdo rje 'chang gi shog dril(1) lo/ lgyis pa la gsum/ lta ba/ sbkyed rim/ rdzogs rim mo/ dang po ni lta ba nam mkha'i rdo rje'i shog dril(2) lo/ lgyis pa la/ dpal 'khor lo bde mchog gi sgrub thabs 'jigs byed rdo rje'i shog dril(3) rgya gzhung/ de'i lhan thabs/ dpal dgyes pa rdo rje dpa' bo gcig pa'i sgrub thabs mi bskyod rdo rje'i shog dril(4) rgya gzhung slob dpon mtsho skyes kyis mdzad pa/ de'i sgrub thabs bsdu pa/ dpal rdo rje phag mo'i sgrub thabs ser sna(5) rdo rje'i shogdril/ de dang rjes su 'brel ba'i dus sbyor thun tshod brtsi pa las bzhi'i sbyin sreg zhar byung las kha tshar dang bcas pa rnam sol/ lgsun pa las/ steng sgo gtum mo 'dod chags rdo rje'i shog dril(6)/ 'og sgo thabs lam las rdo rje'i shog dril(7)/ sgyu lus sgyu 'phrul rdo rje'i shog dril(8)/ 'od gsal gti mug rdo rje'i shog dril(9)/ rmi lam phrag dog rdo rje'i shog dril(10)/ 'pho ba zhe sdang rdo rje'i shog dril(11)/ bar do nga rgyal rdo rje'i shog dril(12)/ grong 'jug sgyu 'phrul rdo rje'i shog dril(13) rnam sol/ lgsun pa la/ bka'i srung dpal ldan lha mo dud sol ma'i sgrub thabs bha ga rdo rje'i shog dril(14)/ thun mong gi phrin las sgrub pa gnod sbyin mo khol po dar thod can gi sgrub pa'i shog dril(15) te/ Note that the 15th scroll does not have a *vajra* title.*

The cycles of guardians of the doctrine and dharma protectors:

The *sādhana* of the guardian of the doctrine, Śrīdevī Dhūmāṅgarī (*dpal ldan lha mo dud sol ma*), *Scroll of Vajra Bhaga* (14).

The scroll of the practice of the *yakṣa* Khol po Dar thod can to accomplish the common activity (15).

Although a detailed analysis of the content of each of the fifteen scrolls exceeds the ambition of the present article, a few general remarks can be made. For the scrolls that are translations of Indian texts, that is to say the Vajradhara empowerment and the *sādhana*s, a most likely invented Indian title is provided, doubled by a Tibetan translation. Four of the *sādhana* scrolls provide another method of practice in addition, and several other texts are included in between the scrolls, such as the *Prayer of Mar pa's Six Doctrines*,¹⁸ or the *Vajra Song that Concentrates the Six Doctrines by Nāropā*.¹⁹

The collection opens with the empowerment of Vajradhara, who epitomises the guru. Mar pa states in the introduction to that scroll that there exists elsewhere elaborate empowerments from scholarly traditions, but that this transmission is the unelaborated tradition of *kusulu* yogis.²⁰ It is designed for those of highest capacity, he continues, and so he will reserve it for future practitioners, to whom he will miraculously appear, and for the time being hide it in Sras mkhar. The definition of the view follows this, which is the method to introduce the practitioner to his mind's true nature, presented in nine seals. Next come several *sādhana*s, methods for practicing the phase of creation of three deities in particular: Hevajra, Mar pa's main practice, as well as Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārahī, which are key deities of the sNyan bgyud tradition.

Then follow eight scrolls detailing practices of the phase of completion, the so-called "Six Doctrines of Nāropā" (*nā ro chos drug*).²¹ These scrolls make up the main part of the collection, generally titled for that reason the *Six Doctrines from Sras mkhar* (*chos drug sras mkhar ma*).²² None of the eight have an Indian title, which indicates that they represent oral instructions translated by Mar pa, not texts. It must be noted that the expression "Six Doctrines" (*chos drug*) is used like a term of art referring to practices associated with the Perfection phase of the Niruttara *tantras*, the foremost being inner heat (*gtum mo*), and is not to be taken literally as referring to six

¹⁸ *Mar pa'i chos drug gi gsol 'debs*; MPSB, vol. 6: 126.

¹⁹ *Chos drug dril ba'i rdo rje'i mgur*; MPSB, vol. 6: 145.

²⁰ MPSB, vol. 6: 113.

²¹ See Kragh 2011 on this cycle of key instructions transmitted by Nāropā to Mar pa.

²² This is the title given by the Fifth Dalai Lama in his *Thob yig* (DL5 *Thob yig*, vol. 2: 302).

specific practices designed by Nāropā. As is clear in this presentation of eight scrolls, the Six Doctrines are not actually six in number. In his *Encyclopedia of Knowledge*,²³ Kong sprul mentions several early groupings, for example Mar pa's grouping into four or eight, Mi la ras pa's grouping into eight, Ras chung pa's grouping into three cycles of mixing and nine cycles of mixing and transference, etc. Later, the system was more generally called "Six Doctrines," but to get to a fixed set of six, the practice of the "Lower Door" (*karmamūdra*) was excluded, and the practices of ejection and entering another's body were counted as one. As regards the practice of entering another's body (*grong 'jug*), gTsang smyon states in his biography of Mar pa that it did not spread in Tibet because of Mar pa mDo sde's death.²⁴ The presence of instructions on this practice in the *Sras mkhar ma* as well as in other collections, however, shows that it did not disappear, although it may not have been widespread.²⁵

The collection ends with the *sādhana*s of two protectors, Dhūmāṅgārī (*dud sol ma*) and the *yakṣa* Khol po Dar thod can, also called Upāya. Dhūmāṅgārī is a well-known protector of the Mar pa bKa' brgyud lineage.²⁶ She was initially the protector of the Catuṣpīṭha and Hevajra *tantras*, and later became the protector of the rNgog pa bKa' brgyud tantric lore in general. As for Khol po Dar thod can, not much is known about this practice; it may be related to one of Mar pa's three protectors, Thod 'phreng can.²⁷

The content of the fifteen scrolls that make up the *Sras mkhar ma* fits perfectly with what we know of Mar pa's transmission, and in particular the aural transmission (*snyan brgyud*). Thus, it is possible that he played a role in the spread of these scrolls, which may have been initially written at his behest.

²³ *Shes bya mdzod*, vol. 3: 326–328, translated in Kongtrül Lodrö Thayé 2007: 149–152.

²⁴ Tsangnyön Heruka 1982: 171.

²⁵ See Ducher *forthcoming* for more details on the six doctrines and especially the practice of entering another's body.

²⁶ The Sanskrit name Dhūmāṅgārī corresponds to the Tibetan *Dud sol ma*, and is found in several Sanskrit manuscripts of the Catuṣpīṭha cycle, for instance the *Yogāmbarasādhanaopāyikā* of Amitavajra (see Szántó 2012: 170–172, Tōh 1619). Her name also appears in several fragments related to the Catuṣpīṭha cult (Szántó 2012: 180). It is noteworthy that in the *Dud sol ma'i sgrub thabs* (Tōh 1769) composed by Vanaratna (1384–1468), the Indic title is given as *Dhūmāṅgārīsādhana*; the translator was Khriṃs khang Lo tsā ba bSod nams rgya mtsho (1424–1482), an important disciple of rNgog Byang chub dpal (1360–1446). More details will be given in my forthcoming PhD dissertation.

²⁷ In the *rNgog Histories*: 9, the three protectors are said to be Ka ka rtsal, Thod 'phreng can and *Dud sol ma*.

2. *The Two Inventories: The Life of Mar pa Reassessed*

The *Sras mkhar ma* compiled by Kong sprul in the RT has two broad sections, an “historical” one (*lo rgyus*), made up of the two inventories and an introduction by Mar pa, and an “instructional” one (*gdams pa*), the fifteen scrolls of instructions. The historical section, and especially Guru Chos dbang’s inventory, provides some unique information clarifying several aspects of Mar pa’s life that are debated within his biographies,²⁸ especially with regards to the years following his death. As described below, the reliability of this account is questionable, and no other source allows us to precisely verify Chos dbang’s claim. I believe, however, that Chos dbang’s description of the years following Mar pa’s death may hold some truth. I shall thus present them in the following section of this article, while asking the reader to keep in mind the speculative character of some of the conclusions and the elusive character of hagiography more generally.²⁹

Every reader of gTsang smyon’s *Life of Marpa* will remember its fourth chapter, which vividly relates the death of Mar pa’s son mDo sde, a topic depicted in scant detail in previous versions.³⁰ gTsang smyon’s emphasis on Mar pa’s loss and grief, and his invention of a few songs, raises questions about the validity of the description, which was contested elsewhere.³¹ Even though this narrative’s claim

²⁸ Recently, the works of Peter Alan Roberts (Roberts 2007), Andrew Quintman (Quintman 2014) and myself (Ducher *forthcoming*) have shed some light on the complex history of the biographical traditions of Ras chung pa (1084–1161), Mi la ras pa and Mar pa respectively, and shown that much was written about these masters prior to the masterpieces of gTsang smyon He ru ka (1452–1507) and his disciples at the turn of the 16th century. Despite this variety, what is generally remembered of—in this case—Mar pa’s life, is found in gTsang smyon’s biography of him, famously translated into English under the title *The Life of Marpa* (Tsangnyön Heruka 1982). Just as Kong sprul’s compilation skills generally hide the complex history of his sources, gTsang smyon’s informed literary genius tended to obscure the heterogeneity of Mar pa’s biographical tradition.

²⁹ As described, for instance, in Quintman 2014 and Ducher *forthcoming*.

³⁰ Tsangnyön Heruka 1982.

³¹ The issue concerning Mar pa mDo sde’s death is related to the biography of Rwa Lo tsā ba. In one famous version (said to be compiled by Rwa lo’s nephew and translated in Cuevas 2015a: 188–191), Rwa lo is depicted as killing mDo sde. In Tāranātha’s *Yamāntaka Religious History*: 95, Tāranātha does not endorse Rwa lo’s “liberation” of mDo sde, but states that Mar pa mDo sde died after his father, thus contradicting gTsang smyon’s scene. Within Mar pa’s biographical tradition, ‘Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab (18th c.), in his *Supplement* to Si tu Paṅ chen’s standard Karma bKa’ brgyud history (‘Be lo 1990: 66.5) agrees with Tāranātha’s view that mDo sde died after Mar pa (see Decler 1992: 23–27 for more detail on Mar pa mDo sde’s death, and Cuevas 2015b for bibliographical details on Rwa Lo tsā ba’s biographies and a discussion of the likely author of the famous

to historicity is feeble, almost all of Mar pa's biographies feature a prophecy by Nāropā stating that Mar pa's familial lineage would not survive, and the rNgog pa bKa' brgyud histories relate that rNgog mDo sde (1078-1154) had to retrieve Mar pa's bone relics because Mar pa's descendants did not take care of them.³² Thus, it seems that Mar pa's sons did not continue his legacy, but not much is known about Mar pa's estate in Gro bo lung and how his family lineage came to an end. The *Sras mkhar ma* provides a narrative that sheds some light on the decades following Mar pa's passing.

Guru Chos dbang (1212–1270) was born in lHo brag. He was lauded by later rNying ma apologists as the second of five kings among treasure revealers (*gter ston*), a reincarnation of Emperor Khri Srong lde btsan and of the earlier important treasure revealer, Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer. Chos dbang was an early chronicler of the treasure tradition, and played a critical role in fashioning standards that enabled the practice of treasure revelation to become popularly accepted.³³ In the inventory which opens the *Sras mkhar ma* in the RT, while describing the events leading to its discovery, Chos dbang provides some information as to what befell Mar pa's estate in Gro bo lung in the years following his demise.³⁴ Guru Chos dbang regularly returned to lHo brag, where he sometimes studied with the master living in Gro bo lung, Bla ma Se bro Gyang gsar pa, who was the third representative of the Se bro clan who took over Mar pa's seat from Mar pa's son dGe 'dun. Although he was living at Gro bo lung, Se bro Gyang gsar pa was not a holder of Mar pa's teachings, as none of what Chos dbang studies with him relates to Mar pa's

biography translated in Cuevas 2015a). Given the amount of interpolation in all versions of these narratives, it is impossible to decide whether Mar pa mDo sde died before or after his father. It is likely that there was never much detail about it in Mar pa's biographies, so gTsang smyon and Rwa lo's biographer could unleash their creative inspiration and thereby produced memorable pieces of literature.

³² The description of how rNgog mDo sde retrieved Mar pa's relics is found in several of the *rNgog Histories* (see the bibliography under this title for references). This account was instrumental in the rNgog pa's self-identification as Mar pa's rightful heirs, almost in a biological sense (more details will be given in my forthcoming dissertation on the rNgog pa bka' brgyud history).

³³ For his biography and reference to its sources, see the website *Treasury of Lives*: <http://www.treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Guru-Chowang/5588> (accessed on 16/09/2015). For more details on Chos dbang's role in the elaboration of the treasure tradition, see Gyatso 1993 and especially 1994.

³⁴ RT, vol. 85: 52–56.

transmission.³⁵ During one teaching, he showed Chos dbang a scroll he had received from his father, Se bro rJe btsun. Se bro rJe btsun had himself inherited the scroll from *his* father, Se bro Rin chen dbang phyug, who in turn had received it from Mar pa's son dGe 'dun.

The circumstances in which dGe 'dun gave the scroll to Se bro Rin chen dbang phyug are rather shadowy:

While Se bro Rin chen dbang phyug [...] was receiving Hevajra from Mar pa's son, dGe 'dun, [Mar pa's] son, Bya ring 'khor lo, secretly sold *Bla ma* Mar pa Lo tsā ba's reliquary. As his son, dGe 'dun, was not able to redeem it, the lady,³⁶ having asked him to stay on a [black] magic retreat [in order to] change [the situation],³⁷ gave poison to the *bla ma*. She fled when he collapsed, locking the door from the outside. When the *bla ma* was about to die, [Se bro Rin chen dbang phyug] came from the outside by climbing over the wall. [dGe 'dun] asked him to pass him a black felt bag, which [Se bro] did, and then to make a fire, which he did. Then [dGe 'dun] asked him to see whether that woman had come from the roof. After [Se bro] had gone there, he smelt burned papers and came back: [dGe 'dun] had thrown some texts into the fire; holding one scroll, he said [...]³⁸

This is followed by dGe 'dun's instructions on what to do with these key-instructions from his father that did not require empowerment and were to be revealed after five generations. He, dGe 'dun, was the first generation; three more remained until the scroll could be opened. Together with the scroll, dGe 'dun gave Se bro Rin chen dbang phyug the translator's texts, bone ornaments and relics. Se bro Rin chen dbang phyug later passed them on to his successor, Se bro rJe btsun, who kept the secret and warned people that the seal should not be broken.

³⁵ RT, vol. 85: 52: only Hevajra may come from Mar pa, although the tradition is not specified. Other teachings include the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, *sūtras*, *Vajravārāhī* from dPyal's tradition and others.

³⁶ *Jo mo*: it is unclear who that woman is. She may be dGe 'dun or Bya ring 'khor lo's wife, or maybe both.

³⁷ *Chos gsungs*: here, this expression probably does not refer to teaching the Dharma. *Chos* may be the imperative form of 'chos pa, "to alter, modify".

³⁸ RT, vol. 85: 53.4-54.4: *Se bro rin chen dbang phyug bya ba [...] bla ma mar pa'i sras dge 'dun la dgyes pa rdo rje gsan cing yod tsa na / bla ma mar pa lo tsā ba'i gdung khang / sras bya ring 'khor los lkog tu btsongs pas / sras dge 'dun gyis blur ma thub par / mthu mtshams su bzhugs nas chos gsungs pa las / bla ma la jo mos dug btang / shul du sgo'i phyi lcags bcug nas mo rang bros / bla ma 'grongs la khad pa'i tsar / phyi nas rtsig pa la 'jogs nas phyin / phying khug nag po thong gsung nas khyer byon tsa na / me zhiq thong gsungs nas btang bas / da khang thog nas bud med de byung ngam ltos gsungs / ltar phyin pa'i shul du shog dud mnam nas log phyin tsa na / dpe tsho me la phul nas shog dril gcig tshags mdzad nas 'di skad gsung so /.*

Thus, if we are to believe this story, Mar pa concealed a precious textual collection in his house and gave a scroll of instruction to his son, dGe 'dun. As it was dGe 'dun, and not mDo sde, who had responsibility for the scroll, it means that mDo sde was already dead or at least not in charge of Gro bo lung at the time of dGe 'dun's death, which fits with what is known about Mar pa's life. Moreover, although the exact situation is hazy, there was apparently some tension in the house. dGe 'dun may have performed some black magic because he wanted to punish his brother for losing their father's relics, or because he wanted to retrieve them. He did not manage, however, and was killed by a woman, maybe his wife or Bya ring 'khor lo's, and Mar pa's property was given away to the member of another clan, without any of his sons being able to safeguard either his material or spiritual wealth.

Even if this story was concocted to account for the way Se bro Rin chen dbang phyug came into possession of Mar pa's house and goods, it means that Mar pa's blood line declined very quickly: his favourite son, mDo sde, died early, and the others were up to no good. Bya ri 'khor lo gambled away the relics of his father; dGe 'dun could not stop him, was poisoned and locked up by a woman. Perhaps no more than two decades after Mar pa's death, Sras mkhar belonged to another family, the Se bro. This aspect of Mar pa's life, although not much expanded upon in Mar pa's biographies, is in line with them. The quick downfall of Sras mkhar explains why we find the prophecy of the disappearance of his familial lineage in Mar pa's earliest biographies, and why the rNgog clan worked hard to present themselves as Mar pa's rightful heirs. rNgog mDo sde in particular, with his name, his transmission coming from Mar pa via his father and his gathering of Mar pa's relics, managed in a few decades to make his estate the new center of Mar pa's tantric transmission in Tibet, and was certainly aided in that by the failure of Mar pa's children to preserve his legacy.

3. The Sras mkhar ma and the Treasure Tradition in Tibet

Let us now turn to the treasure aspect of the collection and the role Guru Chos dbang played in its revelation in the mid-13th century. In the inventory, Guru Chos dbang states that he studied at Sras mkhar with Se bro Gyang gsar pa. During one teaching, Se bro opened his library, which revealed a mysterious scroll wrapped in three layers of silk. It was three years since his father, Se bro rJe btsun, had died, but Gyang gsar pa had not unsealed the scroll. His father told him about it, but he "had never heard of the existence of treasures in the New

Traditions,"³⁹ so thought it could only be a fraud. When the scroll was unsealed in Chos dbang's presence, the two found out that it was an inventory (*kha byang*) composed by Mar pa indicating that a collection of fifteen translations of his most secret instructions was concealed somewhere in the house. The treasure revealer kept thinking about it. Eventually, he felt the time had come for the revelation, so he went to Gro bo lung. He did not dare intruding into Sras mkhar, waited for two weeks, and finally found the treasure. He placed another volume of text in its place and made a hundred *ganacakras*.

At this point, the following question may occur to readers: as Se bro Gyang gsar pa remarked, can there be a bKa' brgyud treasure? The subject of treasures and their revelation is very broad and cannot be covered in the present article, but I shall shortly summarise how they are generally defined in order to contextualise the *Sras mkhar ma*. Janet Gyatso explains in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*⁴⁰ that the term "treasure" refers to something drawn from a treasure cache (*gter kha*). It can be a text or a material object, a statue for instance. The two primary modes of treasure discovery are unearthing an object buried in the ground (*sa gter*) and finding a teaching buried in one's mind (*dgongs gter*). In both cases, the discoverer claims that the item was hidden there at some point in the past. This claim concerning the past distinguishes the treasure tradition from other visionary modes of text revelation in Tibet, such as pure vision (*dag snang*) and aural transmission (*snyan brgyud*). There are at least three ways in which treasures lay claim to authenticity: the exalted status of their original expounder, the similarity of their doctrines or practices to the orthodox tradition, and the special powers of the treasure revealer (*gter ston*). An additional feature of the rNying ma treasure tradition is that the original concealer is usually Padmasambhava or one of his disciples, and that the revealer was present at the time of the treasure's concealment or placement in his/her mind. If one sets these last features aside, the *Sras mkhar ma* could be considered a treasure: it is a text that was revealed from a cache, the content is in line with the rest of Mar pa's teaching, and it was found by Guru Chos dbang, who was recognised as an authentic treasure revealer.

If the *Sras mkhar ma*, as described by Guru Chos dbang, can to some extent be considered a treasure, are there more examples of such treasures existing outside of the rNying ma tradition? As far as the Bon religion is concerned, the answer is obviously yes, since

³⁹ RT, vol. 85: 55.5: *gsar ma ba la gter yod zer ba ngas ma thos /*

⁴⁰ Gyatso 1996: 147–150.

many of the texts making up the corpus of that Tibetan tradition are indeed considered treasures.⁴¹ Although the new traditions that developed from the 11th century onward generally rely on direct transmission from a master, there exist several examples of texts considered to have been concealed and revealed at a later point. The dGe lugs pa master Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737–1802) mentions several such treasures in his *Cleansing of the Purificatory Gem*.⁴² Although Mar pa's *Sras mkhar ma* does not figure in the list, Thu'u bkwan mentions a number of other famous bKa' brgyud treasures. One was concealed by sGam po pa (1079–1153) in a lake above his monastery of Dwags lha sgam po. This collection of two teachings came from Nāropā through Mar pa and Mi la ras pa; it was retrieved two centuries later by Dung mtsho Ras pa (1267–c. 1329) and became an important part of the Zur mang snyan brgyud tradition.⁴³ Another was hidden by Ras chung pa (1085–1161) in mKhar chu, namely the *Six Cycles on the Equal Taste (Ro snyoms skor drug)*, a teaching he received from Ti pu pa and that came from Nāropā. It was retrieved by gTsang pa rGya ras (1161–1211), disciple of gLing ras pa, and became an important feature of the 'Brug pa lineage.⁴⁴ Like the *Sras mkhar ma*, these two treasures have inventories that were passed on in a lineage down to the treasure revealer and that led to their discovery. In both cases, a material text was concealed that needed no specific elaboration or translation, unlike later rNying ma treasures written in “*ḍākinī* language.” A significant difference between the *Sras mkhar ma* and these two collections is that the former was included by Kong sprul in his RT while the other two are found in his *gDams ngag mdzod*. The reason could be that the *Sras mkhar ma* was discovered by a famous treasure revealer while the other two were found by bKa' brgyud masters. One further example of an early bKa' brgyud treasure is a teaching of the gCod tradition concealed by Ma gcig lab sgron and retrieved by distant disciples, also found in the *gDams ngag mdzod*.⁴⁵

The common features of all these treasures are that they were concealed in the late 11th to early 12th centuries, hence do not have any claimed link with the Tibetan empire (generally the purported origin of both rNying ma and Bon treasures), and were retrieved one

⁴¹ For a study on the inclusion of Bon po treasures within the RT, see Blondeau 1988. See also Martin 2001: 16–29, Blondeau 2002.

⁴² Translated in Kapstein 2000: 133–134.

⁴³ See Mei 2009: 40–47. The texts are in the *gDams ngag mdzod* (vol. 8: 408–428).

⁴⁴ See e.g. Smith 2001: 44; *Blue Annals*: 438 & 668. *gDams ngag mdzod* (vol. 10: 91–122).

⁴⁵ *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag gcod kyi gzhung shes rab skra rtse'i sa gzhung spel ba rin po che'i gter mdzod*; found in *Gdams ngag mdzod*, vol. 14: 81–99.

or two centuries later. We may therefore wonder what happened during the second spread (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet that could explain the phenomenon of treasure,⁴⁶ and why it did not endure in the New Schools to such an extent as within the rNying ma and Bon ones, where it continues to be popular even today.

Robert Mayer⁴⁷ argues that “the *gter-ma* tradition is primarily a Tibetan elaboration of Buddhist systems already well attested in Indian Literature many centuries before the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet—rather than a syncretic development derivative of indigenous Tibetan religion, or a Buddhist invention entirely unique to Tibet.” Just like the reincarnation (*sprul sku*) system, the Svātantrika-Prāsangika divide or the gZhan stong view, treasures represent “Buddhist developments of Buddhist ideas, albeit worked out on Tibetan soil.” He backs up this view with reference to an early Mahāyānā *sūtra*, the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*.⁴⁸ In this long and complex text, the Buddha explains to his disciple Bhadrāpāla that his teaching will disappear after a few years, so Bhadrāpāla and other bodhisattvas should copy and conceal it in order to rediscover it at a later time. Robert Mayer also gives the example of a Hindu and Buddhist tantric cult that used to find hidden treasures, usually material, where fierce treasure-protectors play an important role, just like in the Tibetan treasure tradition.⁴⁹

Thus, when Buddhism was brought to Tibet from India in the 11th century, Tibetan translators may have been familiar with these Indian traditions, and maintained and developed them in Tibet. With the period of fragmentation (*sil bu'i dus*) that followed the downfall of the Tibetan empire, Tibetans, like other people at difficult times, were also familiar with the simpler tradition of concealing texts in order to protect them from destruction.

In the 11th century, lineages were in formation, religion was mushrooming again in Tibet, and the treasure tradition was not a specifically rNying ma phenomenon yet. It is therefore not impossible that Mar pa, sGam po pa, Ras chung pa, Ma gcig lab sgron and others may have concealed teachings for future generations. In the following centuries, rNying ma treasures started to be revealed. One of the first great treasure revealers was the 12th-century Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer who, among other texts, revealed

⁴⁶ See Martin 2001 ; Davidson 2005: ch. 6.

⁴⁷ Mayer 1997: 137.

⁴⁸ Translated in Harrison 1990. The Tibetan version is very different from the Chinese version, and the story of the two methods of scriptural revelation that form the main narrative of the *sūtra* is distributed across its whole length in fragmentary bits. Thanks to Robert Mayer for his comments on this *sūtra*.

⁴⁹ Mayer 1997: 144 ff.

Padmasambhava's first treasure biography.⁵⁰ He retrieved exclusively material treasures, be it texts, statues or substances claimed to be concealed by Padmasambhava and his students.⁵¹ He was followed a couple of generations later by Guru Chos dbang, whose treasures are also mainly textual, although he also found a mind treasure.⁵² In later times, treasures were decreasingly material, and involved a larger elaboration on the part of the revealer.

During the 13th century, lineages were consolidating and a dramatic shift in consciousness occurred in Tibet because the Buddhist civilisation in India was being destroyed. Polemic attacks, led by Sa skya Paṇḍita, were launched against rNying ma treasures. Priorities shifted from skilful indigenisation of Buddhism (which might encourage treasure) to a much more conservative effort to conserve in Tibet what was being destroyed in India (which might discourage treasure). The treasure tradition became an increasingly codified rNying ma (and Bon po) phenomenon.⁵³

4. *Why Treasures and is the Sras mkhar ma Really a Treasure?*

As I just argued, it is not inconceivable that masters of the New Schools may have hidden some teachings for later generations, hence that Guru Chos dbang's claim that the *Sras mkhar ma* was concealed by Mar pa may have some truth in it. Despite that possibility, it seems more likely, however, that the collection is not an actual treasure but was just revealed so by Chos dbang's agency.

In terms of content the fifteen scrolls fit remarkably well with the teachings Mar pa transmitted directly to his students. So why would Mar pa have concealed texts that he taught to his disciples anyway? Let us first look at the answer to these questions provided in Mar

⁵⁰ Doney 2014.

⁵¹ Hirshberg 2012.

⁵² Dudjom Rinpoche [1991] 2002: 764. The *Sras mkhar ma* is mentioned as the tenth treasure.

⁵³ That view was suggested to me by Robert Mayer (personal communication). A similar one, albeit not centered on treasures, can be found in Martin 2001: 6-7: "I would say [...] that eras of renewal are likely to occur after times of disruption, [...] and during times of importation, when desirable properties and ideas are being brought in from outside for internal use. In such times, the locally glorious past is reasserted at the same time as the new items and ideas are being integrated. The nation feels strong and unchanging even as it is changing. Times of consolidation to the contrary occur under the real or imagined threat of unwanted invasions, when local goods and ideas are being threatened from without. Such times demand greater internal uniformity, greater conservatism with respect to the immediate past. Early Tibet's age of renewal, I would suggest, probably came to its symbolic end by 1240 [...]"

pa's inventory:⁵⁴ Mar pa, we are told, was asked by his three main masters (Nāropā, Maitripa and the *dākinī*) not to spread those teachings but to keep them secret. Mar pa calls these teachings "the fifteen cycles of instruction of aural transmission" (*snyan brgyud gdams skor bco lnga*), and elsewhere "the fifteen cycles of instructions of the mind" (*thugs rgyud gdams pa skor bco lnga*). This indicates, first, that the terms *snyan brgyud* should not be understood to refer strictly to the specific cycle of teaching that became famous with Ras chung pa, but also to innermost, secret, precious teachings meant to be transmitted from master to disciple in a secret way, and, second, that this cycle may be better approached from within the frameworks of aural transmissions than that of treasures. This aural transmission, according to Mar pa's masters, should not be made available to everyone, like milk which becomes spoiled on the market place, but kept for future generations, or else it would lose its value. It is the masters' innermost, most precious teaching, and as such should not be made available to many people.

This is a well known use of rhetoric to explain lineages restricted to a single holder (*gcig brgyud*), which are trademarks of aural transmissions. Here, however, the advice goes further than just restricting the transmission to one person: Mar pa's masters tell him that he should take care of worthy disciples, but that although there are fortunate and appropriate recipients to his teachings, in the end none will abide by their *samayas*. Thus, Mar pa is asked *not* to spread these key instructions, but rather conceal them, transmitting the lineage of the empowerments but keeping the blessing of his master's mind for later generations. This is why he asks his close disciple Mar pa mGo yags to make five copies of the collection and hide them in the house.

When trying to understand the collection on the basis of the inventories composed by Guru Chos dbang and Mar pa, which intimately echo each other, many questions arise. The inventories' narrative is rather straightforward: Mar pa intentionally concealed this collection because his masters asked him to do so, and Chos dbang found it thanks to a letter of indication descended from Mar pa. When looking closer, however, we may ask: in what way is this collection a treasure? Should we consider it within the framework of the rNying ma treasure tradition, or instead as an aural transmission that found its way into the hands of a treasure revealer? Did Mar pa really conceal a collection for future generations? Can he be considered the origin of the collection? Of the inventory?

⁵⁴ I depend here on the reading of Mar pa's inventory given in the DK-DZO, vol. 4: 374–375, the orthography of which is more correct than that given in the RT.

Concerning the role of Mar pa in the translation of these texts, there is little doubt that the scrolls fit completely with the other teachings he received in India and gave to his disciples, especially those from the aural transmission, and not with what Chos dbang taught and spread elsewhere. It seems therefore unlikely that Chos dbang edited the scrolls, let alone composed them. The question remains open for the inventory, however. In both Chos dbang's inventory and in what is presented as Mar pa's inventory, the collection is depicted as a treasure (*gter*) voluntarily concealed by Mar pa and formally revealed by Chos dbang. Could it be that Chos dbang indeed found the scrolls in Sras mkhar, but that Mar pa did not conceal them? It is likely that Mar pa possessed written versions of the *sādhanas* and oral instructions he received from his masters, but that he did not want them to be seen by everyone in the house or spread in writing among his disciples. In that case, he may well have taught orally these practices to his disciples—the aural transmission and the six doctrines are meant to be oral teachings—without providing them with a written text, although he personally had one. In that case, it would mean that he did not actively conceal the collection with the aspiration that it would be revealed after five generations, but rather simply hid the collection somewhere, not as a treasure but simply as something precious that he did not want to be read by anyone save himself, so as to keep the power of these transmissions intact.

In that case, although Chos dbang's narrative about the extinction of Mar pa's familial rule and the Se bro clan may have some truth in it—as a local he could be aware of the history of the place independently of any actual inventory—one can wonder about the authenticity of Mar pa's inventory and about the instruction he is said to be given by his masters to conceal the collection for future generations.

As shown by Janet Gyatso in her study of Chos dbang's *gTer 'byung chen mo*,⁵⁵ Guru Chos dbang had a very wide understanding of what treasure was, ranging from "outer" treasures (water, hidden valleys, wish-fulfilling gems, etc.), "inner" treasures (texts about secular and religious arts) and "secret, supreme Treasures of body, speech, and mind," i.e. Buddhist materials. That, in turn, covers "the nine vehicles of the Buddhist teachings, which [...] had all been hidden in the heart-mind of Śākyamuni as Treasure and then revealed when appropriate to the needs of disciples." Thus, for Guru Chos dbang, everything is a treasure, and if he indeed found scrolls coming from Mar pa in Sras mkhar, it is conceivable that he may

⁵⁵ Gyatso 1994: 276–277.

have designated them as a treasure, just like the rest of the teachings he found and spread.

It seems therefore likely that the *Sras mkhar ma* was not initially hidden by Mar pa with the overt aspiration of safeguarding it for future generations while hiding it from present disciples. It was, which is more common for a bKa' brgyud master, a written testimony of a very secret oral teaching, not designed to be spread in writing to his disciples, at least for several generations (as other aural transmissions). Guru Chos dbang's role as the revealer of the scrolls to the world, and his active legitimation of the collection as a treasure by way of his inventory and the expansion of Mar pa's inventory made it appear as if it was a bKa' brgyud treasure,⁵⁶ a status further reinforced by its inclusion in the RT. It might be more straightforward, however, to consider this collection as a written testimony of an aural transmission.

In both cases, the issue of blessing and direct transmission, just like in the treasure tradition, prevail. As argued by Robert Mayer, treasure texts are new readings of an older teaching. They have a rather conservative content but are revealed for the sake of refreshing that teaching:

The direct lineages of Treasure re-transmit the blessings direct from their original transcendent sources, rather than through a longer historical human lineage potentially polluted by breaches of tantric ethics and conduct. It is the blessings that are fresh, and their redissemination which is new, far more than any changes in actual ritual content.⁵⁷

This, according to Mar pa's inventory, is the reason given by his masters when they advise him to conceal the collection:

Thus, you too, Lo tsā ba,
Should not spread this now!
Get it sealed into three caches.
Teach the empowerment to your lineage
And let the heart-transmission's blessing appear later.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Mar pa's inventory found in the Drepung version (MPSB, vol. 6, 1–2), although called *gter gyi kha byang*, is completely in line with the sNyan brgyud tradition. As this recension also does not contain Chos dbang's inventory, it is possible that it represents another line of transmission of the text, one that was less shaped by Chos dbang's discovery of it (see below for more detail), hence not so strongly painted with the colours of the treasure tradition.

⁵⁷ Mayer 2013-2014 (2015): 235.

⁵⁸ DK-DZO, vol. 4: 375; RT, vol. 85: 60: *de phyir lo tstsha khyod kyis kyang/ /da lta spel bar ma byed par/ /gter kha gsum du phyag rgyas* (RT: *rgya yis thob/ dbang ni rgyud*

For Guru Chos dbang, who played a large role in the establishment of the treasure tradition in Tibet, it would therefore seem quite natural, if he found a text, to legitimise it by stating that this discovery revived the transmission, in that its blessing was fresh, while the empowerment had been transmitted in direct line from Mar pa through several generations.

5. Various Readings for a Complex History

Moving on from the issue of the scrolls being a treasure or an aural transmission, the various versions present differences which are at times quite telling with regard to the history of the collection. One such case appears in the end of the introduction and before the start of the fifteen scrolls, in a note featured in both the RT and the DK-DZO. The RT version reads as follows:

In Gro bo lung, a lord of gSer sding, Sangs rgyas mgon, cleaved open a rock in the castle's wall and found [Mar pa's] quintessential intention from a *tsha tsha* wrapped with cloth and yak fabric. It then fell in the hands of the great accomplished one, gSer sding pa gZhon nu 'od.⁵⁹

gSer sding pa gZhon nu 'od (lived 12th to 13th century) was a famous bKa' bgyud master who received Mar pa's transmission of the Guhyasamāja from a lineage descended from Mar pa's disciple, mTshur ston dbang nge (dates uncertain).⁶⁰ He met with the Kashmiri *paṇḍita* Śākyaśribhadra (1127–1225), who arrived in Tibet in 1204, and therefore lived before Guru Chos dbang's revelation of the *Sras mkhar ma*. According to the *Blue Annals*, gSer sding pa came to Gro bo lung;⁶¹ if we are to believe this note, he may have been given Mar pa's fifteen scrolls in the early 13th century, before Chos dbang found them. The DK-DZO version reads as follows:

(RT: *brgyud*) *pa la lung ston* (RT: *ma lus ton*) / *thugs rgyud* (RT: *brgyud*) *byin brlabs* (RT: *rlabs*) *phyi phyir 'byung* (RT: *'bungs*) /

⁵⁹ RT, vol. 85: 66: *gro bo lung du gser sding pa rje bo sangs rgyas mgon gyis mkhar rtsig pa'i brag gshags pas / sā tshas ras dang re bas dril ba'i nang nas thugs kyi nying khu rnyed do / de nas gser sding pa grub chen gzhon nu 'od kyi phyag tu byung nas rim par brgyud do /*

⁶⁰ *Blue Annals*: 420–22.

⁶¹ *Blue Annals*: 421.

These key-instructions coming from Lord Mar pa's heart were inserted into a big *tsha tsha*, wrapped with cloth and yak fabric, and then concealed in-between the slabs of Gro bo lung. Later, a sinful shepherd found them when he cleaved open a rock of the house's wall. Not knowing what it was, he passed them on and they fell into my hands. The shepherd's name was Sangs rgyas mgon.⁶²

According to this narrative, the key-instructions were found in a wall by someone called Sangs rgyas mgon. He was not a lord (*rje bo*) from gSer sding, but a shepherd (*rdzi bo*), and he gave the scroll to gSer sding pa gZhon nu 'od, who compiled a version of the text. Thus we may conceive that at some time in the late 12th or early 13th century, someone found scrolls in Sras mkhar's wall. Not knowing what they were, he gave them to gSer sding pa during his visit to Gro bo lung. This may be the sense of a note at the end of Mar pa's introduction in the *Indian Mahāmudrā Works* version, which states that "the verses up to that point are known to have been composed by gSer sding pa".⁶³ gSer sding pa may have passed the collection on, and the *Indian Mahāmudrā Works* version would thus be a witness of that manuscript, thus explaining the absence of both Guru Chos dbang and Mar pa's inventories. A few decades later, Guru Chos dbang found the text again in Sras mkhar, maybe another of the five copies made by Mar pa mGo yags. Immersed as he was in the treasure tradition, he saw it as a treasure. On the basis of what he knew because of attending Se bro Gyang gсар pa, the landlord of Mar pa's estate at that time, he wrote an inventory to legitimise his find, in the same way that he wrote inventories for his other, more orthodox treasures. He may have, to some extent, edited or enlarged Mar pa's instructions based on his masters' advice; possibly a less extensively edited form of these instructions are represented by those that open the Drepung version. Several centuries later, when Kong sprul compiled the *Sras mkhar ma*, he retained Chos dbang's presentation while incorporating the above remark about gSer sding pa, which may be based on his reading of the DK-DZO and the *Indian Mahāmudrā Works* versions.

⁶² DK-DZO, vol. 4: 381: *rje mar pa'i thugs nas byung ba'i man ngag 'di rnams / shog ril chi chi [tsha tsha] chen mo'i nang du bcug nas ras dang re bas gril nas gro bo lung gi brag sebs su sbas so / dus phyis rdzi bo sdig can cig gis dpe'u [spe'u] rtsig pa'i brag bshags pas rnyed de / khos ngo ma shes / de nas brgyud de kho bo'i lag du byung ngo / rdzi bo'i ming sangs rgyas mgon bya ba yin no /*

⁶³ *Indian Mahāmudrā Works*: 108.

6. *The Transmission of the Sras mkhar ma*

After Guru Chos dbang found Mar pa's written texts of his secret, oral transmission, the treasure revealer taught them to his disciples, and several lineages are recorded in the various versions. To underline another interesting aspect in this collection, we may again return to Mar pa's life.

When Mar pa came back to Tibet, he gave teachings to his students. Two main lineages emerged, the lineage of practice (*sgrub brgyud*) comprising mainly Cakrasaṃvara and the Six Doctrines of Nāropā and transmitted through Mi la ras pa, and the lineage of exegesis (*bshad brgyud*) consisting mainly of Hevajra and the six doctrines of "mixing and transference" (*bsre 'pho*) and transmitted through rNgog Chos rdor. During Chos dbang's time, Mi la ras pa's legacy had expanded into the various sNyan brgyud lineages, as well as the four primary and eight secondary bKa' brgyud lineages, and the rNgog pa lineage was in full strength at sPre'u zhing. One day, according to the *Sras mkhar ma*, Guru Chos dbang went to Sras mkhar, and found Mar pa's texts. At once, he recognised them as a very precious and secret teaching—a treasure as he saw it. He gave that collection of bKa' brgyud *sādhana*s and practices of the six doctrines to one of his most important disciples, gNyos lHa Rin chen rgyal po (1201–1270), a holder of the lHa pa bKa' brgyud lineage, a subject within the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud lineage founded by his uncle gNyos lHa nang pa (1164–1224), one of the principal students of 'Bri gung skyob pa 'Jig rten gsum mgon (1143–1217). As shown by Per Sørensen, that lineage was very powerful in southern Tibet and Bhutan at the time.⁶⁴ Guru Chos dbang had close relationships with Rin chen rgyal po and took part in the consecration of his new monastery, the Gye re lha khang, in Central Tibet.⁶⁵

Any reader of Mar pa's biography, as told by gTsang smyon,⁶⁶ will remember in addition to Mar pa's mDo sde's death that Mar pa had a very difficult relationship with gNyos Lo tsā ba Yon tan grags, gNyos lHa Rin chen rgyal po's distant ancestor, who threw Mar pa's texts in the Ganges out of jealousy. As the story goes, Mar pa went to India with him and the two were quite close. But then, gNyos became jealous, and destroyed Mar pa's texts. That treason, however, despite what we are led to believe by reading gTsang smyon's biography of Mar pa, is much debated in Mar pa's biographical tradition. While some say that he indeed destroyed Mar pa's texts, some say they

⁶⁴ Sørensen 2007: 443.

⁶⁵ See Ducher *forthcoming* for more details.

⁶⁶ Tsangnyön 1982.

were burnt, or merely fell in the water. The Jo nang master, Kun dga' grol mchog (1507–1565), who visited the gNyos' Gye re Temple in the 16th century, says that he saw there a Cakrasaṃvara statue that Mar pa had received from Nāropā. On that basis, later biographers completely rehabilitated gNyos in Mar pa's biography, saying that he was a great master and could not have destroyed Mar pa's texts.⁶⁷

Despite this liability (gNyos's role is already murky in the earliest of Mar pa's biographies), Chos dbang gave the *Sras mkhar ma*, Mar pa's secret texts, to gNyos Rin chen rgyal po, who in turn revealed it more widely, giving it to three to four people.⁶⁸ With that in mind, some of the peculiarity of the introduction of the *Sras mkhar ma* may be explained. One indeed finds in that description of Mar pa's journeys to India a rather unique depiction of how he traveled back to Tibet with gNyos Lo tsā ba and was advised by him to return to India as there were great obstacles to his return to Tibet. In the wording, nothing like an enmity between the two is discernable. Strangely enough, the term employed to describe Nāropā, "the one who shows the path to liberation," is the name Mar pa uses in the biographies to hide the identity of his Mahāmāyā master (Śāntibhadra) from gNyos.⁶⁹ These elements, which are not in line with the rest of Mar pa's biographical tradition, may lead us to suspect that there may have been some interpolation in "Mar pa's" introduction to the *Sras mkhar ma* when gNyos Rin chen rgyal po transmitted it to his disciples. That is not certain, however, since the *Indian Mahāmudrā Works* version also contains these descriptions, despite the fact that it may have come from a source that was independent of Guru Chos dbang's version.

The various versions of the *Sras mkhar ma* record different lineages, which shows that the collection spread quite widely after gNyos Rin chen rgyal po. The Drepung version states that it was copied from a Karma pa's copy,⁷⁰ maybe the third, who is part of a lineage recorded in the DK-DZO.⁷¹ At the end of the RT version,

⁶⁷ 'Be lo 1990: 60. See Decler 1992 for details.

⁶⁸ RT, vol. 85: 57.

⁶⁹ See for instance Tsangnyön 1982: 25.

⁷⁰ MPSB: 6.

⁷¹ DK-DZO: 510–511: "Vajradhara, Vajrapani, Vajrayoginī, Tilo, Nāro, Mar pa, Chos kyi dbang phyug, the siddha Me long rdo rdje [1243–1303], the glorious Rang byung rdo rje [1284–1339], the sprul sku Dus 'khor ba, the sprul sku Rol pa'i rdo rje [Fourth Karma pa, 1340–1383], mKha' spyod dbang po [Second Zhwa dmar pa, 1350–1405], the one named mGon po, the one named 'Jams dbyangs, Dran chog blo gros rgyal mtshan, the yogin from La phyi, dBang phyug rin chen dpal ba, the learned and accomplished one from 'Brug bu, bDe chen dpal 'bar ba, 'me.'" bDe chen dpal 'bar ba, also known as Shar ka Ras chen, was a contemporary of the Seventh Karma pa (1454–1506). Another lineage went through Chos dbang's son, Padma dbang chen (see RT, vol. 85, 65–66). Another

Kong sprul notes that except the inventory(/-ies?), the verses listing the contents of the collection (*dkar chag*) and the *sādhana* of Khol po Dar thod can, all texts also feature in the Zur mang tradition of the bDe mchog snyan brgyud.⁷²

7. Conclusion

Unstudied until now, this collection of Mar pa's translations of Indian *sādhana*s and oral instructions retains some ambiguity. Although it is not possible to deny with certainty that Mar pa intended to conceal this text for future generations, it seems more probable that it is the written material he used for the transmission to his disciples of what became known as the aural transmission, that is to say an esoteric wisdom not intended to be spread widely or written down. It is stated in Mar pa's inventory that it was copied several times by his close disciple, Mar pa mGo yags, and concealed at several places within his mansion. That too, is open to doubt, but it is possible that there were several versions, and that one of them was found in the early 13th century and transmitted by gSer sding pa gZhon nu 'od, while another was brought to light by Guru Chos dbang. The latter, as a famous treasure revealer and important designer of the treasure tradition, conceived of the collection in the same way that he did the other treasures he revealed, presenting it as a teaching that kept intact the blessing of Mar pa and his masters, thus not as replacing the existing empowerments and instructions passed down in the various bKa' brgyud lineages, but as enriching them with a fresh energy.

Although the status of the *Sras mkhar ma* as treasure is thus moderated, the fact remains that, during the early period of the second spread of Buddhism in Tibet, there was a somewhat common tendency to conceal texts. A close study of the period's other "bKa' brgyud treasures" may reveal a similar twist in the treasure's status, which became treasure by the agency of the revealer rather than that of the concealer. In later centuries, however, the solidification of the

was received by the Fifth Dalai Lama and transited (among others) through rNgog Byang chub dpal (1360–1446) (see DL5 *Thob yig*, vol. 2, 302–303)

⁷² This tradition was also instrumental in the transmission of *Sems khrid yid bzhin nor bu* (the treasure revealed by Dung mtsho ras pa). It was probably that lineage's founder, Drung rMa sras Blo gros rin chen (1386–1483), who introduced these teachings received from the Fifth Karma pa in his tradition.

rNying ma tradition put a halt to this way of presenting teachings in the bKa' brgyud tradition.

Despite these doubts, the information provided in Chos dbang's inventory on the events following Mar pa's death cannot be easily brushed aside. Both Mar pa's biographical tradition and the rNgog pa bKa' brgyud histories similarly assert that Mar pa's estate in Gro bo lung quickly declined, and that his biological succession collapsed. Although Guru Chos dbang may have expanded the introduction of the collection in order to legitimise it, he certainly relied for that on first-hand information from lHo brag, since his estate neighbored Mar pa's. Regarding his bestowal of the transmission to the holder of the lHa pa bKa' brgyud lineage, it can be explained by the fact that the gNyo clan was very powerful in southern Tibet and Bhutan at the time. It is certainly quite ironical for modern readers of gTsang smyon's *Life of Marpa* that his scrolls were given to the successor of gNyo Lo tsā ba, but given the content of the *Sras mkhar ma*—an eminently bKa' brgyud teaching very different from the other treasures revealed by Guru Chos dbang—it is not surprising that he gave it to a powerful heir of 'Bri gung skyob pa 'Jig rten gsum mgon. Thus, he at once strengthened his footing in southern Tibet, cleared away the doubts surrounding the sanctity of the gNyo transmission, and ensured that Mar pa's blessing reached those it intended to benefit, the practitioners of the various bKa' brgyud sub-branches.

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