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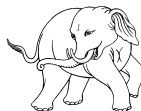
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Building a Tradition

The Lives of Mar-pa the Translator

Cécile Ducher



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CÉCILE DUCHER is a PhD candidate in Tibetan Studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris. Her current research focuses on the history and transmission of the Mar-rngog Bka'-brgyud lineage.

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*For the masters of the Bka'-brgyud lineage,
past and present*

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Abbreviations

BA	<i>The Blue Annals</i> . See Roerich 1979.
BCZP	<i>Hagiographies of the wish-fulfilling gem of the lineage Bde mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud (ras chung snyan rgyud)</i> . See Byang-chub-bzang-po.
DCNGbio	<i>Bde mchog snyan brgyud kyi rnam thar skor</i> . See Unknown.
<i>Deb ther</i>	<i>Deb ther sngon po</i> . See 'Gos lo-tsä-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal.
DK-DZO	<i>'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo</i> . See A-mgon Rin-po-che.
Dpa'-bo II	<i>Rje btsun mar pa'i rnam par thar pa grub pa'i ngo mtshar brjod pa</i> . See Dpa'-bo II Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba.
DRNT	<i>Bka' brgyud kyi rnam thar chen mo rin po che'i gter mdzod dgos 'dod 'byung gnas</i> . See Rdo-rje-mdzes-'od.
Diwakar	<i>Zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba</i> . See 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab (= <i>Rosary of Crystal Gems</i>).
GLNT	"Skyab mchog mar pa lo tstsha'i rnam thar." See Rgyal-thang-pa Bde-chen-rdo-rje.
Gtsang-smyon	<i>Sgra bsgyur mar pa lo tsä'i rnam par thar pa mthong ba don yod</i> . See Gtsang-smyon Heruka Rus-pa'i-rgyan-can.
KSTC	When no number is specified, KSTC refers to the biography by Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas in general.
KSTC-1	"Sgra bsgyur chen po mar pa'i rnam par thar pa." In: <i>Bka' brgyud gser phreng chen mo</i> . See Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas.
KSTC-2	"Brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu las/ Rje btsun mar pa lo tsa'i rnam par thar pa." In: LGNT. See Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas.
KSTC.sum.1	"Rje btsun mar pa'i rnam thar." In: DK-DZO. See Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas.
KSTC.sum.2	"Mar pa lo tsä'i skabs." In: LGNT. See Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas.
KSTC.sum.3	"Mar pa lo tsä ba'i lo rgyus." In: LGNT. See Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas.
KWNT	"Chos kyi rje mnga' bdag mar pa lo tsatsha'i rnam par thar pa gsang ba mdzod kyi lde mig." See Zhwa-dmar 02 Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po Dri-med-dpal-ye-shes.
LGNT	<i>Bod gyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs</i> . See Dpal-brtsegs.
<i>Lho rong</i>	<i>Lho rong chos 'byung</i> . See Rta-tshag Tshe-dbang-rgyal.

- Mdo-chen Rosary* “Bka’ brgyud kyi rnam thar thog mar rdo rje ’chang gi rnam thar na rim par bzhugs so.” See Anonymous.
- MK25 “Mar pa’i mgyur chen nyer lnga.” In: *Mar pa bka’ ’bum*. See Mar-pa.
- MKNT “Rje mar pa’i rnam thar” In: *Mar pa bka’ ’bum*. See Rngog mdo-sde.
- Mon-rtse-pa “Sgra bsgyur mar pa lo tstsha’i rnam par thar pa (nga).” See Mon-rtse-pa Kun-dga’-dpal-ldan.
- MPSB *Lho brag mar pa lo tsā’i gsung ’bum*. See Dpal-brtsegs.
- Pad-dkar “Chos ’byung bstan pa’i padma rgyas pa’i nyin byed.” See Padma-dkar-po.
- Palpung *Sgra bsgyur chos kyi rgyal po mnga’ bdag mar pa lo tsā ba chos kyi blo gros mchog gi rnam thar mthong ba don ldan*. See Rgyal-mtshan-phun-tshogs.
- Opening Eyes* “Bka’ brgyud rin po che’i chos ’byung mig ’byed ’od stong.” See Spyian-snga Bsod-rnams-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po
- Rngog-1 “Bla ma mar pa lho brag pa’i yon tan mdor bsodus pa.” See Rngog (Anonymous).
- Rngog-2 “Bla ma mar pa lo tsā ba’i rnam par thar pa lags par gda’.” See Rngog gzhung-pa Chos-kyi-rdo-rje.
- Rosary of Crystal Gems* *Zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba*. See ’Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab.
- Rwa-lung Rosary* “Skyes mchog mar pa lo tsa’i rnam thar dri med mthong ba don ldan.” In: *Rwa lung dkar brgyud gser phreng*. See Sangs-rgyas-’bum.
- Sgam-po-pa “Rje mar pa dang rje btsun mi la’i rnam thar.” See Sgam-po-pa Bsod-nams-rin-chen.
- Sgam-po-pa (ms) “Mnyam med dwags po lha rje’i bka’ ’bum.” See Sgam-po-pa Bsod-nams-rin-chen.
- TWNB “Mar mi dwags po jo rje yab sras sogs dam pa ’ga’ zhig gi rnam thar sa bon dus kyi nges pa brjod pa dag ldan nyung gsal.” See Kaḥ-thog Rig-’dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu.
- “U-rgyan-pa” “Mar pa chos kyi blo gros kyi rnam thar.” See U-rgyan-pa.
- ZKB “Gro ba’i mgon po zhang g.yu brag pa’i gsung mdzad pa rnam thar gyi skor chos tshan bcu gsum.” See Bla-ma Zhang G.yu-brag-pa Brtson-’grus-grags-pa.



*How could my lineage not be famous
When it is endowed with the spiritual vision of dākinīs?
How could my forefather not be famous
When he is Tilo, the one and only Buddha?
How could my guru not be famous
When he is Nāro who possesses the eye of Dharma?
How could I not be famous
When I am Nāro's only heart-son?
How could my instructions not be famous
When they are three wish-fulfilling gems?
How could my special teachings not be famous
When they are the mixing and transference which no one else has
And the aural transmission that no one else owns?¹*

Mar-pa Chos-kyi-blo-gros

¹ MKNT, vol. *ca*, p. 185. See p. 290, n. 899, for correspondences with other versions. Illustration from Tucci (1967), plate 15, opposite p. 41.

Preface

Mar-pa Lo-tṣā-ba Chos-kyi-blo-gros (1000?–1081?)² was the first Tibetan master of the highly successful Bka'-brgyud school of Tibetan Buddhism and its many branches.³ This work examines the corpus of his biographies in order to map out the genesis of this literary tradition, in which more than thirty independent texts are now known. Although Mar-pa's death occurred more than 900 years ago, he remains very much alive in the Tibetan mind. Hitherto unknown biographies and unknown editions of available material keep popping up now and then. When I defended my thesis, which forms the basis of this book, in 2011, I presented 24 biographies. I now have 32, plus another four or five texts containing biographical information. It is this jungle of material that I have attempted to put into order so as to provide a clear sense of what texts are available on Mar-pa's life, and which are the most reliable or influential.

Although my initial plan was to learn more about Mar-pa's life, this ambition had to be reviewed when I began to take stock of the quantity and diversity of Mar-pa's biographical accounts. Given the absence of historical documents or reliable outer sources, it was very difficult to ascertain anything about Mar-pa's life *per se*. When sources are rare, we might possibly say that so-and-so did this or that, but we have to acknowledge that the data has been derived from a hagiographical narrative and is therefore subject to the vicissitudes of memory, which tends to embellish certain aspects and discount others. Nonetheless, there *is* some data. It may not be factual, but in the absence of anything else, information can be gleaned from it. In Mar-pa's case, differing versions collide with one another, thus obscuring any firm knowledge we would hope to gain about his life. In the end, it feels as if we know less about Mar-pa's life than when reading Gtsang-smyon's "classic" version. While this impression may not be completely valid, we should be aware that what has been gained in the process is a knowledge of the Bka'-brgyud tradition itself, of the way Mar-pa's image was shaped over the centuries so as to construct a common representation of this tradition, and how his life was used to suit various purposes. We may not know when he

² The dates of birth and death of Mar-pa cannot be ascertained on conclusive grounds as none of the biographies agree on the subject and no external information can help us determine which of the several possibilities is correct. See Appendix 5 for an explanation of the chosen dates (1000–1081) and information on the different traditions of dating.

³ The exception is the Shangs-pa Bka'-brgyud lineage, which developed out of the transmission that Khyung-po-rnal-'byor received in India from many gurus, the main ones being the two *dākinis* Niguma and Sukhasiddhi. See Kapstein 1992.

was born, where, exactly, he went in India or whom he met there, but the few facts that remain are decidedly more solid than those gathered by relying on Gtsang-smyon's, or any other, version alone.

The present book is divided into three main parts. The first is an introduction to Mar-pa's life and to the genre of hagiography in Tibetan Buddhism and in general. A lot has been said in Tibetan Studies on the biographies of saints and I do not claim to introduce anything new here. I refer readers particularly to the introduction of Andrew Quintman's book on Mila-ras-pa and Gtsang-smyon,⁴ which deals with the topics I broach here in more detail and depth. In this section my aim is to frame my presentation, analysis and contextualization of the life stories of Mar-pa that comprise the second and main part. There, I place all biographies available to me in a chronological and logical order, in some cases treating several biographies as a group, and presenting together with the main text the secondary ones that it influenced. These biographies are ordered according to the metaphor of a house: first foundations, then floor, walls, roof and further developments. A map of the house is provided at the beginning of that section in order to help visitors find their way among the many small bricks that make up the building. The third part is an offshoot of the second but may prove to be the most interesting one for most readers. While I was reading the biographies and trying to identify their authors or the period and group to which they belonged, I found several markers that are like cornerstones in Mar-pa's life. My first impulse was to mention each of these in the course of the presentation of each text, but this proved to be too cumbersome. I therefore welcomed Professor Kapstein's suggestion that I synthesize some of these points in the third part: Mar-pa's songs; verbs indicative of indirect speech that mark the author's presence in the biography; Mar-pa's status as a reincarnation; the practice of entering another's body (*grong 'jug*); and Mar-pa's relationships with Nāropā⁵ and Gnyos. Other points deserve further study, Mar-pa's disciples for example, which may be researched more thoroughly in the future.⁶

⁴ Quintman 2014.

⁵ I have written the name of the Indian paṇḍita "Nāropā" on the basis of a Sanskrit manuscript on the cult of Vajrayoginī discovered by Sylvain Lévi in Nepal in 1928 (see Lévi 1931, pp. 418 and 422). As pointed out by Helmut Hoffmann 1951, p. 141, n. 1, the Tibetan rendering of Nāropa (*nā ro pa*) is slightly incorrect, as this middle-Indian version of the Sanskrit Naḍapāda should actually be written Nāropā, with the final *-pā* being an abbreviation of *-pāda*. Thanks to Péter-Dániel Szántó and Ralf Kramer for these references.

⁶ The question of Mar-pa's disciples will be dealt with in my PhD dissertation on the Mar-rgong Bka'-brgyud lineage. This lineage stems from the transmission that Rngog

In the appendices of the present book, the reader will find the translation of two of the earliest biographies of Mar-pa, the ones by Ngam-rdzong stonpa and Rngog Mdo-sde. Both were discovered in the course of the present research and represent important material for our knowledge of the beginnings of Mar-pa's biographical tradition as well as fascinating narratives *per se*. A diplomatic edition of the former, which was hitherto published in an *dbu med* manuscript from the 15th century, is also provided. Then are presented two charts referencing Mar-pa's songs and his dates of birth and death as found in the biographies. A short summary of Mar-pa's possible lifespan is finally included.

Now that my research for this book about Mar-pa's life stories is nearing its end, I keep finding new biographies, new articles, and new revelations, and the unending cycle of editing seems to go on and on. I know I will have to stop, but in the many years that I have been studying Mar-pa, I have developed a great fondness for this familiar yet exotic founding father of the Bka'-brgyud lineage, and it is with reluctance that I will leave him behind. No doubt new biographies will be found and there may be major discoveries that will change my understanding of their genesis, but I am confident that most of the conclusions I have reached represent a solid ground for further research on Mar-pa's life and on the history of the early Bka'-brgyud lineage. Many people have helped me reach these conclusions, and I acknowledge their aid, but all uncertainty and the mistakes that remain are definitely mine.

I began studying Mar-pa's life in 2002, when 'Jigs-med Rin-po-che asked those helping at the Dhagpo Kagyu Library (Dordogne, France) to write a history of the Karma Bka'-brgyud lineage. In a simple-minded fashion, we decided to start from the beginning, so we chose Mar-pa, the first Tibetan master of the lineage (although we were naïve, we were aware that starting with Vajradhara or Tilopā might prove an unrewarding task, especially since none of us knew Sanskrit). With the help of Mkhan-po Chos-grags-bstan-'phel, whose encyclopedic knowledge and unending patience were showered upon us, a team of three—Stéphane Faure, Olivier Lespinasse and myself—started to gather as many biographies as we could find. We soon realized that the task we had been assigned was much greater than we had imagined. With the help of several Tibetan informants, we began translating some of these texts, and Stéphane synthesized our findings. Thinking back about that time from the vantage point of fifteen years of research, I now see that this collective endeavor, no matter how limited, was very precious; I thank

Chos-sku-rdo-rje received from Mar-pa. It has been kept alive and is currently transmitted as part of the *Bka' brgyud sngags mdzod*.

'Jigs-med Rin-po-che, along with Mkhan-po Nges-don and Mkhan-po Chos-mchog for opening our eyes to the mysteries of religious history, and U-rgyan-lags and Bsam-gtan-lags for their instruction in the Tibetan language.

My life changed in 2007 when Stéphane Arguillère visited our library. His enthusiasm convinced me to study Tibetan Buddhism in a more academic fashion, and with his help I enrolled at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (EPHE) in Paris, where I started to prepare a “diplôme”—the French equivalent of an M.A.—under Professor Matthew Kapstein’s direction. Professor Kapstein’s skilled guidance led me into a whole new world. By listening to his advice, observing the way he conducted his own research, and working by his side in the school’s library of Tibetan Studies, I learned more than I can acknowledge, and it is with deep gratitude that I thank him for helping me navigate this ocean of knowledge. I certainly have not reached the other shore, but knowing that he is by my side reassures me in moments of doubt.

Following fruitful meetings with teachers who shared their knowledge during classes and in more informal exchanges, I defended my thesis in 2011. I particularly thank Stéphane Arguillère, Professor Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, Rémi Chaix and Elijah Ary for their support, as well as Professor Charles Ramble and Professor Heather Stoddard, who were part of my jury, for their encouragement and advice.

When Professor Kapstein encouraged me to publish this work, it was not clear whether I wanted to continue Tibetan Studies, but after a few months, I decided that this was what I wanted to do, and again with his help I obtained a three-year scholarship from Paris Novi Mundi Universités, and a publisher for the present research. Professor Franz-Karl Ehrhard read the French version of the thesis, and accepted it for the *Collectanea Himalayica*. His kindness did not stop there, however: he gave me advice, shared articles with me, read my work again in English and filled gaps that I was not aware of. For all of this, I am extremely grateful.

There are many other scholars who were a source of inspiration when I first prepared my research and later when I revised it. Marta Sernesi generously shared with me her knowledge of the Aural Transmission and provided me with much useful information. Nathan Hill, Kenichi Kuranishi, Stefan Larsson, Charles Manson, Andrew Quintman, Charles Ramble, Peter Alan Roberts, Ulrike Roesler, Per Sørensen, Péter-Dániel Szántó, David Templeman, and others, answered my questions and encouraged me to proceed with my research and its publication. I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

Stefan Larsson in particular advised me to translate the work into English in order to make it available to a wider audience. This did not prove an easy

task, but there too I was helped by several precious friends. Christine Knowles and Louise Burnet-Munoz read and translated some parts of the work, and Pamela Gayle White corrected the English. The job probably turned out to be more than she would have wished, but she proved to be the perfect copy-editor, and if any pleasure is taken while reading my prose, she must be thanked for that, together with Chuck Norris, who took on the responsibility of editing the manuscript in order to make a book out of it. Through his patient and thorough readings, he tracked down the best concealed errors and unrelentingly slashed them. Last but not least are the generous sponsors who supported me while I was doing my research, and who contributed to the printing of this book; I thank them sincerely.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my husband and daughter who were there when I needed them and were patient with me when I was lost in 11th-century Tibet. Without their love and joy, and without the help of all the people mentioned and others who are remembered but are too numerous to be named, I could never have been able to conclude this research. May any knowledge about Mar-pa's life that I have gained be offered to the community, and may it help us reach a better understanding of the formation of the Bka'-brgyud lineage!

Fleurac, June 2016

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*Historia est quae praeterita narrat,
Prophetia quae futura narrat,
Hagiographa quae aeternae vitae gaudia jubilat.*⁷

1. Introduction

1.1. *Mar-pa's life*

A lot has been said about Mar-pa, and it is difficult to sum it all up in a few words, to simply state who he was, or what he did. One thing that most biographies agree upon is that he sang songs about his life and his realization for his gurus and disciples. Let us hear what Mar-pa says about himself:⁸

Lord Vajradhara of this age of strife,
Supreme being who has practiced hardships,
You remain above everyone's head like a crown,
Glorious Nāropā, I bow my head down at your feet!

I, this Mar-pa Blo-gros from Lho-brag,
Met with the Dharma when I reached my thirteenth year.
It was like reawakening previously trained habits.
First I learned the letters of the alphabet.
Then I learned the translation of words.
Finally, I went south to Nepal and India.
I stayed three years in the Nepal Valley.
From Newar [gurus] blessed by the father [Nāropā]
I heard the Catuspīṭha, renowned as a powerful tantra,
Obtained the instructions on transference and entering an-
other's body,⁹
And received the goddess Dhūmāṅgārī as a protector.
That alone did not suffice to quench my desire:
I traveled for Dharma to the central country, India.

⁷ Honorius of Autun (ca. 1080–1150): *Patrologie latine*, tome 172, p. 273b.

⁸ This song was chosen as it is featured in many biographies. Ngam-rdzong ston-pa (12th century), who wrote the first life story about Mar-pa, mentions it and narrates much of its content. The translation is based on the song found in the MK25, pp. 464–466 (see p. 297 for correspondences), which might be among the most ancient and unadulterated versions. Only the most important differences with regard to the other versions are mentioned here. This song and its utilization in the genesis of Mar-pa's biographies is the object of Ducher Forthcoming (?), on the relationship between songs and biographies.

⁹ This verse was omitted by Gtsang-smyon and Dpa'-bo II.

I crossed poisoned rivers with undrinkable water.
The poison on my body [made] my skin shed like a snake's,
[But] I dared risking my life for the sake of the Dharma.

[I traveled] to the west, to the city of Lakṣetra¹⁰
Where I touched the feet of glorious Jñānagarbha.
I heard the father tantra of Guhyasamāja,
Learned the meaning of the path in five stages,¹¹
And obtained instructions on the illusory body and luminosity.

I went to the south, to the island of a boiling toxic lake.
At times, the midday sun faded into darkness,
And the path, clear a moment before, would disappear.
Forsaking [the fear] of losing my life, I searched for the Venerable,
And met the glorious Śāntibhadra in person.
I heard the mother tantra of Mahāmāya,
Learned the meaning of the three yogas, of form [and so on],
And obtained the instructions on the Triad of Illusions.

In the East, I crossed the Ganges, river of accomplishments.
In a tumultuous charnel ground on a mountain,
In the Capturing the Luster of Flowers Hermitage,¹²
I touched the feet of the Sovereign Lord¹³ Maitrīpā.
I heard the profound tantra of Melodious Praise [Mañjuśrī-
nāmasaṅgīti].
I trained¹⁴ in the realization of the dharma of Mahāmudrā,
Established the abiding mode of the entity of mind,
And saw the true nature of the uncontrived basis.

¹⁰ Gtsang-smyon inserts the verses on Nāropā at this point. All other versions start with Jñānagarbha.

¹¹ This verse is placed after the next in all other versions.

¹² *Me tog mdangs 'phrog dgon pa*: this name generally refers to Puṣpahari, a place associated with Nāropā. However, all versions of the song state that this place is Maitrīpā's, while mentioning it again in relation to Nāropā in another song. Gtsang-smyon probably spotted the incoherence and removed this line. Gtsug-lag (p. 55) keeps both but explains that *me tog mdangs 'phrog* is Sanskrit Puṣpahari, which in dialect is Phullahari.

¹³ Although "U-rgyan-pa" (p. 165) has *rje 'ga gha* and MK25 (p. 465, l. 5) has *rje gang ga* most later versions of the song have *rje mnga' bdag*, which is the usual epithet of Maitrīpā, and it is therefore the translation I follow here.

¹⁴ MK25 has *skyangs*. All other versions have *shyangs*, and this has been amended accordingly.

I went to a wonderful place revealed by the *ḍākinīs*,
 Phullahari in the North.
 In the hermitage of the glorious accomplished one,
 From the gatekeeper, *mahāpāṇḍita* Nāropā,
 I heard the profound tantra of Hevajra.
 I received the instructions uniting [the six doctrines] of mixing
 and transference,
 Requested in particular the *karmamudrā* of inner heat,
 And was introduced to the key points of the Aural Tantra.

The above [masters] are famous throughout Jambudvīpa
 As the lineage rivers of the four directions.
 Yet there are yogins roaming in charnel grounds
 And *kusulus* dwelling under trees;
 Some of them are completely unknown.
 I requested from them many details on the perfection phase.
 Their means of accomplishment
 And minor instructions are beyond number!

When on the way [back] we reached the Nepal Valley,
 I, Mar-pa Lotsā from Lho-brag,
 And Gnyos Lotsā from Kha-rag,
 Were asked who the most learned translator was
 And who held the greatest instructions.
 Later, when we reached the border between Nepal and Tibet,
 It was he who received financial and material fortune.
 When we reached the four parts of La-stod,
 We obtained equal fame as translators.
 When we arrived in the Tibetan plain of Dbus and Gtsang,
 It was I who was renowned for my instructions.
 Do not imagine that there is any higher instruction,
 As these come from my encounter with accomplished gurus.
 Though I do not search for enlightenment in words and con-
 ventions,
 May all the exegetes who revel in them do as they please!

This was intoned by Mar-pa for Tibetan disciples who asked him which masters he had met and what he had received from them, and it sums up Mar-pa's training as generally described in his life-stories.¹⁵ It gives a good

¹⁵ The song is found at various places in the different biographies. Some insert it between the first and second journeys while Mar-pa is in Tibet, others after the last return to Tibet. The MK25 states it was sung while Mar-pa was at Ba-rang Lba-ba-can's place, after the last journey.

idea of his character and style. He is thus known as a translator who went to Nepal and India. There he received the most famous tantras of the time from many masters. Back in Tibet, he was recognized for the wealth of his instructions and initiated a tradition centered on practice rather than study.

1.2. *Mar-pa and his time*

Mar-pa lived during a period of renewal in Tibet when many Tibetans went south to India or Nepal to receive Buddhist transmissions which had declined in their homeland. The pivotal individuals who were active between Indian Buddhism's heyday and the revival of Tibetan Buddhism were the subject of numerous biographies and descriptions in the following centuries. Devoted disciples, lineage masters, administrative leaders, and historians all attempted (to various degrees) to depict the lives of these individuals who changed the course of history and graced them with a precious religious heritage. Their stories fed the Tibetan tradition, and also provide much of our knowledge of Indian masters, whose dates are often established in relation to the Tibetan pilgrims who met them. Despite its importance and the wealth of its biographical literature, however, the history of the 11th, and to some extent, of the 12th century, remains shrouded in a legendary halo that is difficult to dispel.

The political implosion of the old Tibetan empire during the 9th century left behind a fragmented Tibet. During the 10th and 11th centuries, after decades of "darkness," Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism started to take shape again in a more or less institutional fashion.¹⁶ At the origins of the Bka'-gdams and Sa-skya schools, were individuals who were sponsored by local authorities¹⁷ like the kings of Gu-ge, who were distant descendants of the Tibetan emperors and played a decisive role in the efflorescence of the Dharma in Tibet. They patronized the translator Rin-chen-bzang-po¹⁸ and invited the Indian guru Atiśa to Tibet,¹⁹ thus kindling the development of the Bka'-gdams school. The founder of the Sa-skya school,²⁰ 'Brog-mi Shākya-ye-shes, was supported by his Tibetan monastery as well as by the Gu-ge kings. He went to the Indian university of Vikramaśīla and received teachings that he then

¹⁶ Concerning this dark period and how it actually served as a time of insemination of Indian Buddhism for Tibetans, see Dalton 2011.

¹⁷ See Kapstein 2006b, pp. 89–104, for a synthetic presentation of the major actors of Buddhist renaissance in Tibet.

¹⁸ See Tucci 1988.

¹⁹ See e.g. Decler 1997 and Chattopadhyaya 1999.

²⁰ See BA, pp. 205–211, and Stearns 2001.

shared with Tibetan disciples in exchange for large amounts of gold. Among them figured the heir of one of the leading Tibetan clans, Dkon-mchog-rgyal-po of the 'Khon clan (1034–1102), who built the Sa-skya monastery. Despite such supportive and successful structures, the beginnings of these new tantric transmissions remain rather mysterious; the life of Atiśa²¹ and the birth and death dates of 'Brog-mi,²² for instance, cannot be assessed with certainty.

The early Bka'-brgyud lineage is even more enigmatic as it did not develop within any structured locus of power. Mar-pa did not belong to a famous family, he raised money independently, he did not study in a major Indian university, and did not found a monastery. No contemporary historical document attests to his existence, and what we know about him is limited to hagiographical accounts given by his spiritual heirs. The first such account was written two generations after him. These preliminary observations underscore the scope of the present work. Given the current state of our knowledge, it is not possible to determine precisely what happened ten centuries ago. What we can do, however, is describe the diachronic evolution of Mar-pa's life story in the centuries that followed his death.

1.3. *What sources, for which historical reconstruction?*

Before delving into the narrative tradition about Mar-pa itself, it is important to examine the kinds of sources referenced in this book, i.e. historiographical writings. There are many other kinds of sources that could have been used—instructional texts, tantric commentaries, lineage prayers, means of practice (*sādhanas*), statues, paintings, and so on. It is clear, for example, that colophons of instructions and commentaries that Mar-pa brought back from India were used by biographers to add details to their hagiographies. I chose not to use them, however, because I wanted to have a coherent body of texts to study. Also, how do we date the colophon of a translation? If two colophons state something different, how do we assess them?²³ If the introduction to an instruction gives details that do not appear anywhere else in the biographical tradition, how can we make sense of it?²⁴ As the goal of this

²¹ See Eimer 1982.

²² See Davidson 2005, p. 163 ff. Davidson states that 'Brog-mi's dates (993–1077) were given for the first time at the end of the 16th century by Mang-thos Klu-grub-rgya-mtsho in the *Bstan rtsis gsal ba'i nyin byed*, pp. 81–83. See Stearns 2001 for a translation (without any date) of 'Brog-mi's life as well as those of other Lam-'bras masters, from the *Zhib mo rdo rje*, which was written in the first quarter of the 13th century.

²³ See Almogi 2008 for an examination of the matter.

²⁴ One such text is the "Rje btsun mar pa lo tsā'i gdams pa chos drug sras mkhar ma'i

book is not to tell Mar-pa's life but to describe his biographical tradition, I decided to ignore these texts, no matter how interesting they may be.

The historiographical texts that are the object of this study belong to several Tibetan genres: "hagiography" (*rnam thar*) and its "golden rosary" (*gser phreng*) sub-genre, as well as "religious histories" (*chos 'byung*).²⁵ There are of

skor rnam" reproduced for example in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 85, pp. 51–201. This set of fifteen instructions translated by Mar-pa is said to have been hidden by him in his house, Sras-mkhar, in Gro-bo-lung, and was revealed five generations later by Guru Chos-dbang (1212–1270). It contains an autobiographical introduction where Mar-pa describes his journeys between India and Tibet and how he received Nāropā's innermost instructions. It will not be considered here in the framework of Mar-pa's biographies, but only in the part on Gnyos, as it contains elements that may inform our perception of the much-debated relationship between the two translators. See Ducher 2016 for more details.

²⁵ Historiographical genres are discussed in van der Kuijp 1996, pp. 42–47. He distinguishes between "religious histories" (*chos 'byung*), "royal chronicles" (*rgyal rabs*) and "histories" (*lo rgyus*). Even though "royal chronicles" may seem irrelevant in the context of Mar-pa's life, van der Kuijp classifies the *Red Book* (*Deb ther dmar po*) as belonging to this genre. This text has a short passage about Mar-pa, but it also narrates the history of Tibet's neighbors—India, China, Mongolia, and so on—in an attempt to write a "global history," at a time when Tibet was part of the Mongol Empire. According to van der Kuijp 1996, p. 44, and van der Kuijp 2006, pp. 4–5, the term *deb ther* is a loanword that entered the Tibetan lexicon from the Mongol *debter* during the 13th century. The term does not really mean "annals" as the translation of *Deb ther sngon po* by "blue annals" would lead us to think, but rather "book," as in "blue book" or "red book" (*deb ther dmar po*). It is not, therefore, a genre *per se*, even though this kind of text generally refers to historical writings. Another historical genre which is not relevant to study Mar-pa's life is the "abbatial chronicle" (*gdan rabs*), as Mar-pa did not found a monastery. van der Kuijp lists another name for historical writing, the *lo rgyus*, literally "tidings of year[s]," "annals," or more simply "story." Martin 1997, pp. 14–15, states that "*lo-rgyus* ('history' or 'story,' although in its etymology it apparently means 'year familiarity') [...] [are] by far the broadest genre-term that we might translate as 'history,' covering as it does both the secular and the religious, but as pointed out long ago by Vostrikov (*Tibetan Historical Literature*, 1970, p. 204), *lo-rgyus* are often simply narrative works, or "stories," that may have little to do with history as such." In Mar-pa's biographical tradition, this is not the most significant genre; Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu (1698–1755) mentions a biography of Mar-pa composed by Rngog Byang-chub-dpal-ba called *Lo rgyus rin chen spungs pa*, but this most probably refers to the *Bla ma rngog pa yab sras rim par byon pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, which belongs to the "rosary" genre. Don-mo-ri-pa (DRNT, p. 472) also states in the colophon of the biography of his master, Ri-khrod-dbang-phyug, that the collection includes *lo rgyus rnam thar*, whose goal is to present a coherent story aimed at generating faith in those who did not meet the masters described in each biography, and "who see only what they have in front of them." (see quotation pp. 101–102 and discussion of the term in Quintman 2014, n. 40, p. 243). Here again, this designation does not really distinguish this text from others called *rnam thar*.

course differences between these various genres, but they are not as fundamentally distinct as we might think when we use the terms “hagiography” and “religious history.” Basically, a “hagiography” is the biography of a saint, either in the form of a free-standing text, or within a series of hagiographies of all the masters of the lineage, which in the Bka’-brgyud school is called a “golden rosary.” In both cases, the life of only one master at a time is described. “Religious histories” offer a more global approach of the history of religious traditions represented by these individuals, and of Buddhism in general. They often start with the Buddha and reach all the way to the author’s master, with indistinct divisions between a master and his disciples. Typically, chapters describe whole lineages rather than individuals. Another difference is that religious histories are generally more interested in comparing the chronology and dates than hagiographies are. The *Deb ther sngon po* and *Lho rong chos ’byung*, for instance, attempt to precisely define the various phases of Mar-pa’s life by stating his age at each important junction. Hagiographies, on the other hand, may give his year and age of death, often without much precision, but will leave the rest of the progression rather vague.

Most biographies²⁶ of Mar-pa come from “golden rosaries.”²⁷ These rosaries are made up of a series of “pearls,” the individual hagiographies, which can be the work of one or several authors. An example of a collection with a homogenous paternity is the golden rosary composed by Rgyal-thang-pa Bde-chen-rdo-rje:²⁸ all the biographies have a similar style and describe one after the other the masters of the Bka’-brgyud and then ’Brug-pa-Bka’-brgyud lineage until Rgod-tshang-pa Bde-chen-rdo-rje (1189–1258). An example of a disparate collection is the four-volume *Great Bka’-brgyud Golden Rosary*.²⁹ The copy of this compilation of biographies composed by several authors, often anonymous, switches between *dbu can* and *dbu med* in the middle of the fourth volume. Sometimes a rosary compiled by an author includes individual biographies that he composed as well as biographies by other authors. This is the case with Mon-rtse-pa’s rosary, in which Mar-pa’s biography is the work of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, Mi-la-ras-pa’s disciple. Here

²⁶ I use the terms “biography” and “hagiography” in a generally interchangeable way, in reference to the Tibetan term *rnam thar*. When I mean to be more precise and translate the idea of *rnam thar* as “the life of a saint” (as in the preceding paragraph), I use the term “hagiography.”

²⁷ See Smith 2001, p. 39, for general remarks on this type of literature typical of the Bka’-brgyud lineage but also adopted by the Dge-lugs and Sa-skya schools. See pp. 105–110 for that of Rgyal-thang-pa.

²⁸ All biographies and their presumed authors are presented in the next section.

²⁹ *Bka’ brgyud gser phreng chen mo* (KSTC; compiled after 1838), see pp. 72–76.

the attribution is mentioned in the colophon and is therefore quite straightforward, but often no author is indicated, as in “U-rgyan-pa” where my quotation marks point to the fact that U-rgyan-pa the compiler is probably *not* the author of Mar-pa’s life, but his compilation is nonetheless referred to as “U-rgyan-pa” for want of a better reference. Elsewhere, the indications may be fanciful, as in the *Hagiographies of the wish-fulfilling gem of the lineage*³⁰ compiled by Byang-chub-bzang-po in the early 16th century but attributed to disciples of each of the masters mentioned. Sometimes a rosary has been judged incomplete by later editors, and stand-alone biographies or biographies coming from another rosary are adjoined to it; this is the case for Ras-chung-pa’s biography in Rgyal-thang-pa’s rosary, as well as Mar-pa’s biography in the *Cycle of hagiographies of the Cakrasamvara Aural Tantra*³¹ which was composed by Mkha’-spyod-dbang-po. These two last examples illustrate the difficulties of assessing an author’s identity on the basis of the rest of the rosary. As individual works in a rosary are almost never dated or signed, we often resort to analyzing the rest of the rosary, especially the last work of the collection. This can lead to conclusions that are uncertain or erroneous, as the various biographies in the collection are likely to be the work of more than one author. We might also try to determine authorship by analyzing the style of the composition in question to see if it is homogeneous with the other texts in the volume, to compare its terminology and information with other dated works, or to use the information provided in later texts, for example when they state that so-and-so said such-and-such. I have used all of these means, often in combination, to reach the conclusions presented below. At the end of the day, a golden rosary is actually only an accumulation of hagiographies, whether it is comprised of several texts by a single author, several collections of texts by several authors, or several independent biographies by several authors. One difference between hagiographies and rosaries may be that the biographies belonging to rosaries are generally shorter and more generic than stand-alone works; for their author, they are simply parts of a whole. Full-length hagiographies, on the other hand, are often designed for specific reasons; they are therefore much more distinctive and detailed. In Mar-pa’s corpus, we see this in the texts by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, Rngog Mdo-sde, Gtsang-smyon Heruka, and Dpa’-bo Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba.

Now that the different genres of Mar-pa’s biographies have been briefly described, we might look for their common characteristics. What, exactly, is

³⁰ “Brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu rnam par thar pa” (BCZP), see pp. 69–70.

³¹ *Bde mchog snyan brgyud kyi rnam thar skor* (DCNGBio); compiled before 1361, see pp. 119–122.

a “hagiography”? *Rnam thar* has a very long history in Tibet. As pointed out by Janet Gyatso, “Tibetans have been recollecting their lives in order to narrate them since close to the birth of Tibetan writing.”³² Giuseppe Tucci gives an overall picture of the development of Tibetan historical literature in his *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*³³ where he states that the first historical writings produced by Tibetans at the time of the Empire were the *yig tshang*, “writings” or chronicles reporting on and dating national events. During the second spread of Buddhism in Tibet, religious histories, or more literally narratives on the “origin of the Dharma” (*chos 'byung*), developed, reflecting the people’s interest in their religion rather than in their state, now in shambles. According to Tucci, these narratives contain biographical writings in which “bare facts are not listed year by year according to the simple system of the chronicles; they assume decorous literary draperies in which reminiscences of Buddhist hagiography recur.”³⁴

This brings us to the question of the relationship between “hagiography” and “truth.” Much has already been said about the subject, but I would like to revisit it (albeit in an inchoate and superficial fashion) in order to better frame the backdrop against which Mar-pa’s biographies should be viewed.³⁵

From the 19th century forward, the varying versions of the Buddha’s life fueled considerable debate between advocates of different styles and interpretations. Here is how Frank E. Reynolds summarizes the evolution of these antagonistic approaches:³⁶

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the field [of Buddhology] was largely divided between a group of myth-oriented scholars such as Emile Sénart, Heinrich Kern and Ananda Coomaraswamy on the one hand, and a group of more historically oriented philologists such as Herman Oldenberg and T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys-David on the other. Among the myth-oriented interpreters the emphasis was placed on the study of the Sanskrit sources and on the importance of those elements in the sacred biography which pointed in the direction of solar mythology; [...] In contrast, among those who took the second position, the emphasis was placed on Pali

³² Gyatso 1998, p. 101.

³³ Tucci 1949, vol. 1, pp. 139–154.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

³⁵ A recent study on the subject that I have been unable to consult as yet is Rondolino 2017.

³⁶ Reynolds 1976, pp. 38–39.

Theravāda texts and on those elements in the Pali tradition which they could use to reconstruct what they considered to be the actual historical life of the Buddha. [...]

More recently, however, Buddhologists have come to recognize the inadequacy of both the purely mythic and the historical, essentially rationalistic, modes of interpretation, and have reached a rather widely shared consensus concerning a number of basic methodological issues. First, there is now a common recognition that the study of any aspect of the most ancient forms of Buddhism requires a careful comparison and analysis of sources which have been preserved in a variety of traditions, including those which have come down to us not only in both Pali and Sanskrit, but in other Asian languages as well. Secondly, most scholars presently working in the field are convinced of the existence and importance of the historical Gotama Buddha; but at the same time they are painfully aware that the available texts provide us with very little authentic information concerning the details of his life. Beyond this, there is a widespread consensus that the most crucial problems which are amenable to future investigations cluster around the identification of the various levels or stages in the development of the biographical tradition, the question of the structure of the various biographical fragments and texts, and the role which these fragments and texts have played within the broader tradition.

The response to Tibetan biographies has been mixed as well. Scholars, willingly or unwillingly, often had to take these texts into account, in the absence of other, more “reliable,” sources. Tucci recognized that “an historian cannot ignore the *ṛnam t’ar*. He must resign himself to read them, and go through hundreds of pages to find a point of reference, an allusion, an important piece of information; he must be resigned [...] because with the exception of a few lives, noble masterpieces breathing a fresh, serene and robust poetic spirit, as for instance, Milarepa’s, these *Legenda aurea* are mostly cast in the same mould [...].”³⁷

Obviously it is difficult to gauge the reliability of narratives about the spiritual evolution and alleged liberation of someone, sometimes long dead, who spent time in a country where the author never set foot. There are many examples that illustrate the circumspection with which hagiographies should be treated. The following is given by Toni Huber,³⁸ who compared

³⁷ Tucci 1949, p. 151.

³⁸ Huber 2008, pp. 65–66.

an excerpt from a hagiography of Rwa Lo-tṣā-ba said to be composed by a distant disciple in the 12th century³⁹ with a travelogue of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang's journey to India in the 7th century. The comparison, and the proximity revealed between the two, show that Tibetan authors wrote biographies not to describe a historical truth, but to set an inspiring example. Here is how Rwa Ye-shes-seng-ge describes Rwa Lo-tṣā-ba's visit to the Tree of Enlightenment in Bodhgayā:⁴⁰

In autumn it does not wither. In winter it does not dry out. All of its leaves and flowers give off a great luster [...]. Those Indians whose fundamental faith is firmly established come here in an unceasing human stream to make offerings, even from distant lands. They combine various kinds of excellent medicinal herbs with milk, and whitewash the Bodhi Tree with it, and thus it is as though it is never bereft of moisture. At dusk, day-break, noon, and the evening, many pilgrims circumambulate the site. There are many lines of people making prostrations and offerings after the custom of the different lands in the four directions.

Here is how Xuanzang described the same phenomenon a few centuries earlier:⁴¹

The leaves wither not either in winter or summer, but they remain shining and glistening all the year round without change [...] [T]he princes of different countries and the religious multitude from different quarters assemble by thousands and ten thousands unbidden, and bathe [the roots] with scented water and perfumed milk; whilst they raise the sounds of music and

³⁹ Rwa Lo-tṣā-ba is mainly known through this biography attributed to Rwa Ye-shes-seng-ge (end 12th century) and translated in Cuevas 2015a. He was a highly controversial yogin-translator specialized in the Yamāri cycles and Vajrabhairava. It is claimed in his biography that he “liberated”—i.e. killed—many bodhisattvas, foremost among them Mar-pa's son Mdo-sde. See Decler 1992 and Ramble 2010 for insights into his life and conduct, and the *Rosary of Crystal Gems* (Diwakar, vol. 1, pp. 70–71) for the answer 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab (18th century) gave to what he saw as baseless affirmations by Rwa-lo's descendants of the translator's responsibility in Mdo-sde's death. Cuevas 2015b convincingly argues that this version of Rwa-lo's life may have been compiled in the mid-17th century within the circle of the 5th Dalai Lama.

⁴⁰ Huber 2008, p. 65; *Rwa lo tsā'i rnam thar*, f. 34b, l. 3–5.

⁴¹ Beal 1884, p. 117. Translation checked by Duncan Campbell at Huber's request. See Huber 2008, p. 66.

scatter flowers and perfumes, and whilst the day is continued by the burning torches, they offer their religious gifts.

The comparison illustrates how previously written texts influenced Tibetan authors when they composed biographies, and justifies the care with which their writings should be tackled. In the case of Mar-pa's biographies, caution is equally justified: none was composed during his lifetime or by a direct disciple. While they may have been based on songs attributed to Mar-pa, the many variations—and inventions—show that these oral narratives have been manipulated to a greater or lesser degree; indeed all of the biographies were written by Tibetans who had never traveled to India. Even though concrete knowledge of the Tibetan places where Mar-pa had lived is obvious in some cases, like in the hagiography composed by Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, who was the Gro-bo-lung abbot in the Lho-brag region where Mar-pa spent most of his Tibetan life, they still indiscriminately amalgamate critical passages and faithful restatements of earlier biographical passages.

Clearly, we cannot take these narratives as reliable sources for our knowledge of Tibetan religious history. "Hagiography,"⁴² whether in the West or in the East, has many other functions than just faithfully narrating the life of a saint. Often in the West, they were reduced to this, hence not considered worthy of an historian's consideration. Before describing these other functions in some detail, let us take a short foray into the way medieval hagiographies have been assessed by Western scholarship in order to understand how and why their usefulness has been reevaluated.

A frequently cited definition of "hagiography" is that of Hippolyte Delehaye (a Belgian Jesuit, 1859–1941), who states that it "intends primarily to engender, propagate, strengthen, etc. the cult of a saint."⁴³ Similarly, Baudouin de Gaiffier distinguishes hagiography from historiography in that the former glorifies its subject, inspires emulation, expresses ideals which change over time as a result of larger societal transformation, is inspired by earlier models within the genre and by texts such as the Bible, is sometimes more concerned with the tastes of the public or with some didactic aims than with the "painstaking search for truth," and whose visions of the subject or hero

⁴² Lifshitz 1994, p. 109, reminds us that the term "hagiography" did not always refer to a saint's biography. This definition was actually added to the traditional one, which literally meant "holy scriptures"—e.g. the final portion of the Hebrew Scriptures (writings such as Psalms, Proverbs, and Lamentations)—in the middle of the 19th century. Hence, the quotation of Honorius of Autun (11th/12th century) opening this chapter (*hagiographa quae aeternae vitae gaudia jubilat*, quoted by Lifshitz) should be understood in the framework of holy scriptures, even though I use it in a more general sense.

⁴³ Delehaye 1906, pp. xiii and 2. Quoted by Lifshitz 1994, p. 96.

are unstable and constantly changing. These elements prevent it from providing scientifically certain knowledge.⁴⁴

Most or all of these remarks could fit the *rnam thar*, and these characteristics tend to become accentuated with the centuries that separate the author from his subject. Mar-pa, for example, is portrayed with a number of defects, but what is of greatest concern to authors is how he received authentic teachings from the most renowned tantric master of the time, Nāropā; how he practiced and realized them through wondrous visions and acts; and how he transmitted them to extraordinary disciples before dying in marvelous circumstances.

These characteristics of medieval hagiography and Tibetan *rnam thar* have repelled many scholars keen on historical truths. As demonstrated by Felice Lifshitz, however, this vision of hagiography as unscientific when compared to historiography actually depends on a positivist and rationalist view of history, a view that did not emerge until the 19th century in the West.⁴⁵ Earlier, historiography was no more realistic than hagiography and distinguished itself by its subject: historiography was concerned with the secular state, while hagiography was interested in saints and the sacred. In Tibet, the secular and the sacred were often inseparable. This was true during Mar-pa's time, when saints and translators were more charismatic and powerful than clan leaders, and could attract communities of practitioners, and later, when the various lineages would pledge their allegiance to the ruling lords—the Sa-skya school with Mongol emperors of the Yuan Dynasty, or the Karma-pas with the ruling Rin-spungs-pa or Zhing-shag-pa clans, for example—or when the religious leaders would also rule the state, as was the case for the Dalai Lamas and the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang. Given the proximity between religion and state, it is no wonder that in Tibet the genre of hagiography never really distinguished itself from *a priori* more historiographical

⁴⁴ These views are expressed in De Gaiffier 1970, p. 140 ff., and summarized by Lifshitz 1994, p. 101.

⁴⁵ Lifshitz 1994, p. 102 ff., describes the evolution of historiography and hagiography by distinguishing three periods (in Medieval France, mainly). During the first era, from the 9th to the 11th centuries, historiography and hagiography were indistinguishable as there were no centralized states or kingdoms. Beginning in the 12th century, the two genres can be distinguished through their difference of interest in the secular and the ecclesiastical. Historiography is then characterized by a rationalistic approach which culminates in post-Enlightenment positivism; in the 19th century historiography became a type of narrative ostensibly concerned exclusively with the realm of sensible reality divorced from the realm of the sacred. It was then that the genre “hagiography” was invented. Then, “historiography stood ready to be purged of those who dared write of saints or miracles *in* history at all, rather than within the confines of ‘hagiography,’ ‘superstition,’ ‘folklore,’ or ‘popular devotion.’” (Lifshitz 1994, p. 108). See also Deeg 2010.

genres, such as “religious histories” (*chos ’byung*, the name itself shows the fusion), “royal chronicles” (*rgyal rabs*), or “ecclesiastical chronicles” (*gdan rabs*).

After having ostracized hagiographies and supposedly legendary narratives, Medievalists, Buddhologists, and Tibetologists have now adopted a more conciliatory approach, one that does not aim at historical objectivity but tries to understand how each text represents a specific period and milieu. As Jacques Fontaine stated in a summary of the contributions of a 1979 seminar on hagiographic studies, “for modern historians, even legends are no longer useless chimera once destined to be tossed into the dustbin of history. The legend too—and even the legend—has fully risen to the status of historic object and document.”⁴⁶

As pointed out by Andrew Quintman, “certain forms of Tibetan biography and autobiography, especially those designated as ‘outer biographies,’ are indispensable sources for reconstructing local histories. [...] But the scanning of Tibetan life writing for historical information has until recently tended to supersede a more careful exploration of a work’s literary qualities, structures, and functions. To treat Tibetan biographical literature simply as a target for data mining, to the point of overlooking it as an important cultural formation in its own right, is to miss the literary forest for the positivist trees.”⁴⁷ This is how I see Mar-pa’s biographies: as a wealth of texts, each of which written in a specific context and providing information about how Mar-pa supposedly led his life, but also about how his life was progressively narrated, in a more or less objective fashion. In this, I have followed a now long-established trend, which, to quote Lifshitz one last time, has been:

[...] to move from searching for the original version of each particular saint’s biography to studying all extant versions, each in its particular compositional context. Instead of seeing “legendary accretions” as dross to be sifted and cleared away, scholars have seen transformation in a saint’s character as crucial indicators of many different sorts of change over time.

1.4. *Why are hagiographies written?*

Even when hagiographies, and here specifically Tibetan Buddhist ones, are not discredited as historical sources, it is important for us to be aware of the reasons why they were written. More often than not, the goal was *not* to

⁴⁶ Fontaine 1979, p. 938: “Même la légende n’est plus pour l’historien d’aujourd’hui une vaine chimère naguère encore bonne à jeter aux poubelles de l’historiographie. Elle aussi, et même elle, a pleinement accédé au rang d’objet et de document historiques.”

⁴⁷ Quintman 2014, p. 22.

write history. One reason, maybe the most common and obvious one, is that Tibetans composed *rnam thar* in order to retrace and justify their lineages, as lineage transmission lies at the core of Buddhism, and especially of tantric Buddhism. As Janice Willis pointed out:⁴⁸

In Tibet the genre of *rnam-thar* became an invaluable means of establishing a demonstrable lineage of successful ones for each new school established, and this resulted in the rapid proliferation of such sacred biographies there.

The idea of lineage will be examined along several lines in the following,⁴⁹ but I would like to begin by presenting a perspective that was adopted by Rachel McCleary and Leonard van der Kuijp⁵⁰ in an analysis of Tibetan Buddhism employing the methodology of social sciences. They applied economic concepts and principles to different aspects of religion, and used them especially to examine the conditions under which, in the absence of state intervention in the religion market, a religious monopoly develops. I am not interested here in the power struggle *per se*, but in applying their findings to the example of Mar-pa's lives, thus shedding a new light, more political and economic, to his biographical building. Indeed, it is quite fascinating to observe that the different waves of biographies—which are so many tools legitimizing a transmission—surge during periods of power vacuums, that is to say, when the various sects (the “religious providers”) are competing to supply their own transmissions (their “goods”) in a market where demand by disciples and patrons is strong. During the second spread of Buddhism in Tibet, translators brought back from India teachings whose value largely depended on the translators' legitimacy and fame. The stronger and more prestigious their links with Indian paṇḍitas and siddhas, the more attractive the lineage and its teachings would be, and hence the most successful. Within this framework, it is quite understandable that Mar-pa's life story, which is at the root of all Bka'-brgyud lineages' imagery, was widely narrated, and that his relationship with the great Indian siddha Nāropā was singled out.

⁴⁸ Willis 1985, p. 305.

⁴⁹ A line that I do not pursue here but which I find very enlightening is the one presented in the introduction of McRae 2003. To sum it up, John McRae spells out four “Rules of Zen Studies,” which can be imported easily into Tibetan Buddhism Studies: “1. It's not true, and therefore it's more important. 2. Lineage assertions are as wrong as they are strong. 3. Precision implies inaccuracy. 4. Romanticism breeds cynicism” (pp. xix–xx). See my conclusion (pp. 237–238) for more details.

⁵⁰ McCleary and van der Kuijp 2010.

Three peak periods can be observed regarding the quantity and frequency of compositions about Mar-pa. The first covers the 12th century, when as many as six biographies may have been composed by Mar-pa's second or third generations of disciples.⁵¹ This corresponds to the initial efflorescence of the newly formed tantric movement and the division into Bka'-brgyud sub-schools initiated by Sgam-po-pa's disciples, and thus to accrued competition between developing sects to attract and maintain the fidelity of disciples. A second phase took place during the 13th century, when seven or eight biographies may have been compiled.⁵² This corresponds to sectarian strife between the then consolidated Bka'-brgyud and Sa-skya sects⁵³ from, roughly, the Mongol invasion of Tibet in 1240 to Sa-skya supremacy and 'Phags-pa's (1235–1280) accession as the head of Central Tibet in 1264. During the period of reign that followed—during the Emperor Kubilai Yuan dynasty in China (1271–1368)—no new life story of Mar-pa appeared, excepting perhaps “U-rgyan-pa's” compilation, including a biography of Mar-pa which may be older, and the *Deb ther dmar po* in 1346. The latter, however, is a religious history focusing more largely on Buddhism and Tibet's relationship with its neighbors; Mar-pa's life is of secondary importance. A third peak period can be observed from roughly the mid-15th century to the late 16th century. This can be correlated with the birth of the Dge-lugs school (Tsong-kha-pa died in 1419), its rise and its coming into power in 1642, and with the defeat of the Gtsang-pa regime, staunch supporters of the Karma Bka'-brgyud sect. During this period, if we add stand-alone hagiographies,⁵⁴ golden rosaries,⁵⁵ and religious histories,⁵⁶ we end up with more than ten narratives that deal with Mar-pa and his lineage. It is, by the way, quite remarkable that all of these biographies were composed in

⁵¹ Ngam-rdzong ston-pa (Mon-rtse-pa), Rngog Mdo-sde (MKNT), Rngog-2 (Chos-rdor?), Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas (KSTC), Sgam-po-pa, and Bla-ma Zhang (ZKB). See next chapter for details on each of the mentioned texts.

⁵² Rngog-1, Don-mo-ri-pa (DRNT), Rgyal-thang-pa (GLNT), *Mdo-chen Rosary*, *Rwaling Rosary*, KSCT.sum.1, KSTC.sum.3 and “U-rgyan-pa.”

⁵³ The distinction between a lineage and a school, or sect, is developed in e.g. Miller 2005, pp. 375–376.

⁵⁴ Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje, Gtsang-smyon, and Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba (Dpa'-bo II). Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po's work (KWNT) cannot really be included in this section as it was composed in the early 15th century, when the Karma Bka'-brgyud school was at its apex. The same can be said of Spyan-snga Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan's *Bka' brgyud rin po che'i chos 'byung mig 'byed 'od stong* (*Opening Eyes*) in the category of religious histories.

⁵⁵ Kun-dga'-rin-chen and Rgod-tshang Ras-chen.

⁵⁶ *Lho rong chos 'byung*, Rgyal-dbang Kun-dga'-dpal-'byor, *Deb ther sngon po*, *Feast for Scholars*, Stag-lung-khri 17 Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal.

Central Tibet, Tibet's power hub of the day, where the Bka'-brgyud lineages in all their forms were firmly rooted at the time. This is not the case for the last two biographies studied here,⁵⁷ as they were composed during the Bka'-brgyud school's revival in Eastern Tibet in the mid to late 18th century. A parallel can thus be drawn between the profusion of biographies justifying the legitimacy of a lineage on the one hand, and the struggle of that same lineage to gain power and support from the faithful on the other.

Not only did the quantity of biographies fluctuate according to political circumstances, but the description of certain aspects of Mar-pa's life also evolved to match specific requirements of lineage justification. As we will see in the second part of this work, it is significant that Nāropā's role expands over the centuries. Though mentioned in the first biographies, the place of the great paṇḍita becomes increasingly dominant in Mar-pa's life stories, while his role is downplayed and even questioned in competing traditions. This is understandable, given that Nāropā symbolizes the importance Bka'-brgyud teachers—like most Tibetan traditions—attached to the establishment of strong and prestigious links with India, which was seen as the sole authentic source of the teachings.⁵⁸ Other biographical elements can also be accounted for by this need for legitimacy, such as the importance that Sgam-po-pa lends to the offerings received by Mar-pa, as a symbol of his power. Mar-pa's eagerness to dominate the tantric transmissions' "market" follows similar reasoning. For example, he is said to have had mixed feelings about Ākarasiddhi's visit to Tibet, lest the Kashmiri siddha overtake him in spreading Guhyasamāja there. In many biographies, much of the contention with Gnyos is explained by their rivalry over the transmission of that same tantra. The 'Brug-pa hierarch Padma-dkar-po mentions that Mar-pa was the only master in Tibet to possess a Catuḥpīṭha commentary composed by Nāropā.⁵⁹ This concern for wealth and exclusive transmissions is not specific to Mar-pa; many of his contemporaries—a well-known example being that of 'Brog-mi Lo-tṣā-ba—are portrayed in the same light. Prestige was important because the recognition afforded by gurus, believers, leaders, and competing teachers validated a lineage and ensured its popularity.

Another function of life-writing is to provide instruction. Janice Willis mentions that:⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Kaḥ-thog Tshe-dbang-nor-bu (TWNB) and the *Rosary of Crystal Gems* (Diwakar).

⁵⁸ On this, see e.g. Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub's care to distinguish between "authentic" and "invented" traditions, i.e. those with an Indian precedent and those without, in his edition of the *Bka'-gyur*. Cf. Schaeffer 2004.

⁵⁹ Pad-dkar, p. 458

⁶⁰ Willis 1985, p. 308.

Buddhist *rnam thar* differ from Western hagiography in at least one important way: unlike most hagiographies, *rnam thar* do more than just inspire and edify, they *instruct* as well, setting forth, albeit in veiled language, detailed descriptions of practice and instructions for future practitioners of the path.

This is clear in Mar-pa's longer biographies, especially the ones that include songs. Some songs have no biographic intent and are designed as reminders or syntheses of much larger teachings, in the fashion of the Indian *dobas*.⁶¹ Examples of this in Mar-pa's biographies are Nāropā's song summarizing the six doctrines when Mar-pa is about to return to Tibet for the last time,⁶² and Mar-pa's song for his disciples about proper circumstances for accomplishing a *ganacakra*.⁶³ Mar-pa appropriated the genre by adapting it to the Tibetan tradition of singing, which was more autobiographic and popular,⁶⁴ and used songs to instruct disciples. One example of this is the song about his meeting with Saraha,⁶⁵ where Mahāmudrā instructions are framed by narratives describing the circumstances of Mar-pa's dream of the Indian *śiddha*.

Biography is also a specific feature of the Aural Transmission (*snyan brgyud*), which explains the particularly large number of works composed by masters of this tradition.⁶⁶ Mar-pa is generally thought to have received the transmission during his last journey to India based on the cycles of Cakra-saṃvara and Vajrayoginī imparted by Nāropā.⁶⁷ Mar-pa gave it to his disci-

⁶¹ See Kapstein 2003 and the part on song in the present work (pp. 173–185), where this topic is developed.

⁶² Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 95–97.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁶⁴ Gyatso 1998, pp. 101–123, and more particularly pp. 114–123, on the conditions that favored the development of autobiographical narratives in Tibet although this genre was not widespread in India or China.

⁶⁵ See Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 43–48.

⁶⁶ Western scholars who have specialized in this transmission include Fabrizio Torricelli and now, especially, Marta Sernesi. Cf. Torricelli 1998 and 2000, Sernesi 2004, 2010b, 2011a and her 2007 PhD thesis, “The Aural Transmission of Saṃvara and Ras chung pa's legacy,” which is being thoroughly revised for its forthcoming publication. I did not have access to it when completing the present study.

⁶⁷ Sernesi 2011a, p. 181, corrects a widespread misconception based on the *Deb ther snyon po* (BA, pp. 437–438, *Deb ther*, pp. 523–524), according to which there are two lineages of transmission of the *Nine Instructions of the Formless Dākinīs* (*lus med mkha' 'gro chos skor dgu*), called Ras-chung Snyan-brgyud and Bde-mchog Snyan-brgyud, originating with Ras-chung-pa and Ngam-rdzong ston-pa. According to the Aural Transmission tradition itself, these nine cycles are only supplementary teachings, and not the core

ple Mi-la-ras-pa, who transmitted it as the innermost teaching to two of his disciples, Ras-chung-pa and Ngam-rdzong ston-pa Byang-chub-rgyal-po (Bodhirāja), who are at the origin of the Ras-chung snyan-rgyud and the Ngam-rdzong snyan-rgyud respectively. Sgam-po-pa is said to have received a more condensed version of the transmission, which was later named Dwags-po snyan-rgyud. These instructions were codified by Zhang Lo-tsā-ba (?–1237), and especially revived by Gtsang-smyon Heruka (1452–1507) and Padma-dkar-po (1527–1592).

Marta Sernesi⁶⁸ explains that the Aural Transmission instructions are grouped into three “wish-fulfilling gems” (*yid bzhin nor bu skor gsum*), the first of which justifies the importance given to the life-stories of masters in this tradition. The three gems are:

- The wish-fulfilling gem of the lineage;
- The wish-fulfilling gem of the maturation path;
- The wish-fulfilling gem of the liberation path.⁶⁹

The wish-fulfilling gem of the lineage is defined as “the instruction of the *nirmānakāya* which externally cuts doubts.”⁷⁰ In sources, it is defined either as that which establishes the characteristics of the master and the disciple, or as the biographies of the lineage successors.⁷¹ Thus, to establish the qualities of the master by narrating the story of his “complete liberation” (*rnam thar*) is the first, fundamental step in the Aural Transmission path, and it explains the importance that the holders and practitioners of this lineage have attached to the composition of biographies, often in the form of golden rosaries. Among Mar-pa’s biographies, two of the most ancient and influential come from this tradition and were composed by Mi-la-ras-pa’s disciple’s Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, and by Ras-chung-pa’s grand-disciple Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-byung-gnas. A number of summaries and rewordings of the latter exist, many of them by disciples within the tradition.⁷² Gtsang-smyon

of the tradition. The tradition as a whole is called Bde-mchog Snyan-brgyud or Mkha’-’gro bde-mchog Snyan-brgyud. There are two main lineages of transmission, Ras-chung Snyan-brgyud and Ngam-rdzong Snyan-brgyud, named for the two main disciples of Mi-la-ras-pa who spread it. Mar-pa received the Aural Transmission and part of the nine instructions from Nāropā, and Ras-chung-pa received the missing five instructions from Ti-phu-pa, but only after receiving the complete main transmission from Mi-la-ras-pa.

⁶⁸ Sernesi 2010b, pp. 404–408. I am following her lead for most of this section’s explanations.

⁶⁹ *brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu; smin lam yid bzhin nor bu; grol lam yid bzhin nor bu.*

⁷⁰ *phyi sgro ’dogs gcod par byed pa sprul sku’i gdams ngag.*

⁷¹ See sources listed by Sernesi 2010b, p. 405, n. 12.

⁷² KSTC.sum.1, 2 and 3, DCNGBios and BCZP, to cite the most obvious.

Heruka, also a holder of this transmission, composed a full-fledged biography as well as a golden rosary.

In his detailed commentary of the *Vajra Verses of the Aural Transmission*⁷³ (the root-text of the transmission) Gtsang-smyon explains the wish-fulfilling gem of the lineage as two-fold, comprising of the four characteristics of the master and the six characteristics of the disciple. The master must 1) possess the three trainings, 2) be a holder of the lineage descending from Vajradhara, 3) be experienced in the teachings transmitted through that lineage, and 4) be able to introduce the disciple to that experience. Such a master can lead his disciples to the paths of maturation and liberation. For this, and for the six characteristics of the disciple to blossom, it is also necessary for the disciple to hear or see the complete liberation and qualities of the master. This is precisely the aim of biographies: in the Aural Transmission, they are the indispensable preliminary of the practice of the path since they allow the disciple to arouse devotion towards the lineage and its instructions, and hence to earn his or her access to that lineage's blessing, which is personified by the master.

Hagiographical writing is therefore the end result of a variety of motivations, many of which have little to do with history. These motivations are reflected to a lesser or greater scale in Mar-pa's biographies. Many Tibetan authors, however, also have had a more historical interest in religious figures of the past. They have often tried to untangle the threads of legend, and to determine a possible chronology. Several texts in Mar-pa's biographical tradition show such an interest in clarifying available data. Religious histories such as the *Deb ther sngon po* and the *Lho rong chos 'byung* are cases in point. Their authors gathered the *nam thar* of all of the lineage masters that interested them, and compared the details, trying to deduce from the different elements just how events most likely unfolded. Several later authors—Padma-dkar-po, Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-norbu, Si-tu Paṅ-chen and his colleague 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab—also manifested a penchant for a more historical approach to past masters' lives, though their religious side remains quite evident.

1.5. *Why study Mar-pa's life?*

I have chosen to study Mar-pa Chos-kyi-blo-gros' life because he is the founder of a Buddhist lineage that is still influential today, and is therefore the source of many transmissions currently studied and practiced by Tibet-

⁷³ “Snyan brgyud rdo rje'i tshig rkang.” In: *Bde mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud kyi gzhung 'brel sa gcad dang sgrags pa*, p. 19, quoted by Sernesi 2010b, pp. 406–407, and also presented in Sernesi 2011a.

ans and Westerners alike. Though the development of the early Bka'-brgyud lineage has received quite a lot of attention,⁷⁴ much remains to be done if we are to gain a clear idea of the events of the 11th and 12th centuries. As regards Mar-pa specifically, even though he is universally renowned as “Mi-la-ras-pa’s master,”⁷⁵ his life is mainly known to us through the biography composed by Gtsang-smyon Heruka in the early 16th century, more than four centuries after he died.⁷⁶ The narrative talents of this author, unanimously acclaimed for his biography of Mi-la-ras-pa, tend to eclipse the tradition that preceded and completed it. This situation of “near monopoly” was accentuated in the West with the success of the Nālandā Translation Committee’s book.⁷⁷ Although other biographies of Mar-pa have been translated, they have not had such a lasting legacy. Rdo-rje-mdzes-'od's rosary, translated as *Great Kagyu Masters*, had a limited impact,⁷⁸ in part because of the more conventional literary power of the Tibetan original and a less reliable English rendering. The translation of 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba's religious history, the *Blue Annals*,⁷⁹ though greatly influential in Tibetan studies, is much more limited in scope as regards Mar-pa, and did not significantly inform our perception of the translator's life.⁸⁰ Though for many years the sole reliance on Gtsang-

⁷⁴ Examples of major works dealing with the early Bka'-brgyud lineage are the following: Davidson 2005; Decler 1992 and 1997; Jackson 1994; Kragh 2011 and 2013; Lo Bue 1997; Martin 1982, 1992a, 1996, 2001; Mei 2009; Miller 2005; Roberts 2010; Sernesi 2004, 2010b and 2011a; Smith 2001; Sobisch 2008; Sørensen & Hazod 2007; Stearns 2001; Tatz 1988; Tiso 1989 and 2010; Trungram 2004; and Yamamoto 2012. I am greatly indebted to these scholars, and to others who will be mentioned in the course of study of each biography.

⁷⁵ See Charrier 2003: the publishers of the first complete French translation of Gtsang-smyon's biography of Mar-pa, even though published quite recently, gave it the title *Marpa, maître de Milarépa: sa vie, ses chants*. A partial French translation by Jacques Bacoat was published in 1937.

⁷⁶ A lot has been written on Gtsang-smyon and his school: Larsson 2011a, 2011b and 2012; Quintman 2014; Schaeffer 2007, 2009a and 2011; Sernesi 2011b; DiValerio 2015.

⁷⁷ Tsangnyön 1982.

⁷⁸ Konchog Gyaltzen 1990.

⁷⁹ Roerich 1979 (BA).

⁸⁰ One notable exception is the dating of Mar-pa's birth and death, 1012–1097, given by 'Gos-lo. Although they do not appear in any previous work, and despite Gtsang-smyon's avoidance of them, they have been widely accepted and used everywhere as *the* correct dates. In the West, TBRC now proposes 1002 as an alternative for Mar-pa's birth, and 1100 for his death, so that dates given by scholars are not so clear-cut anymore. The TBRC dates, however, do not appear anywhere else and do not seem to have much backing (the 2nd Dpa'-bo's discussion of Mar-pa's dates is quoted on Mar-pa's TBRC

smyon's 16th-century biography has not been considered satisfactory, it is difficult to access other data if an inventory of Mar-pa's biographies is not available. Several scholars have explicitly called for a study of the various biographies, and some began to lay the groundwork for such a study.⁸¹ I hope that my research will remedy this situation to some extent and allow easier access to knowledge about Mar-pa's life. It has been greatly supported by the findings of many scholars, which I have used whenever relevant to the study of the various biographies.⁸²

I have not intended to provide in this introduction an exhaustive review of the scholarship on Mar-pa in the West. For one thing, something of this sort is available in Andrew Quintman's revised version of his studies of Mila-ras-pa's life stories⁸³—which arguably deals with Mi-la-ras-pa and not Mar-pa but is nonetheless quite closely related—and for another, most of the available information will be provided in the course of the following study itself, either in the text or the footnotes. I do need to acknowledge my sources of inspiration, though, and to clarify the manner in which I approached my topic.

I was very much helped in my endeavor by two PhD dissertations that have since been published as books, though while I was working, only the first was a book. These are Peter Alan Roberts' *Biographies of Rechungpa* and Andrew Quintman's *Yogin and the Madman*.⁸⁴ In these two, much of the location and inventory of the needed texts and editions had already been accomplished, and I basically began by studying each biography of Mar-pa that belonged to the golden rosaries they referred to. Though I suppose we

page <<http://www.tbrc.org/#!rid=P2636>> (accessed on 20/09/2013), but Dpa'-bo himself chose 1000–1085 as the correct dates). A similar problem exists with regard to Mila-ras-pa's dates and has been studied in Quintman 2015. See also Appendix 5 below.

⁸¹ See Martin 1984/1985. In his review of the *Life of Marpa* as translated by Trungpa's disciples (Tsangnyön 1982), Dan Martin mentions a few of Mar-pa's biographies widely available at the time, noting that “this treasure trove of early sources of Kargyudpa biography has been so far almost universally neglected, unfortunately.” He lists online and in much greater detail the contents of several Bka'-brgyud rosaries, so as to help in “locating biographical information on pre-modern Bka'-brgyud-pa figures”: <http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/Kagyü_Namthar> (accessed on 20/09/2013). Sernesi 2010b also surveys early Bka'-brgyud hagiographical writings. I am very much indebted to her in many respects in my study. Be it through her work, her sharing of articles or her suggestions, this book would not be what it is without her help.

⁸² See the study of each biography for details.

⁸³ See Quintman 2014, pp. 11–17.

⁸⁴ Thanks to Andrew Quintman for providing me with the proofs of his book while I was in the process of completing the present introduction.

started with similar objectives—studying the lives of Mar-pa, Mi-la-ras-pa or Ras-chung-pa—the way we tackled our material was rather different and the result too is predictably different. Roberts’ aim was to “present the successive parts of Rechungpa’s life through the stages of their narrative evolution in a succession of texts. [...] The principal topic is the complex relationship between the numerous variants to be found in texts that have been little studied or even read”.⁸⁵ To achieve this, he presented the various versions, and then juxtaposed all data therein and analyzed it in order to recount, step by step, his subject’s life.

Quintman’s goal was different. His book “traces the literary transformations of a seminal Tibetan life story—that of Milarepa [...]—from its fragmentary origins to the standard version published nearly four centuries later.”⁸⁶ This means that he was not so much interested in Mi-la-ras-pa’s life as in the narratives about it, foremost among them Gtsang-smyon’s biography—as the book’s title *The Yogin and the Madman* suggests. Thus, the principal aim of his book is a kind of “extended autopsy on the corpus that Tsangnyön crafted,”⁸⁷ revealing the components of Mi-la-ras-pa’s life that were present in the works that preceded it. Quintman uses the metaphor of a body throughout his work, and it is therefore worth quoting it here, as it is somehow similarly relevant for Mar-pa’s corpus:⁸⁸

As authors began joining together these narratives, an image of the yogin came into view, first fragmented and skeletal, later incorporating literary structures as muscles and sinews binding together the body’s inner frame. Comprehensive accounts later added layers of flesh, forming an increasingly lifelike representation. Finally, in the madman’s hands, like Pygmalion’s Galatea from the cold grain of ivory, the yogin’s portrait embodied in the biographical corpus was brought to life. And in this living form, the madman’s narrative was capable of both eclipsing four hundred years of literary development and reshaping Tibet’s religious landscape.

As for the way he revealed these various layers, he states:⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Roberts 2007, pp. xi–xii.

⁸⁶ Quintman 2014, p. 1.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

I adopt such an approach by formulating a metaphorical anatomy of the biographical corpus. Dissecting the corpus is not an exploratory maneuver, lancing off tumorlike accretions in search of an untainted historical persona within. It is rather a systemic approach to life writing that identifies broad structural similarities in versions across anatomical planes and maps their relationship to the body of literature as a whole. Examining the life stories of a figure such as Milarepa is no longer a matter of taking sides between the opposing factions of mythocentrism and historical positivism. In the case of Milarepa, like that of the Buddha, the historical figure is distant enough and the biographical tradition complex enough to make searching for a historical figure divorced from the literary tradition an unenviable task. [...] If Milarepa the saint is to be found anywhere, it is not as a cold corpse lying beneath all the books, but embodied within the biographical corpus formed of the literature itself, a body of writing that authors transformed over time into a lifelike portrait.

While I adhere to Quintman's perception of the corpus,⁹⁰ my perspective is somewhat different. Gtsang-smyon's talent being what it is, his *Life of Marpa* is as outstanding as is his *Life of Milarepa*, but I've chosen a different approach since I situate myself midway between Roberts and Quintman. Like Roberts, I began studying Mar-pa's life because I found it interesting; like him, I found that it was a "complex and baffling [...] labyrinth." He tried to find his way through the labyrinth, and to narrate Ras-chung-pa's life. Quintman did not try: the story was told, it was Gtsang-smyon's, there was no telling it again, and no way to do it any better. As for me, following in Quintman's footsteps, at first I gave up searching for Mar-pa's life and just tried to order the corpus of biographies as clearly and logically as I could. Next, I compared the information I had gathered in order to investigate specific issues concerning the translator's life; in this, my work resembles Roberts'.

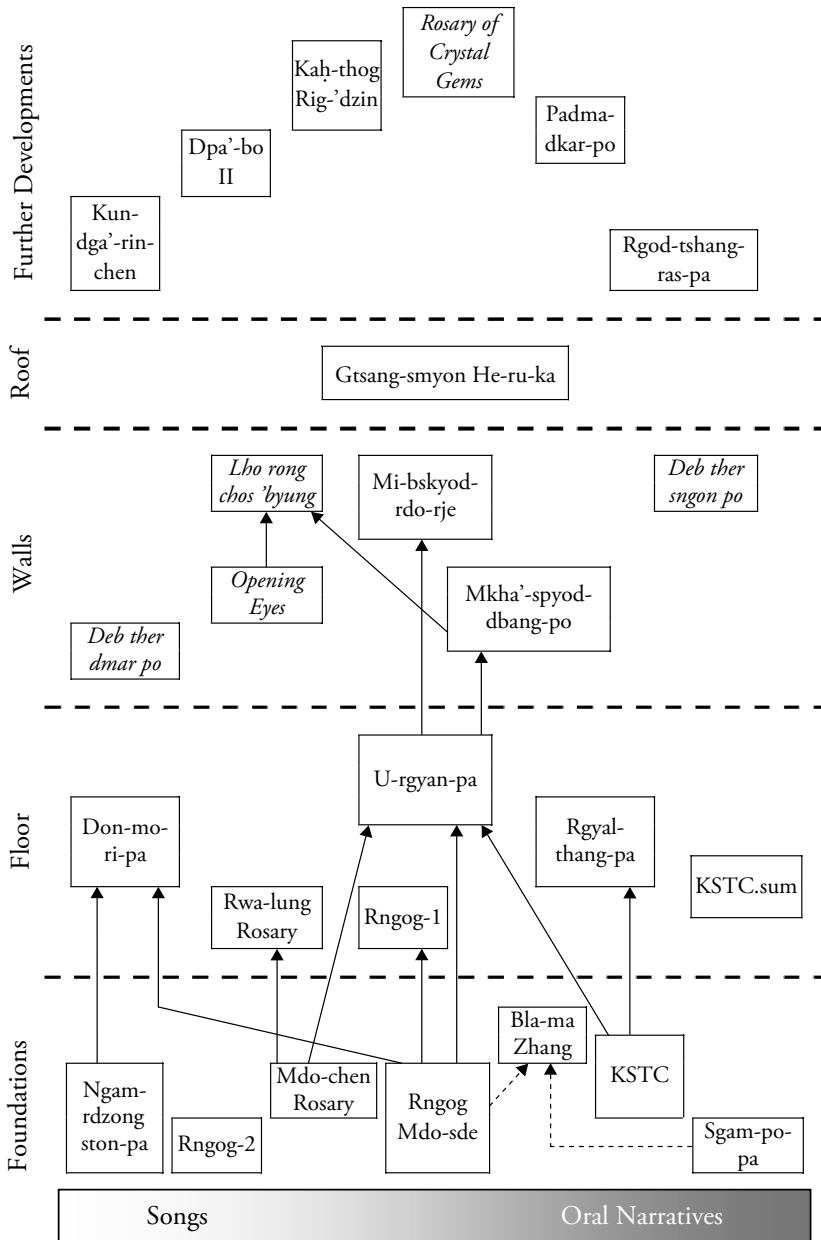
The major difference between Quintman's focus and mine is that I am interested in the diachronic progression of Mar-pa's life, but from the perspective of each biography. What did the author know when he wrote his biography? Who was he? Where was he living? What sources did he use? What do we know about the author and publications of the text? What does this biography tell us about Mar-pa? Seen in this light, Gtsang-smyon's work is just another biography—a major one, but nonetheless a rewording, an

⁹⁰ See Ducher 2015 for a review of Quintman's book.

addition to something that already existed. Since I was not only interested in the narratives, but also in the data that could be gleaned from the narratives, I ended up with another metaphor for conceptualizing the corpus.

Mar-pa's life story could be seen as a building, and the various biographical writings as the different elements of its architecture. In a house, first there are foundational pillars, then the floor is laid on these first foundations and walls are raised. The roof tops the whole edifice. After the roof has been built, there can be further developments: additional rooms, a veranda, decorations, etc. In the same way, the first biographies of Mar-pa, written in the 12th century, can be considered as foundations, the main elements that sustain the rest of the edifice. Biographies of the 13th century lie on these foundations and start to build on them: they become a ground floor, which will then be used by later authors as their foundation. All of the shorter and longer developments created in the 14th and 15th century can be seen as walls. Just as some walls are load-bearing and others are dividing, certain biographies are crucial elements of the history of Mar-pa's life-writing, and some just use old data and can be considered variations. In Mar-pa's life, as in Mi-la-ras-pa's, the roof—the biography which tops the others and is most visible—is Gtsang-smyon Heruka's. But the story does not end here; after the roof, further improvements have been added, some reshaping the structure, like the long text by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, and others adding information, like those by Padma-dkar-po or 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab. They can be compared to additional rooms like a veranda, which provide new vistas, or annexes where things can be stored.

In the end, I see a house which is more or less complete, raised on its foundations, with a pleasant ground floor, strong walls, a prominent roof, and practical extensions. When I completed my thesis in 2011, the house was still rather unsteady. Several times, a biography that I thought was “floor” finally ended up “foundation,” and I had to change its location and rebuild the floor and walls that were set on top of it. With a wealth of new material being published, brick after brick, like in a 3-D puzzle, I had to change the biographies' positions and try new equations, and finally I have the feeling that they fit together better and better. I'm still finding new data and having new insights, but they no longer turn the house inside out; they are more like a bit of stucco that gives a nice finishing touch. There are surely more bricks out there waiting to find their place, but the time may well have come for a house-warming party. The visit may reveal malfunctions and gaps that are the architect's doing—and for this I present all my apologies—but I do hope that the house will stand for some time, and I welcome all suggestions for improvement.



2. Mar-pa's Life Stories

2.1. The foundations: biographies of the 12th and early 13th centuries

The sources of our knowledge of Mar-pa's life are his biographies. Although there probably were no biographies composed during his lifetime, he did give accounts of his travels to India through songs. These songs, together with the stories Mar-pa must have narrated to his close disciples and their own teachings about their relationship with their master are at the origins of the first available biographies. The songs are not presented in detail in the first part, but will be studied in the second part of the present work. Their relationship with the elaboration of narratives about Mar-pa's life is the subject of a separate article.⁹¹ Here the focus is to establish the genesis of Mar-pa's biographies and present most of the texts that are available on the topic.

Late biographies, like the one written by Gtsang-smyon Heruka for instance, generally state that the first elements about Mar-pa's life were collected by Rngog Chos-rdor, Mar-pa mgo-yags and, later, by Ras-chung-pa, Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and Sgam-po-pa. These texts can therefore be considered the theoretical foundations of Mar-pa's biographical tradition. Among them, Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's and Sgam-po-pa's can be identified with some certainty, and are indeed actual foundations, especially as regards Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's work. As for the Rngog version, several texts putatively belong to that group; one has been identified as having been composed by Chos-rdor's son, Rngog Mdo-sde, and another bears Chos-rdor's name in the colophon, although that attribution is questionable; the first of the two has had a lasting influence on the tradition. What was dubbed "Ras-chung-pa's" version by Gtsang-smyon Heruka appears to be the work of Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas (second half of the 12th century), a disciple of Khyung-tshang-pa Ye-shes-bla-ma (1115–1176); it is the most important literary foundation of Mar-pa's biographical tradition. As for Mar-pa Mgo-yag, he is mentioned passim in some biographies without being credited with the composition of a full-fledged account. It is possible that he transmitted only songs and distinct narratives that were later taken up in biographies by other authors without clear reference to Mgo-yag; a short text that appears in a golden rosary of the Mdo-chen sub-branch of the 'Brug-pa lineage may represent this tradition. Whatever the case may be, although his

⁹¹ See below, pp. 173–185, and Ducher Forthcoming (?). This article results from a presentation at a symposium at the University of Oxford convened in 2012 by Charles Ramble and Ulrike Roesler, and entitled "Beyond Biography: New Perspectives in Tibetan Life-Writing." It is not clear, however, if the proceedings will be published in the foreseeable future.

spiritual transmission did not leave major traces, Mgo-yag is omnipresent in Mar-pa's life, and may therefore be considered a major source of knowledge about it, albeit an untraceable one. Let us now examine these foundations of Mar-pa's life and establish the material on the basis of which later biographies were built.

2.1.1. Major foundations

In Mar-pa's life-building, I have distinguished between major and minor foundations. The reason is that even though all of these texts were written during the 12th century, and are therefore definitely the foundational sources of all later versions, some of them were much more influential than others. Their prominence may be explained by the fact that they are longer narratives, which offer a wealth of details and picture Mar-pa in a very lively fashion. It is therefore quite logical that later biographies built on them; they are "major foundations" because they are the underlying inspiration of the whole of Mar-pa's biographical tradition. Given their importance, two of them are translated in the appendices of the present book. The minor foundations are texts that most probably appeared quite early in the tradition but did not play a significant role in later works. Often they were not much more than a sum of vignettes on Mar-pa's life, and have no meaningful life of their own.

2.1.1.1. Biography composed by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa Byang-chub-rgyal-po⁹²

One of the first *nam thar* on Mar-pa is called the *Hagiography of the translator Mar-pa Lo-tśā-ba*.⁹³ It is part of a golden rosary (*gser phreng*) compiled by Mon-rtse-pa Kun-dga'-dpal-ldan (1407–1475) and republished with a lengthy introduction by Gene Smith⁹⁴ in the third volume of the *Smanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod*.⁹⁵ Mon-rtse-pa was born in the border regions of South-East Tibet and belonged to the 'Ba'-ra-ba bka'-brgyud lineage, a sub-branch of the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud originating with 'Ba'-ra-ba Rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po (1310–1391).⁹⁶

⁹² See the translation in Appendix 2.

⁹³ *Sgra bsgyur mar pa lo tśha'i nam par thar pa*, Mon-rtse-pa, pp. 83–103.

⁹⁴ See Smith 2001, pp. 39–51.

⁹⁵ *Dkar brgyud gser phreng: A Golden Rosary of Lives of Eminent Gurus*. Leh: Sonam W. Tashigang, 1970.

⁹⁶ See Smith 2001, pp. 48–49, for a short description and Ehrhard 2009, pp. 189–190, for biographical references. The founder of the 'Ba'-ra-ba bka'-brgyud was a disciple of

According to Gene Smith⁹⁷ and Franz-Karl Ehrhard,⁹⁸ the compilation and its manuscript are from the second half of the 15th century and can be attributed to Kun-dga'-brug-dpal, a disciple of Mon-rtse-pa. It is written in a condensed *dbu med* script with a particular shape. According to Mkhan-po Chos-grags-bstan-'phel,⁹⁹ this style is called *byib bris sug thung* or *yar lung gi bris*.

Mar-pa's biography and its attribution to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa

Even though the compilation and manuscript are from the end of the 15th century, the biography on Mar-pa is much older and remained unnoticed until now despite its prestigious authorship. According to its colophon, it can be attributed to Bodhirāja¹⁰⁰ (Bho-dhe-ra-dza), i.e. Byang-chub-rgyal-po, also known as Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, the disciple of Mi-la-ras-pa who started the lineage that later became known as the Ngam-rdzong Aural Transmission.¹⁰¹ In the colophon, which is followed by two verses of homage to Mar-pa by 'Ba'-ra-ba and Mon-rtse-pa, Bodhirāja's declaration of composition is explicit:¹⁰²

These songs and story of Mar-pa were given to the lord [Mi-la-] ras-pa and to the 'Phan-yul master [Mar-pa Mgo-legs] but to none other. I, the lay Tibetan Bodhirāja, have long remained at

some of the luminaries of the 14th century, such as the 3rd Karma-pa Rang-byung-rdo-rje (1284–1339) and Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290–1364). He was considered a reincarnation of Yang-dgon-pa (1213–1258) and was mainly known for his encyclopedic treatise, the *Thar pa'i 'jug pai' gru bo skor gsum*, which presents a systematic exegesis of the entire Buddhist tradition.

⁹⁷ Smith 2001, p. 46.

⁹⁸ Ehrhard 2009, p. 179. In this article, Ehrhard studies a *thang ka* of the 'Ba'-ra-ba lineage that depicts the lineage masters as portrayed in two golden rosaries that contain important Mar-pa biographies: the one compiled by Mon-rtse-pa and presented here, and the *Bka' brgyud gser phreng chen mo*.

⁹⁹ Private interview, 07/08/2010.

¹⁰⁰ Ngam-rdzong ston-pa sometimes signs his compositions/compilations with this name. See for example in DK-DZO, vol. 64, p. 557.5. The name of his family is generally spelled “Ngam-rdzong,” the form used in this book. In some sources, like Gtsang-smyon, the spelling is “Ngan-rdzong”.

¹⁰¹ The Aural Transmission that Mi-la-ras-pa received from Mar-pa was then passed on to two of Mi-la-ras-pa's disciples, Ras-chun-pa and Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, who in turn initiated two lineages, the Ras-chung Snyan-brgyud and Ngam-rdzong Snyan-brgyud. See Sernesi 2011a, pp. 179–181, for a short history of the Aural Transmission of Samvara.

¹⁰² Mon-rtse-pa, p. 103.

the lotus feet of these two venerable ones and have well pleased them. I have lavished the Guru and the three jewels with maṇḍalas and offerings, have offered maṇḍalas and *gaṇacakras* to *dākinīs* and dharma protectors, and have received [their teachings] as they should be received. The Master joyfully gave [me the permission to write this]; I have in no way written it of my own account. As the Venerable [Mi-la]-ras-pa said, if this [story] spreads beyond those who consider this lineage as their own, as well as to one or two meditators who have reached certainty in their practice, then the punishment of the *dākinīs* will occur. This is not because of stinginess with the Dharma, but rather because a root downfall [of *samaya*] occurs if those who are not worthy recipients see it. Nowadays, people mock, exaggerate, denigrate and doubt, so I have written this down with a good deal of restraint.

Of course, this declaration alone does not prove without a doubt the text's age and authorship, but a body of evidence backs it up and would indicate that this is one of the earliest, if not *the* earliest work on Mar-pa, probably contemporary to that by Sgam-po-pa, from which it differs considerably.

The first confirmation of this authorship can be found in Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's life story as it appears in the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, for instance, and in certain texts of the *'Bri gung chos mdzod chen mo* (DZ-DZO). He is said to have been born in South-Western Tibet, in Lcim-lung, in the Ding-ri region.¹⁰³ That would explain the presence of many features from that region in the text.¹⁰⁴ Ngam-rdzong ston-pa left home at thirteen and extensively studied the scriptures of the sūtra tradition, particularly the five treatises of Maitreya (*Byams chos sde lnga*), as well as the tantras.¹⁰⁵ Among his masters was Mar-pa Mgo-yags (a.k.a. Mgo-legs).¹⁰⁶ He was known as a *ston*

¹⁰³ *Lho rong*, p. 151: *'khrungs yul la stod lho'i phyogs/ ding ri'i mgo lcim lung zhes bya bar/*

¹⁰⁴ Private interview with Mkhan-po Chos-grags-bstan-'phel, 07/08/2010.

¹⁰⁵ DK-DZO, vol. 63, p. 154.

¹⁰⁶ The name of this early disciple of Mar-pa varies among the biographies. He was sometimes called Mar-pa Mgo-yags (in Sgam-po-pa, KSTC-2, KSTC.sum.1, MKNT, "U-rgyan-pa," Rgyal-thang-pa, KWNT, *Lho rong chos 'byung*, *Deb ther sngon po...*), sometimes Mar-pa Mgo-legs or 'Go-legs (ZKB, DRNT, KSTC-1, KSTC.sum.3, *Deb ther dmar po*, Gtsang-smyon, TWINB...), or both (Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, Dpa'-bo II; the former sometimes changed names from one sentence to the next). It would seem that the two names are synonymous (*mgo legs* and *mgo yag* both mean "good beginning") and exchangeable. It is likely that both names referred to the same disciple, who, according to the *Lho rong chos 'byung* (p. 71), came from 'Dam or Tsam-klung—biographies also hesitate about his origins. The distribution of appellations does not fit the general

pa, a “teacher.”¹⁰⁷ When his parents died, Ngam-rdzong developed repulsion towards saṃsāra, and saw that even though he knew the words of the scriptures, he had not yet awakened to the ultimate.¹⁰⁸ He turned to Mi-la-ras-pa, offered him all that he owned and received the Aural Transmission. He remained in his presence during the last seventeen years of the yogin's life, meditated in many caves and received the whole of his transmission.

This brief account roughly corresponds to information given in the biography's colophon, where Mgo-legs and Mi-la-ras-pa are said to be the sources of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's knowledge of Mar-pa. The biography itself is punctuated by remarks, often by Mgo-legs, on the origin of the stories and songs. It is noteworthy here that Mar-pa instructed Mgo-legs to keep some of the songs he sang for him secret, even though they form the basis of this biography and can be found *in extenso* in other texts.¹⁰⁹ This may explain the importance Ngam-rdzong ston-pa gives to secrecy in his colophon.

Another indication of the antiquity of the narrative is the structure of the text itself. No date is included and the names of Mar-pa's parents are omitted, as is the case in most early biographies. The only reference to time is found in a song that Ngam-rdzong quotes in prose.¹¹⁰ The text is not di-

affiliations of biographies; one anomaly for instance is that he is called Mgo-legs in the KSTC-1 and KSTC.sum.3, but Mgo-yags in KSTC-2 and KSTC.sum.1. Among the three texts that show a clear influence from the KSTC, “U-rgyan-pa” and Rgyal-thang-pa indicate Mgo-yags, but Gtsang-smyon uses Mgo-legs. Despite the seeming identity between both names according to Mar-pa's biographies, a 17th century *thang ka* by Dpa'-bo III, Gtsug-lag-rgya-mtsho, represents two distinct characters whose incarnation Dpa'-bo III is supposed to be. The one on the left bears the name Mar-pa Mgo-yags, the one on the right Mar-pa Mgo-legs. They surround a representation of Hevajra. See www.himalayanart.org, item no. 825.

¹⁰⁷ See for instance BA, p. 449.

¹⁰⁸ DK-DZO, vol. 63, p. 155.

¹⁰⁹ Examples are the end of the song as it appears in Dpa'-bo II, p. 88, or Gtsang-smyon, p. 152: *nga byas pa drin du gzo ba'i phyir/ glu de kun khyod kyi ngo ru blangs/ lkhong gzhan la ma sgrog gsang bar zhu/ ldrin lan gyi chos skyes da gzod ster/ lsnying gam yod pa khad kyis bzol/ l'o skol sngon la phrad pa grogs kyi mchog/ lda ma shi bar du 'grogs par byal* Tsangnyön 1982, p. 159: “In order to express my gratitude for what you have done / I have sung this song for your benefit. / Please do not proclaim this to others; keep it secret. / Now I have given you these teachings to repay your kindness. / Keep this confidential; we will speak of it privately. / We have met before and are the best of friends. / From now until we die, let us be together.”

¹¹⁰ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 88: *log da kha la bla ma mar pa lo tstsha bas lo bdun bzhugs nas/ snga phyi 2 log pas lo bcu gnyis bzhugs*: “When he came back, master Mar-pa Lo-tsā-ba had spent seven years [in India], twelve years in total with the earlier and later period.”

vided into qualities (*yon tan*), even though that tendency appears in the *incipit*.¹¹¹ The text is studded with *skad* and *gsung*, indicating that the author is reporting what he has heard. This method is widespread in most early biographies.¹¹²

Also, Gtsang-smyon explicitly states that Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's biography is the source of his own composition. The description he makes of the circumstances of enunciation of his source shows that the text he used is indeed the one compiled by Mon-rtse-pa, as he declares that Ngam-rdzong mentions Mi-la-ras-pa and Mgo-legs as his main sources:

Thus, this hagiography of the Venerable Mar-ston Chos-kyi-blo-gros, [called] Meaningful to Behold, was transmitted orally and in detail to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa by the Venerable Mi-la and Mar-pa Mgo-legs. The Venerable Mi-la also gave it to Ras-chung-pa, so that he and Ngam-rdzong ston-pa Byang-chub-rgyal-po could discuss it and compile the first [versions], of which the main part is given here.¹¹³

Another clue to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's authorship is the importance given to songs in the narrative. Ngam-rdzong ston-pa is well known for his compilation of the first collection of songs by his guru Mi-la-ras-pa. Along with Zhi-ba-'od, another disciple of Mi-la-ras-pa's, he recorded several songs that appear in larger compendia of Mi-la-ras-pa's life. The colophon of these songs, hypothetically attributed to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, is also the one which appears at the end of one of Mi-la-ras-pa's earliest biographies, called *Bzhad pa'i rdo rje rnam thar*, also known as *Bu chen bcu gnyis* as it is supposed to have been composed by twelve great disciples of Mi-la-ras-pa.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 83: *bla ma mar pa lho brag pa'i yon tan la!* See the part on the Snyan-brgyud, pp. 78–79. for a possible explanation of the advent of this structure in the Aural Transmission.

¹¹² See pp. 185–195 for an analysis of this rhetoric tool in Mar-pa's biographies.

¹¹³ Gtsang-smyon, p. 224: *de ltar rje btsun mar ston chos kyi blo gros kyi rnam par thar pa mthong ba don ldan 'di nyid/ rje btsun mi la dang/ mar pa mgo legs gnyis kyis/ ngan rdzong ston pa la zhib rgyas zhal nas snyan du brgyud pa dang/ rje btsun mi las ras chung pa la yang gngang bas/ ras chung pa dang/ ngan rdzong ston pa byang chub rgyal po gnyis bka' bgros nas/ bsgrigs pa'i rnam thar phyi mo'i gtso bor bzhugs pa las/ [bla ma rmgog pa/ tshur ston/ mes ston rnam kyis zhal nas byung ba'i yig cha la sogs rnam thar mang dag 'dzoms pa'i nang nas/ skye 'gro dang ba'i mig rkyen mchog tu gyur pas!]* See also the section on Gtsang-smyon for a more detailed study of this colophon.

¹¹⁴ Roberts 2007, pp. 19–22, and Quintman 2014, pp. 86–93, describe the three versions (the extant Oxford and Newark manuscripts and the missing Stockholm xylograph) in which this compendium has been conserved, as well as their history and that of the biography proper. Another manuscript is kept in the British Library (OR 16756).

This colophon is representative of the beginnings of the Aural Transmission and has close links with the colophon in Mar-pa's biography. It reads:

This lineage wish-fulfilling gem
 Of the Aural Transmission of Saṃvara
 Is written down according to the master's words
 So that future descendants will remember it,
 [And] in fear that it may be forgotten by those of inferior
 minds.
 I pray for patience of the master and *dākinīs*!
 Grant it to those individuals, future holders [of the lineage],
 Who rejoice in initiations, blessings, *gaṇacakras*,
 And in making offerings to the heroes and heroines.
 Apart from them, this is sealed by the venerable master's seal of
 command.
 If this command is transgressed,
 The *dākinīs* will show great displeasure.
 Therefore do not spread it, but keep it secret!
 This is the Lineage Wish-fulfilling Gem, the commitment to
 the *dākinīs*.¹¹⁵

Several elements connect the two colophons, the first of which is the command of secrecy sanctioned by the *dākinīs*. While Mi-la-ras-pa had scruples about authorizing writings about his own experience, he joyfully encouraged documentation of the life of Mar-pa, but with the intention that it only be made available to lineage practitioners and to serious meditators. The seal of secrecy imposed by the *dākinīs* is typical of the Aural Transmission, whose transmission was meant to take place between a master and a single disciple.¹¹⁶ These several indications seem to solidly establish the attribution of that section of Mon-rtse-pa's golden rosary to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, thus attesting to its antiquity.

Sources: songs and oral narratives

A large part of the story is the rendering in prose of songs which are named and said to exist elsewhere in writing,¹¹⁷ but are not quoted *in extenso*.

¹¹⁵ See Roberts 2007, pp. 24–25; Sernesi 2011a, pp. 200–201, n. 40; Quintman 2014, p. 203 (Oxford manuscript, f. 192a; Newark Manuscript, f. 243b). Marta Sernesi takes this colophon as an example of the rhetoric of the Aural Transmission in the context of the “lineage wish-fulfilling gem” (*brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu*) and the “seal of entrustment” (*giad rgya*).

¹¹⁶ See Sernesi 2004 for an explanation on this mode of transmission.

¹¹⁷ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 89: *ngo mshar can gyi mthong brtags rnamsgur du bzhes pa yi ge gud na yod dol*

Ngam-rdzong ston-pa particularly mentions five songs that are easily recognizable in later biographies,¹¹⁸ even though the names he gives are generally different. These are four of the “great songs”¹¹⁹ and a fifth—the one quoted in the introduction¹²⁰—in which Mar-pa relates his first journey to India. The latter serves as the guideline for Ngam-rdzong ston-pa’s description of many elements from the first part of Mar-pa’s life, and particularly his visit to Nepal, the meeting of the masters associated with the four directions, and the competition with Gnyos.

Variations in this song underscore the two main versions of Mar-pa’s journeys that run through the whole history of the biographical tradition:¹²¹ one is the version found here, in which Mar-pa first meets Jñānagarbha and other yogins in the West of India, spends five years there, and only afterwards meets Nāropā at the urging of Painḍapā, whom he met at Jñānagarbha’s. In the other version, during Mar-pa’s first journey to Nepal he meets Painḍapā who leads him to Nāropā. Nāropā then sends him to the four directions of India to receive transmissions from other masters. In the song, Mar-pa introduces himself as a holder of the lineages of the four directions, which he quotes counterclockwise, beginning with Jñānagarbha’s lineage in the West, then Śāntibhadra’s in the South, Maitrīpā’s in the East and Nāropā’s in the North. Though Ngam-rdzong ston-pa does not cite the song, he clearly uses it by adapting the data found therein and mentioning the masters, places and transmissions accordingly. However, he changes the order of the song, starting with Jñānagarbha but continuing with Nāropā, Maitrīpā and Śāntibhadra (clockwise: west, north, east, south). Gtsang-smyon also changes the order in his narrative as well as in his version of the song, placing Nāropā first (counter clockwise: north, west, south, east), and thereby adapting the song to his version of the biography, which begins with Mar-pa’s meeting Nāropā. The first version seems to be more faithful to the song, as Jñānagarbha is mentioned first. Ngam-rdzong ston-pa then mentions Nāropā, despite the fact that the paṇḍita closes the song, probably on the basis of oral accounts and because he is considered central in Mar-pa’s formation. Gtsang-smyon Heruka, aware of the discrepancies between the two versions and the song, changes the order of the latter to fit the version he chose. This editorial choice is justified by the fact that in his song, Mar-pa probably was not intent on relating an historical truth, but rather a poetic

¹¹⁸ See Appendix 4 (pp. 295–299).

¹¹⁹ See pp. 176–180 for details concerning this classification.

¹²⁰ See pp. 19–21.

¹²¹ See chart p. 209 for the repartition of the various biographies according to that schematic summary.

or symbolic truth. It is noteworthy that the song's order is not consistent with Indian cosmology, which is evidenced in the order used in Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's text¹²² when Nāropā describes the four masters who have spiritual influence over the four directions (Kṛṣṇācārya in the East, Nāgārjuna in the South, Indrabhuti in the West and himself in the North). It is therefore plausible that the choice was deliberate rather than arbitrary, indicating that Nāropā was the last master Mar-pa met, though this would not fit with any of the biographies.

The end of the last trip to India, which features several peculiar encounters, and the last return to Tibet via Nepal are faithful to songs mentioned in the text, without any noticeable differences. Other descriptions—the end of the stay with Maitrīpā for instance (pp. 91–92)—are based on songs quoted in later biographies but not explicitly mentioned in this text.¹²³ Thus, it seems clear that this biography and most others are largely inspired by Mar-pa's songs.

Certain other passages of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's biography do not figure in any of the songs. This hints at the influence of other oral accounts, probably those of Mi-la-ras-pa and Mar-pa Mgo-legs. Examples include the picturesque encounters between Mar-pa and the *mudrās* of Jñānagarbha and Śāntibhadra which lead to visions of his *yi dam*, and the explanation of the name of Maitrīpā's hermitage, the "charnel ground which burns like fire" (*ri me ltar 'bar ba'i dur khrod*).¹²⁴ There is also a short note referring to some documents that belonged to Nāropā which is not mentioned elsewhere.¹²⁵ The end of this *rnam thar* seems to be uninfluenced by the songs, at least those we know of, and there are some details that do not appear in many of the later biographies. Mar-pa's display of the strength of his *bodhicitta* is one such example: when passing by a freshly ploughed field with his disciples, Mar-pa places his hands on the earth and ants spontaneously seek refuge in

¹²² Mon-rtse-pa, p. 95.

¹²³ A song on Maitrīpā (Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 116–119, Gtsang-smyon, p. 129, Dpa'-bo II, p. 76) and another more general one on the quest for Nāropā and Maitrīpā (Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 119–121). See the chart on songs in Appendix 4 for the presence of these songs in other biographies.

¹²⁴ Note that Ngam-rdzong ston-pa also gives another name to Maitrīpā's hermitage. During the first travel, Maitrīpā is said to stay at Me-tog-mdangs-'phrog. This place, a translation of the Sanskrit Puṣpahari, generally rather refers to Nāropā's residence. It is sometimes located in Kashmir, in which case the one in Central India is called Phullahari. Me-tog-mdangs-'phrog is however the name used in the song on which the narrative is based to refer to Maitrīpā's place. This specificity of the song followed by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa confirms that the song predates the biography and influenced it.

¹²⁵ It may come from a colophon of a translation by Mar-pa or a teaching of Nāropā's.

his palms. The first time he enters another's body in Tibet¹²⁶ is also specific to this biography and is only taken up by Don-mo-ri-pa¹²⁷ and, in brief, by Dpa'-bo II.¹²⁸ On several occasions, speech indicators show that Ngam-rdzong ston-pa is relating stories that he has heard. In many cases, Mar-pa seems to be the source of the accounts but they have not survived in their original form as songs. Other speech verbs show that there were oral narratives shared among the disciples of Mar-pa whom Ngam-rdzong ston-pa met. For example, he nominally quotes Dge-bshes Gzhung-pa (Rngog Chos-rdor) and Yon-tan-'bar, a translator contemporary to Mar-pa.

In consequence, this first biography is of critical importance on several levels. First, it figures prominently as a foundation of the biographical tradition, and it has a distinctive and graphic tone which makes it very lively. Second, it allows us to guess how Mar-pa related his Indian experiences, both in songs and in stories, and to identify some of the sources that are not part of the biographical tradition proper. Third, it helps us distinguish the most ancient songs from those that were invented or modified later, and thus see which directions the modifications took. This is why it has been diplomatically edited and fully translated in the appendices.

2.1.1.2. The Rngog biographies

Among later biographies, many mention the Rngog clan's works on Mar-pa as being very reliable sources. There are several texts composed by members of this family lineage whose spiritual history begins with Rngog Cho-sku-rdo-rje (1023–1090),¹²⁹ who inherited Mar-pa's "explanation lineage" (*bshad brgyud*). This lay practitioner played a major role in the spread of the

¹²⁶ See the part on the practice of entering another's body (Tib. *grong 'jug*), pp. 200–209, for explanations on it and the rationale for this translation of the name.

¹²⁷ DRNT, pp. 172–173.

¹²⁸ Dpa'-bo II, p. 99.

¹²⁹ This master was the heir of the Rngog clan, whose ancestry can be traced back to the Tibetan empire. He is generally called Chos-rdor, which is short for either Chos-sku-rdo-rje or Chos-kyi-rdo-rje. His dates are known through two Rngog clan histories composed in the 15th century, which state that he was born in a pig year and died in his 68th year, earlier said to be a horse year (LGNT, vol. 22, p. 22, l. 1 & p. 47, l. 7). Neither rosary provides the element in the sexagenary cycle. This explains why there is always a twelve-year difference in the date of birth and death of all the Rngog members between the two religious histories which used them as sources, the *Lho rong chos 'byung* and the *Deb ther sngon po*. The *Lho rong chos 'byung* systematically presents years from the earlier cycle. It should be noted that 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba also has Chos-rdor being born one year later (i.e. dying at 67 instead of 68). The dates in these two texts are 1023–1090 or 1036–1102, respectively. As in the case of Mar-pa, I generally prefer the earlier dates of the *Lho rong chos 'byung*.

tantric transmissions Mar-pa received in India, which were preserved in his family until the 15th century under the name *The Seven Maṇḍalas of the Rngog* (*rngog dkyil bdun*),¹³⁰ six of which can be traced back to Mar-pa.

We know about the possible existence of biographies composed by members of the Rngog clan thanks to several sources. The *Lho rong chos 'byung*, for one, states that it mainly follows Rngog's tradition for Mar-pa's life story.¹³¹ Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba¹³² mentions two main works of that tradition when referring to Mar-pa's birth place and date: the *Lo rgyus the tshom gsal byed* by [Rngog] Zhe-sdang-rdo-rje (1078–1154),¹³³ Chos-rdor's son, and the *Rnam thar rim bzhi* by Rngog-pa. As we will see shortly, the first of these texts may actually be the text now found in the first volume of the "Mar pa bka' 'bum" in the *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*. A text called

¹³⁰ The six maṇḍalas coming from Mar-pa are: 1. The nine deities of Hevajra (*dgyes rdor lha dgu*); 2. The 15 deities of Nairātmyā (*bdag med ma lha mo bco lnga*); 3. The 49 deities of the condensed family of the [Dākinī]vajrapañjara (*rdo rje gur rigs bsdu lha zhe dgu*); 4. The 97 deities of Catuspīṭha (*rdo rje gdan bzhi'am rnal 'byor nam mkha' lha go bdun*); 5. The 13 deities of his consort (*de'i yum dka' ye shes mkha' 'gro lha bcu gsum*); and 6. The five deities of Mahāmāyā (*sgyu ma chen mo lha lnga*). See Shes-rab-rgya-mtsho, *Rngog dkyil bdun las brtsams pa'i gtam du brjod bsnyan bskul lha'i rnga sgra*, p. 833. They are preserved alongside others in the *Bka' brgyud sngags mdzod*. The name "Seven maṇḍalas of the Rngog" is not used in the early phase of that family's transmission. Its first occurrence is in the *Deb sngon* (see BA, pp. 948, 952, 964, 966 and 972), within the biography of Khriims-khang Lo-tsā-ba Bsod-nams-rgya-mtsho (1424–1482), which was inserted by the *Deb sngon* editors only after 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba's death. Khriims-khang Lo-tsā-ba or his disciple the 4th Zhwa-dmar, both important masters in the Rngog-pa lineage, may therefore be the ones who coined the expression.

¹³¹ *Lho rong*, p. 50: *phal cher lo rgyus 'di ni rngog lugs kyi rjes su 'brang ba yin*.

¹³² Dpa'-bo II, p. 4.

¹³³ Rngog Mdo-sde (1178–1154), also called Zhe-sdang-rdo-rje, was Rngog Chos-rdor's son and a very important 12th century master. He had many disciples and six children. All of his children died young, but two of them started the two branches of the family which transmitted Mar-pa's tantric lore. The seat of the Gtsang-tsha branch, originating with Mdo-sde's eldest son Tshul-khriims-shes-rab (alias Jo-tshul, 1103–1146), Spre'u-zhing, was founded by Rngog Kun-dga'-rdo-rje (1157–1234). The name of the second seat, that of the Rgyal-tsha branch originating with Mdo-sde's second son Thogs-med-grags (alias Jo-thog, 1120–1156), was Ri-bo khyung-lding. It was the original estate of the Rngogs in the Gzhung valley. In the 15th century, members from both branches of the clan were closely collaborating, as is shown by the *Gsan yig* of Kun-dga'-rnam-rgyal (1432–1496), who came from the neighboring monastery of Gong-dkar. Kun-dga'-rnam-rgyal states that he received empowerments from Rngog Byang-chub-dpal (1360–1446, Gtsang-tsha branch) and reading transmissions and explanations from Rngog Bsod-nams-don-grub (Rgyal-tsha branch), collectively calling them the *rngog pa rnam gnyis* (see Fermer 2009, pp. 126–129, and his references to the corresponding passages in the *gsan yig*).

Rnam thar rim bzhi pa is attributed to Rngog Rin-chen-bzang-po (1231–1307) in two rosaries of the Rngog clan as well as in the *Lho rong chos 'byung*.¹³⁴ This text has not surfaced yet, but it may be quite detailed as several authors allude to it. Two 15th-century rosaries of the Rngog clan, for instance, refer to a hagiography of Mar-pa that is not the one found in the *Mar pa gsung 'bum*, but which may be that *Rnam thar rim bzhi pa*. Kaḥ-thog Si-tu also mentions this text, as well as another called the *Lo rgyus rin chen spungs pa* by Rngog Byang-chub-dpal-ba.¹³⁵ The latter may refer to the second of the two rosaries just mentioned, which is called *Rje mar pa nas brgyud rngog gzhung pa yab sras kyi bla ma'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*, and is said to be composed by Bodhiśī.¹³⁶

None of the texts we have present these exact names and signatures, but, as we will see, most can be identified on the basis of other elements. Among these, the most influential is presumably Rngog Zhe-sdang-rdo-rje's, who was reported to have actually met Mar-pa in his infancy. It is to this first source of Mar-pa's life that we now turn.

2.1.1.2.1. Mar-pa's collected works published in the '*Bri gung bka'* brgyud chos mdzod chen mo

The '*Bri gung bka'* brgyud chos mdzod chen mo (DK-DZO) is a huge collection of 151 volumes of texts of the 'Bri-gung lineage published by A-mgon rin-po-che in Lha-sa in 2004 and then distributed in 'Bri-gung monasteries. The TBRC owns a copy of it (W00JW501203), and before their publication online Gene Smith had the kindness to inform me that it held two volumes of a *Rje mar pa'i bka' 'bum*. According to the present Chetsang Rin-

¹³⁴ Rin-chen-bzang-po studied the Rngog teachings with his father Rgyal-po-dga' (1193–1272) and his uncle Gzi-brijid-grags-pa (1190–1269), and received transmissions from other masters as well. He took monastic vows at 18 and was fully ordained at 33. He taught widely throughout Tibet before inheriting the Rngog seat of Spre'u-zhing at the death of his uncle in 1269. He continued to be a prolific teacher and writer, and contributed greatly to the development of his monastery. He was recognized as an incarnation of Mar-pa. (*Lho rong*, pp. 61–62; BA, p. 410)

¹³⁵ TWNB, vol. 3, p. 640.

¹³⁶ According to the *Lho rong* (p. 65), Rngog Byang-chub-dpal-ba (1360–1446) was the seventh and last generation of the Rngog seat whose life and activity were blessed by Mar-pa. He inherited Spre'u-zhing at the death of his uncle Don-grub-dpal-ba (1331–1398) and spread the Rngog transmissions widely during the second part of his life. Most of his transmissions were received by Khriims-khang Lo-tsā-ba, and his disciple Zhwa-dmar Chos-grags-ye-shes introduced them into the Karma Bka'-brgyud lineage. Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa (1357–1419) and many other Tibetans (see BA, p. 412) also received Byang-chub-dpal's teachings. One of them, Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje, authored a biography on Mar-pa, on which see below, pp. 131–133.

poche, quoted by Klaus-Dieter Mathes,¹³⁷ the collection was initially compiled under the direction of the 15th 'Bri-gung abbot Kun-dga'-rin-chen (1474–1527);¹³⁸ this is corroborated by the *'Bri gung gdan rabs*.¹³⁹ The collection opens with four volumes of Tibetan translations of texts representing the Indian sources of the lineage, among which one finds many translations by Mar-pa under Nāropā's guidance (in volumes *ga* and *nga*). The next two volumes, *ca* and *cha*, are the *Mar pa bka' 'bum*. These are followed by four volumes of a *Mi la bka' 'bum* which are, in fact, essentially two volumes of Mi-la-ras-pa's biography by the 3rd Karma-pa Rang-'byung-rdo-rje (1284–1339)—the *Mdzod nag ma*—, as well as a biography by Zhi-byed-ri-pa (15th century), another by Gtsang-smyon Heruka (16th century), and Gtsang-smyon's compilation of Mi-la-ras-pa's *mgur 'bum*. The next four volumes are the *Sgam po bka' 'bum*,¹⁴⁰ followed by the works of Phag-mo-gru-pa (1110–1170), 'Bri-gung 'Jig-rten-mgon-po (1143–1217), and other masters of the 'Bri-gung lineage.¹⁴¹

The *Mar pa bka' 'bum* opens with anonymous biographies of Tilopā, Nāropā and Maitrīpā as well as with songs by Tilopā and Nāropā. Then follows the biography of Mar-pa.¹⁴² Mar-pa's songbook, containing twenty-five songs (MK25), is at the end of the first volume. Its wording is quite different from that of the *mgur 'bum* derived from Gtsang-smyon's biography

¹³⁷ Mathes 2009, p. 91.

¹³⁸ See below, p. 147, for some information on this important 'Bri-gung master who had close ties to the 4th Zhwa-dmar Chos-grags-ye-shes (1453–1524). Both the Zhwa-dmar-pa and Kun-dga'-rin-chen's heir at 'Bri-gung-thil were holders of the Rngog transmissions. See for example the lineage of the Hevajra transmission as conserved in the *Bka' brgyud sngags mdzod*, vol. 1, p. 21.

¹³⁹ See *'Bri gung gdan rabs*, p. 181. This was composed by the 4th Che-tshang Rin-poche, Bstan-'dzin-padma'i-rgyal-mtshan (1722–1778).

¹⁴⁰ It must be noted that this is a facsimile of the manuscript edition of the *Dwags po bka' 'bum* that precedes the xylographic edition of 1520, and is therefore a precious testimony to what the collection looked like before the very extensive editing work accomplished under the direction of the 16th Dags-lha-sgam-po abbot. See Kragh 2013, especially p. 372, for an assessment of this copy.

¹⁴¹ See Sørensen 2007, pp. 319–404, for an index of each volume. It is important to note that the volumes have not been presented in the correct order. The first thirty volumes (*ka* to *a*) should be followed by *ki* to *i*, *ku* to *u*, etc., but instead after *a* come *ki*, *ku*, *ke* and *ko*, then *khi*, etc., thus shuffling all the volumes. We may also refer to the index volume of the collection (*'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, vol. 151) which introduces the contents of each volume, and to the table of contents offered by the TBRC.

¹⁴² "Rje mar pa'i rnam thar" (MKNT). In: *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo* (DK-DZO), vol. *ca*, pp. 167, l. 4–188, l. 1.

of Mar-pa, and there are many significant variations. These songs appear to be older and less heavily edited, and several of them have not been found anywhere else.¹⁴³ Some introductory biographical data has been inserted in between the songs. The balance of the two volumes is filled with short tantric texts; they mainly concern Hevajra and the six doctrines. They all appear to be very early instructions which, if they do not come directly from Mar-pa himself, represent his teaching as received by his close disciples. For instance, two texts are said to have been composed by Zhe-sdang-rdo-rje (Rngog Mdo-sde). The collection ends with the 16th century biography by Gtsang-smyon Heruka.

Information on Mar-pa's life is mostly absent from these texts, but some do indicate a lineage of translation. For example, *Instructions on the Blazing of Supreme Candali*¹⁴⁴ indicates that the lineage began with Tilopā and Nāropā, and continued with Mar-pa and Rngog, who transmitted it to Mi-la-ras-pa. Tilopā is said to have obtained supreme *siddhis*, Nāropā to have obtained ordinary *siddhis*, and Mi-la-ras-pa to have been blessed by the *dākinīs*. The *Instructions on the Intermediate State* mention in the transmission history¹⁴⁵ that Mar-pa obtained these teachings from Nāropā after having offered him several maṇḍalas of gold, and that Mar-pa in turn transmitted them to Rngog Chos-rdor after the latter offered him his fortune three times. Mi-la-ras-pa also went through many hardships to receive instructions from Mar-pa, before handing them down to Ras-chung-pa, Sgam-po-pa, and so on. The *Profound Condensed Practice of Mixing and Transference*¹⁴⁶ says that Mar-pa spent twelve years near Nāropā, offered him a great deal of gold, and received his transmissions while in Vikramaśīla, before finally transmitting them to Rngog Chos-rdor. Since Rngog Chos-rdor is referred to as *bla ma'i yab*, it is likely that the speaker belonged to Rngog Mdo-sde's circle and that the presentation belongs to the Rngog tradition.

It is difficult to judge the age of these texts and colophons and to ascertain whether the latter were present or not in the initial instructions. They do, however, seem to represent old traditions that are probably linked to the Rngog family. For example, in the *Mar pa'i gsung 'bum* there are two biographies attributed to Rngog clan members.¹⁴⁷ Vikramaśīla is mentioned in

¹⁴³ "Mar pa'i mgur chen nyer lnga" (MK25). In: DK-DZO, vol. *ca*, pp. 430.1–482.5. See Appendix 4 (pp. 295–299) for a chart summarizing Mar-pa's songs. The collection is reproduced in *Lho brag mar pa lo tsā'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 5, pp. 1–52.

¹⁴⁴ "Mchog gi gtum mo sbar ba'i man ngag." In: DK-DZO, vol. *ca*, pp. 387–390.

¹⁴⁵ "Bar do'i khrid." In: DK-DZO, vol. *ca*, p. 409.

¹⁴⁶ "Bsre 'pho lag len du dril ba zab pa." In: DK-DZO, vol. *cha*, pp. 59–88.

¹⁴⁷ MPSB, vol. 1, p. 2.

the first, and the second has Mar-pa meeting Nāropā in Kashmir.¹⁴⁸ This is information that can be found in many colophons belonging to the DK-DZO.¹⁴⁹

Mar-pa's biography and its author

Mar-pa's biography (MKNT) appears in the first of the two volumes. As with many other texts in Mar-pa's biographical tradition, there is no signature, but it ends with the following words:

Thus, the lord Mar-pa Lo-tstsha-ba,
 Endowed with true kindness,
 Appeared as the glory of beings.
 Having revealed a few of his qualities,
 This hagiography unraveled the significance of symbols,
 Just as a precious lamp **dispels doubts**.¹⁵⁰

The concluding verse, *the tsom sel byed* [...], most probably links this text with that referred to by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, who attributes a biography on Mar-pa called *Dispelling doubts* to Zhe-sdang-rdo-rje:

In six or seven hagiographies—the history called *Dispelling Doubts* by Zhe-sdang-rdo-rje, and in the colophon present in Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje's [biography], in the two Ngam-rdzong traditions, and so on—it is said that [Marpa] was born two years later, in the year of the water tiger [1002], and that he lived 80 or 78 years.¹⁵¹

This phrase can be found in both editions of Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba's biography,¹⁵² but the references do not correspond to any of the aforementioned hagiographies which, when they say something about Mar-pa's dates, say

¹⁴⁸ MPSB, vol. 1, p. 13. See part 2 on Nāropā for more details on this monastery that supposedly existed in Kashmir.

¹⁴⁹ Nāropā's *Śaddharmopadeśa* (*chos drug gi man ngag*) translated by Mar-pa (Tōh 2330): *rgya gar gyi mkhas pa nā ro paṇḍita dang mar pa lho brag pa chos kyī blo gros kyis kha che'i gnas pushpaharir bsgyur ba'o* is one such example.

¹⁵⁰ MPNT, p. 188, l. 1: *de ltar rje mar pa lo tstsha bal lnges pa'i don gyi bka' 'drin can/ / 'gro ba rnam kyī dpal du shar/ lde'i yon tan cung zad bstan pa las/ l'nam par thar pa brda' don 'grol byed/ /the tsom sel byed rin cen sgron me lta bu'o* See below, p. 294.

¹⁵¹ Dpa'-bo II, p. 4: *lo rgyus the tshom sel byed bya ba zhe sdang rdo rje dang mi bskyod rdo rje'i sbyar byang yod pa gnyis dang ngam rdzong lugs gnyis sogs rnam thar drug bdun las de las lo gnyis kyis snga ba'i me bya la 'khrungs nas gya bgryad cu'am don brgyad bzhugs par 'chad.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 4, and *Bod kyī lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. *ya*, p. 201.

that he died at 88, in the year of the bird (1081 or 1093), which would indicate birth in 994 or 1006 (a horse year). One possibility for this discrepancy is that there is a copy error in Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba's text:¹⁵³ the 2nd Dpa'-bo may have meant to say that according to these texts, Mar-pa died at 88 (*brgyad bcu'i gya brgyad*), which was misread as "80 or 78" (*brgyad bcu'am don brgyad*), by the copyist. Another possibility is that the mistake lies in the MKNT, which should read 80 instead of 88. It is indeed stated in Rngog-2, a text attributed to Rngog Chos-rdor,¹⁵⁴ that Mar-pa died at 80 in the bird year. Even though the relationship between MKNT and Rngog-2 is difficult to assess, they were both composed within the same milieu and it would make sense if they concurred on the age of Mar-pa at the time of his death. If we accept this emendation, Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba's reference to the MKNT is rather straightforward.¹⁵⁵

This anomaly aside, as the words *the tshom sel byed* are absent from all other biographies, it is possible that the text Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba refers to and the one found in the *Mar pa bka' 'bum* are one and the same. It is not clear why Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba attributes that text to Rngog Mdo-sde, but it may be because of sources from the Rngog clan that are not yet available to us. Whatever the case may be, it seems reasonable to follow Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba's lead and deduce that this text may be attributed to Rngog Mdo-sde, or in any case early members of the Rngog clan. If so, it would represent the very beginning of the tradition, since it was composed by a second-generation disciple of Mar-pa who even met him as a child.

A biography from the Aural Transmission that was compiled by Rgod-tshang-ras-pa,¹⁵⁶ a disciple of Gtsang-smyon, cites alternative sources of his knowledge of Mar-pa's life, specifically mentioning "Ngam-rdzong's tradition" and "some other."¹⁵⁷ The summary of what he calls "Ngam-rdzong's tradition" is actually quite similar to the MKNT (= Rngog Mdo-sde's version), and at the end of "the other" (the summary of which begins like Ngam-rdzong's!) Mar-pa's encounter with Atiśa is mentioned—a meeting

¹⁵³ It is likely that Dpa'-bo II, which is very badly printed and conserved (see below, p. 152 for details), is the basis for other copies, for instance the one found in the *Bod kyi lo rgyus nam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. *ya*.

¹⁵⁴ As described on p. 66 below, Chos-rdor may not be the author, although it remains likely that this biography was composed within the Rngog family.

¹⁵⁵ This emendation is somewhat complicated by the fact that Don-mo-ri-pa (called "Ngam-rdzong tradition" in Dpa'-bo II) also states that Mar-pa died at 88.

¹⁵⁶ NGMPP, reel no. L941/5. See part 2.5.1. below.

¹⁵⁷ See f. 2a: *ngan rdzong lugs nas/ [...] yang gzhan dag ni/* The reproduction from the NGMPP was given to me by Marta Sernesi, who is studying the whole collection.

which only appears in the MKNT and, later, in Gtsang-smyon's version. The mix-up between the two versions makes it rather difficult to form an opinion, but it is likely that the fact that Rgod-tshang-ras-pa draws a parallel between them shows that, one, he thought both were very old and, two, that he did not know that one was composed by Rngog Mdo-sde. Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba's assumption of authorship can therefore not be taken at face value and may be as speculative as my own deductions, but the biography's antiquity, which can be corroborated by a study of the text itself, seems clear.

The text's structure and influence

In terms of structure, the text is divided into eight parts, called "qualities." As we will see in the next section and as shown by Marta Sernesi,¹⁵⁸ there has existed since the 12th century and the *rnam thar* of Mi-la-ras-pa written by his disciples, a bipartite presentation in qualities typical of the Aural Transmission. Many authors used this division, or its derivatives, in their biographies of the Bka'-brgyud masters, which shows the influence of that tradition. This tendency to divide biographies into qualities is less obvious in later biographies. If we take the BCZP as an example, all biographies until Gzi-brjid-rgyal-mtshan (1290–1360) follow this structure, while those that were written later do not. Mdo-sde's biography is also divided into qualities, but there are eight instead of two, distinguishing that presentation from the classic Aural Transmission one. The eight are as follows:¹⁵⁹

1. The quality of awakening to his potential and going to India (*rigs sad pa rgya gar du byon pa'i yon tan*, p. 168, l. 3)
2. The quality of perfecting the practice of hardships (*dka' ba'i spyod pa mthar dbyung ba'i yon tan*, p. 171, l. 3)
3. The quality of having the Venerable Nāropā foretell his worthiness (*rje btsun na ro pas snod ldan du lung bstan pa'i yon tan*, p. 184, l. 1)
4. The revelation that sutras and tantras are the paths of methods (*mdo rgyud thabs lam du lung bstan pa*, p. 184, l. 5)
5. Fame of the lineage's strength based on following an enlightened teacher (*bla ma sangs rgyas bsten pas brgyud pa'i rtsal snyan par grags pa*, p. 185, l. 1)

¹⁵⁸ Sernesi 2010b, pp. 408–410.

¹⁵⁹ It must be noted that the titles are not exactly the same when they are announced at the beginning of the text and when they are detailed in the course of the biography. The titles are translated here as they appear in the body of the text. See Appendix 3 for a translation of the complete biography and of the opening outline.

6. The quality of the introduction to Mahāmudrā by glorious blessings (*byin brlabs kyi dpal gyis phyag rgya chen po ngo sprad pa'i yon tan*, p. 185, l. 4)
7. Showing that thanks to meditative absorption he is unimpeded regarding appearances (*ting nge 'dzin gyis snang ba la thog gdugs med par bstan pa*, p. 186, l. 1)
8. Accomplishing entering another's body through power over the pathways and winds (*rtsa rlung gi rtsal gyis rnam shes grong 'jug mdzad pa*, p. 186, l. 3).

The wording and numbering of the eight is quite different from that found in the KSTC, which represents the beginning of the Aural Transmission (as far as Mar-pa is concerned). This is not surprising if Mdo-sde did indeed compose this text, as it means that the biography is roughly contemporary with those composed by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and Sgam-po-pa, and therefore earlier than the first confirmed version of the Aural Transmission. This in turn implies that Rngog Mdo-sde is the first, in Mar-pa's biographical tradition, to use this division into qualities. More research could be undertaken within the context of Mi-la-ras-pa's life story in order to determine the origin of this structure there, but one consequence is that Mdo-sde's text actually initiated the style in Mar-pa's biographical tradition. It would certainly make sense to think that Mar-pa's life story was written at the same time or slightly before Mi-la-ras-pa's; in this case, it would mean that Mdo-sde developed a terminology (perhaps inspired by an oral tradition) that was systematized in the first Aural Transmission version of Mi-la-ras-pa's life and generalized until it became typical of all biographies of the lineage.

The first two of the eight qualities seem to have been synthesized in the first of the two qualities of the bipartite structure. The phrasing of the first is particularly interesting in that it shows that this biography is not yet dependent on Mi-la-ras-pa's biographical tradition. In the Aural Transmission biographies, the first part is called "the quality of undergoing hardships in connection with the family" (*rigs dang 'brel pa dka' ba spyad pa'i yon tan*). This title makes sense in the context of Mi-la-ras-pa's life story, as his hardships were indeed linked with familial disputes. It does not, however, make sense in the context of Mar-pa's biography (his difficulties do not have much to do with his family, which he leaves quite early), even though it was adopted by most of Mar-pa's biographers. Mdo-sde however understands *rigs* in a way which is much more fitting to Mar-pa's life, namely as "potential" (*rigs*, Skt. *gotra*) within the framework of Buddha nature: it is because Mar-pa awakens to his Mahāyāna potential that he goes to India and undergoes hardships.

As far as the text's content is concerned, it is replete with details which do not appear in the other early biographies but are the source for many

later biographies. The date of death is given as “when the sun rose over the mountains on the 14th day of the horse month in the bird year.”¹⁶⁰ The names of Mar-pa's parents are indicated (Mar-ston Dbang-phyug-'od-zer for his father, Rgya-mo-'od-de for his mother), as are the names of the five masters from Pharping in Nepal. Another unique feature is the meeting with Atiśa¹⁶¹ as the Indian paṇḍita arrived in Central Tibet while Mar-pa was en route for India. According to Nag-'tsho Lo-tsā-ba, who belonged to Atiśa's circle when he came to Tibet and whose account is recorded in a letter by Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan,¹⁶² it took place after Atiśa spent three years in Mnga'-ris and then traveled towards Central Tibet. Strangely, this episode was not included in any of Mar-pa's other biographies except the one by Gtsang-smyon Heruka, which explains its fame today.

Mdo-sde's influence is patent in many texts. His depiction of Mar-pa's last journey to India and his quest for Nāropā are probably the basis for later *rnam thar*. Nearly all of these mention Mar-pa's friends' and masters' prophecies that he would meet Nāropā, and Mar-pa's visionary and auditory experiences of the Indian paṇḍita.¹⁶³ With slight variations, these passages are the most widespread in biographies, and the ones over which there are the fewest polemics. In Mdo-sde's biography, the prophecies and ensuing search are generally briefly described in prose and followed by versified prophecies or instructions. Although these descriptions and verses take up almost half of the text, they are absent in Mar-pa's songs. However, their length and ubiquity in later biographies highlight their importance and show that this text is, together with the songs, one of the most influential sources of our knowledge of Mar-pa. This is why, even though most Tibetan and Western readers are familiar with the unfolding of the second half of the text as it is closely related to Gtsang-smyon Heruka's version, I chose to translate and present it *in extenso* in this book's Appendix 3. It represents the very beginning of the tradition of describing Mar-pa's search of Nāropā in detail, and contains the essential “songs” or verses in which Mar-pa proclaims the fame of his lineage and his accomplishment of entering another's body.

¹⁶⁰ MKNT, p. 187 (see also below, pp. 293–294, and the chart listing Mar-pa's dates as given in various biographies on p. 301).

¹⁶¹ MKNT, p. 171.

¹⁶² Cited by Davidson 2005, p. 145.

¹⁶³ See the translation's footnotes in Appendix 3 for correlations between MKNT and some of the most representative later versions.

2.1.1.2.2. Biographies composed by early Rngog clan members in the *Mar pa lo tsā'i gsung 'bum*

The first volume of the newly published *Mar pa lo tsā'i gsung 'bum* (MPSB) is devoted to Mar-pa's biographies. Among them, three are already familiar: the version attributed to "U-rgyan-pa,"¹⁶⁴ the one by Bla-ma Zhang,¹⁶⁵ and the one by Gtsang-smyon Heruka.¹⁶⁶ The other two belong to the Rngog tradition. The first of these two has been named the *Good Hagiography of the Lama Mar-pa Lo-tsā-ba* by its modern publishers, and is attributed to Rngog-gzhung-pa Chos-kyi-rdo-rje in the colophon.¹⁶⁷ It is actually comprised of two biographies: the first (Rngog-1), unsigned, is called *Summary of the qualities of Lama Mar-pa from Lho-brag*.¹⁶⁸ The second (Rngog-2) is signed Chos-kyi-rdo-rje in the colophon and is supposedly *The Extraordinary Dharma-story of Master Mar-pa*.¹⁶⁹ The second hitherto unknown text was composed by Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje, a disciple of Rngog Byang-chub-dpal, after his master's death (1446), and will be studied separately below.¹⁷⁰

Rngog-1

The Summary of the qualities of Lama Mar-pa from Lho-brag (Rngog-1), as its colophon indicates, is very likely a summary of the biography composed by Rngog Mdo-sde (MKNT).¹⁷¹ It presents eight qualities of Mar-pa, just as in the MKNT (and no other), even though the eight are not expounded on in this text. Mar-pa's grandfather's name is given in both texts as Phyug-podkon-mchog. But the clearest mark of MKNT's influence on this text is that the author actually quotes it (albeit without clear identification):

¹⁶⁴ MPSB, vol. 1, pp. 28–93. See the section concerned with the description of these biographies for more details; these texts were not studied on the basis of the computerized *Mar pa lo tsā'i gsung 'bum* but with the previously available versions of the same.

¹⁶⁵ MPSB, vol. 1, pp. 164–168.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 169–330.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–27. The title is given on the first page of the biography, p. 1: *bla ma mar pa lo tsā ba'i rnam par thar pa lags par gda'*. It is not clear whether this is an original title or if it was given by the modern publishers. Given that it is supposed to refer to two units in the biography, neither of which contains these words, I would favor the second possibility.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–11: *bla ma mar pa lho brag pa'i yon tan mdor bsdu pa*.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–27: *bla ma mar pa chos kyi lo rgyus thun mong ma yin pa yin*.

¹⁷⁰ See part 3.3.8. below.

¹⁷¹ MPSB, vol. 1, p. 11: *de yan chas bla ma mar pa lho brag pa'i yon tan mdor bsdu pa lags so*.

Some say that at the time he arrived, he asked who was the greatest among the paṇḍitas of the great institution of Vikramaśīla. He was told that none could compare with Nāropā.¹⁷²

This is exactly what can be found in Mdo-sde's biography,¹⁷³ where there are additional details about the guardians of the four directions, and it is therefore likely that the word "some" (*la la*) refers to Rngog Mdo-sde. Another possible indication of this source is that at one point the author seems to be summarizing certain details while referring to an earlier version:

The second [quality] is that Nāropā declared him a worthy vessel. As for the declaration that the Aural Transmission is spontaneous and the declaration of the sūtras and tantras as being the path of methods, there is nothing more to understand than what has been said earlier.¹⁷⁴

Qualities three and four in Mdo-sde's text indeed use exactly the same terminology.¹⁷⁵ Certain details differ between the two, but this is probably due to the fact that Rngog-1 is summarizing MKNT. This is the case, for example, with the description of Mar-pa's heritage from Nāropā: Rngog-1 describes it as being made up of one *thangka*, one *tsakli* and the root-tantra of Hevajra.¹⁷⁶ Mdo-sde says in the MKNT:

The Lo-tṣā-ba's share was a *thangka* of Hevajra; the three root-tantras of Guhyasamāja, Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara; one *ka-pala*; one *tsakli*; and an umbrella.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² MPSB, vol. 1, p. 2: *la la na re mar pa rang byon pa dang dus mtshungs su bi kra ma la shri la'i gtsug lag khang chen po'i paṇḍita rnams la su che byas pa la/ nā ro pa la sus kyang 'gran du med gsungs pa dang/* The wording is clearer in the MKNT, p. 169: [...] *rgya gar du byon nas/ bhi ka ma la dang/ da lta ni shri na len tra na dus mtshungs pa'i pan di ta chen po bzhi'i sgo bzhi srung ba dang [...]*.

¹⁷³ MKNT, p. 169, l. 3–5.

¹⁷⁴ MPSB, vol. 1, p. 3: *gnyis pa nil nā ro pas snod ldan du lung bstan pa nil snyan rgyud lhun grub tu lung bstan pa dang/ mdo rgyud thabs lam du lung bstan pa dang/ gong du songs bas go bar zad do.*

¹⁷⁵ MKNT, p. 184: *gsum par je btsun na ro pas snod ldan du lung bstan pa'i yon tan ni/ gsang snags yid bzhi nor bu'i snyan rgyud zab mo mkha' 'gro'i gsang / lsku gsum dbyer med brda bstan pa/ /de don lhun gyis grub pa yin/ [...]* *bzhi pa mdo rgyud thabs lam du lung bstan pa nil [...]*.

¹⁷⁶ MPSB, vol. 1, p. 4: *thang sku 1, tsak li 1, dgyes rdor rtsa rgyud.*

¹⁷⁷ MKNT, p. 172, l. 2: *be bazra'i thang sku cig/ gsang ba 'dus pa/ dgyes mdzad 'khor lo bde mchog gsum gyi rtsa rgyud gsum/ ka pa la cig/ bsag ka li cig dangs gdugs cig dang rnams.*

One discrepancy is that the MKNT has Gnyos throwing Mar-pa's texts into the Ganges, but in Rngog-1 he throws them into the Gnub-mtsho (which is also what Sgam-po-pa and Ngam-rdzong ston-pa say). The verses from the second half of the text contain some substantial differences, and often the Rngog-1 version is closer to the versions quoted in the KSTC and "U-rgyan-pa" than to the one in MKNT.¹⁷⁸

Given all of this, it seems quite reasonable to think that Rngog-1 is a summary of Mdo-sde's biography of Mar-pa as found in the *Mar pa'i bka' bum*. The fact that it shows the influence of slightly later texts such as the KSTC suggests that this summary was composed later than the 12th century, but within the Rngog clan tradition, as shown by its incorporation into this collection largely comprised of Rngog texts, including a work attributed to Rngog Chos-rdor.

Rngog-2

The second text in what the editors of the *Mar pa lo tsā'i gsung 'bum* considered to be a single composition is attributed in the colophon to Rngog Gzhung-pa Chos-kyi-rdo-rje. This may refer to Mar-pa's disciple of the Rngog clan whose residence was in Gzhung,¹⁷⁹ who is also called Chos-rdor or Chos-sku-rdo-rje. In the context of Mar-pa's biographies, the latter two names are most common. In the framework of the Rngog lineage histories, however, this master is generally called Chos-rdor or Chos-kyi-rdo-rje.¹⁸⁰ The short term Chos-rdor can indeed be spelled out as both Chos-sku-rdo-rje and Chos-kyi-rdo-rje. The fact that his name is spelled Chos-kyi-rdo-rje in this text therefore testifies to the fact that it comes from within the Rngog clan tradition.

If the colophon is correct in attributing this biography to Rngog Chos-rdor, it is the earliest biography on Mar-pa, and the only one composed by a direct disciple. Several biographies refer to such a text, the most noteworthy of which is Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's:

At this point, there are two traditions. In that of Dge-bshes Gzhung-pa, after the above narrative, [Nāropā] enters the practice. [Rngog] says that Mar-pa wanted to request the *Cakra-samvaratantra* the following morning, but as [Nāropā] had al-

¹⁷⁸ See the translation footnotes for details.

¹⁷⁹ The Gzhung valley is a side-valley within the actual Rnam-rab valley, south of Gongkar airport, in Central Tibet. See Sørensen & Hazod 2007, vol. 1, pp. 174–175.

¹⁸⁰ For example in the two rosaries of the Rngog clan described below, p. 124. They are the subject of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation.

ready entered the practice, this did not take place. Other says that even though he received the *Cakrasamvaratantra*, his son died before he could transmit it to him and so it did not spread.¹⁸¹

The point in question is Mar-pa's final farewell to Nāropā. This, however, does not unfold in Rngog-2 the way Ngam-rdzong ston-pa says it does. Sgam-po-pa also refers to the story of Rngog Gzhung-pa's meeting with Mar-pa,¹⁸² but that cannot be found in Rngog-2 either. Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu and Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, who generally mention most versions of Mar-pa's rnam-thar, do not refer to Chos-rdor's version of Mar-pa's life, even though the 2nd Dpa'-bo speak of Chos-rdor's autobiography.¹⁸³ Such a text is not available, but it is likely that a great deal of information relating to Rngog's relationship with Mar-pa derives from it, and this may indeed be the source referred to by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and Sgam-po-pa. Until we have access to this text and given the differences between references to "Chos-rdor's" biography on Mar-pa and Rngog-2, we must be very cautious about accepting this colophon.

Let us examine the details of this text to try and determine its time and milieu of origin. Concerning the date of composition, it would seem that the text is quite early, as indicated by the absence of details such as parents' names. Such particulars become more widespread in later versions, but it is plausible that an early disciple such as Chos-rdor would know certain details about Mar-pa's life but ignore his parents' names; the famous translator probably did not speak about them often. Another point in favor of an early date is the author's description of Mar-pa's realization:¹⁸⁴ here he is said to have realized the greater path of accumulation; Nāropā predicted that he would reach Buddhahood after three lifetimes; and according to Maitrīpā he would gain supreme *siddhis* after seven lives. These modest declarations, even though the author confirms that Mar-pa was renowned as a siddha in India, Nepal and Tibet, seem to point to an early date of composition and tend to disappear from later versions.

The songs are the only discernible source of this text. This becomes clear when we compare Rngog-1 and Rngog-2: even though both are most likely from a Rngog background, they are very different from one another, which would indicate different sources. We saw that Rngog-1, a summary of Mar-

¹⁸¹ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 95. See below, p. 266.

¹⁸² Sgam-po-pa, p. 29.

¹⁸³ Dpa'-bo II, p. 28 (p. 226 in the LGNT, vol. *ya*).

¹⁸⁴ MPSB, vol. 1, pp. 26–27.

pa's life as related by Mdo-sde, is quite succinct when it comes to Mar-pa's songs. The narrative in Rngog-2, on the other hand, is in large part derived from Mar-pa's *mgur*, of which several are mentioned explicitly and quoted *in extenso*.¹⁸⁵ Given the apparently exclusive reliance on songs and on personal knowledge, it is possible that Rngog Chos-rdor is the author.

In that case, one dubious detail is that the author states that Mar-pa died during a bird year, in a phrasing reminiscent of MKNT, except that Rngog-2 states that this happened when Mar-pa was 80, and Mdo-sde when Mar-pa was 88. A possible explanation for this discrepancy between these two biographies, which may have been crafted by father and son, is an error in the MKNT version, which should read 80 instead of 88. There is another curious point in the conclusion, where the author quotes Nāropā's prediction of the disappearance of Mar-pa's family lineage but the success of his dharma lineage, saying that "there are many excellent disciples holding [Mar-pa's] dharma lineage, and so his doctrine is expanding more and more."¹⁸⁶ Would not Chos-rdor have found it a bit early to say that his master's lineage is expanding "more and more" and to consider himself an excellent disciple?

There are more solid reasons that make the attribution of this text to Mar-pa's disciple Chos-rdor problematic. First, it is surprising that a biography with such a prominent author would be so neglected by the later tradition; this text has not been particularly influential, as demonstrated by the fact that the song quoted in it was only taken up again in Gtsang-smyon's work, and then in a very different shape. Second, why did the modern publishers join the two biographies as if they were both the work of Rngog Chos-rdor? Given the clear semantic separation between the two, they must have had good reasons to do so; it seems likely that they were kept in a single manuscript. If both texts are indeed by the same author, that author can not be Chos-rdor, as Rngog-1 cannot be composed by him and be a summary of Mdo-sde's work at the same time. They may therefore be by two different authors, with Rngog-2 being composed after Rngog-1, hence its second place in the manuscript.

¹⁸⁵ MPSB, vol. 1, pp. 24–25, also mentioned pp. 21–22. This song, which can be found in Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 119–121, describes Mar-pa's visions of Nāropā and his experience during his last journey to India. The author of Rngog-2 maintains that this song figures among the "eight songs" (p. 21: *mgur brygad na yod*). Gtsang-smyon, however, does not consider it to be one of the eight great songs, and he is the first after Rngog-2 to mention it. Both versions are quite different and the beginning of the song in Gtsang-smyon is an addition with regard to Rngog-2.

¹⁸⁶ MPSB, vol. 1, p. 26: *chos kyi bryud pa 'dzin pa'i bu slob ni bzang la mang ba gzhuḡs tel chos ni je dar je dar 'gro ba'o*.

If this were the case, the Chos-rdor in question may not be Mar-pa's disciple, but a distant descendant of the Rngog clan, who was also from Gzhung. One likely candidate is the brother of Rin-chen-bzang-po (1231–1307), also called Chos-rdor. Nothing much is known about him, apart from the fact that he fathered five sons; the eldest, Chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan (1283–1359), was Spre'u-zhing's fourth abbot. This authorship is not backed by a lot of evidence, as virtually nothing is known about him, but this later dating could account for the discrepancies described.

Conclusion

In light of the above considerations, it seems quite safe to conclude that the MKNT is an early work written within the Rngog clan and summarized in Rngog-1 during the 12th or 13th century. Its authorship may tentatively be attributed to Rngog Mdo-sde, which would make it a composition by Mar-pa's direct disciple, although Mar-pa died when Mdo-sde was quite young. Despite the uncertainty about its exact authorship, this text was very influential on the later tradition, which explains its similarity with most later works. It can therefore be considered a major foundation. If Rngog Chos-rdor authored Rngog-2, this would make it the earliest known account of Mar-pa's life. However, several points indicate that this may not be the case, and another possibility would be that a fifth-generation Chos-rdor composed it in the late 13th century. As this text does not seem to be related to many others and is mainly based on Mar-pa's songs, it can in any case be considered a minor foundation.

2.1.1.3. Biographies of the Aural Transmission

Last but not least is the third—and most influential—foundation, the biography composed in the Ras-chung Snyan-brgyud tradition. We know of its existence mainly by Gtsang-smyon's colophon:¹⁸⁷ Gtsang-smyon says that his two most important sources are the biographies by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and by Ras-chung-pa. To identify the latter, we will first present several biographies composed within the Aural Transmission lineage, even though some were compiled later.

Biography compiled by Byang-chub-bzang-po in the Hagiographies of the wish-fulfilling gem of the lineage (early 16th century)

To begin our search of Mar-pa's *nam thar* in the Aural Transmission, we will start with a collection of biographies compiled by Byang-chub-bzang-po

¹⁸⁷ See below, pp. 139–140, for a complete translation and analysis of this colophon.

in the beginning of the 16th century (BCZP). He was a monk within the administration of the 7th Karma-pa (1454–1506), and later attended the young 8th Karma-pa (1507–1554), from 1507 to 1514. Under the name Akhu A-khra, he redacted the most detailed account of the Karma-pa's early years.¹⁸⁸ Two versions of his compilation of biographies of the Aural Transmission exist: one in *dbu med* published in 1973 in the *Bde mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud*,¹⁸⁹ and another in *dbu can* that recently surfaced in the DK-DZO within the first of the five Ras-chung Snyan-brgyud volumes. Both collections end with Byang-chub-bzang-po's colophon¹⁹⁰ and it is likely that he is the author, or rather the editor, of all biographies therein, even though most are attributed to a close disciple of the subject. That is, Tilopā's and Nāropā's biographies are said to have been composed by Mar-pa, Mar-pa's by Mi-la-ras-pa, and so on. However, as Roberts and Quintman¹⁹¹ have recognized, this late attribution, doubtless an act of devotion, is quite misleading when we consider the content and history of the collection. The fact that these attributions were accepted by Torricelli and Naga, who edited and translated Tilopā's life from that collection¹⁹² and by Dan Martin in his review of the *Life of Marpa*¹⁹³ has resulted in some confusion.

A recent article by Marta Sernesi on the hagiographies of the masters of the Aural Transmission¹⁹⁴ and my own research lead me to believe that to compile his collection, Byang-chub-bzang-po edited a text which already existed and which played a major role in the elaboration of later biographies. Convincing evidence indicates that there was indeed a biography which circulated among Aural Transmission practitioners very early on, and which corresponds roughly to the version in the BCZP.

Genealogy of biographies in the transmission of the Aural Transmission

To start our search of the original biographies composed within the Aural Transmission, we should note that the life of Mar-pa found in another col-

¹⁸⁸ See *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 1225, and Rheingans 2014, p. 74.

¹⁸⁹ Byang chub bzang po: "Brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu rnam par thar pa" (BCZP). In: *Bde mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud (ras chung snyan rgyud): A manuscript collection of orally transmitted precepts focusing upon the tutelaries Cakrasamvara and Vajravārāhī*. New Delhi: [s.n.], 1973. 2 vol. (W24891).

¹⁹⁰ See for example DK-DZO, vol. 58, p. 382: *ces bya ba 'di nyid brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu'i mtshams su gzbug pa'i phyir rnam thar rgyas pa las btus te bo dhi bhā dras sbyar ba'ol'*

¹⁹¹ Roberts 2007, p. 52, Quintman 2014, p. 51.

¹⁹² Torricelli 1995.

¹⁹³ Martin 1984, p. 84.

¹⁹⁴ Sernesi 2010b, pp. 401–424.

lection from the Ras-chung Snyan-brgyud lineage entitled *Bde mchog snyan brgyud biographies*¹⁹⁵ (DCNGBio) does not originally belong to that collection, but is a late addition from a golden rosary by Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po composed in the late 14th century.¹⁹⁶ The people responsible for the edition of the DCNGBio must have considered the lineage incomplete without Mar-pa's biography and added it from another source. The collection *per se* includes twelve biographies, beginning with Mi-la-ras-pa and ending with Gzi-brjid-rgyal-mtshan (1290–1360). The latter was composed in 1361 by Gzi-brjid-rgyal-mtshan's disciple Dus-zhabs-pa Rin-chen-rgya-mtsho (who died in 1400),¹⁹⁷ which leads us to conclude that all biographies, which share the same structure (a presentation in two qualities) predate 1361.

In the BCZP, Byang-chub-bzang-po adds seven biographies from different authors to these twelve. He takes up the DCNGBio after Gzi-brjid-rgyal-mtshan and continues until his own master, Kun-dga'-dar-po. He also edits the previous twelve biographies and attributes to them fanciful authors who are not mentioned in the original. The seven additional biographies, as Sernesi notes,¹⁹⁸ do not follow the binary plan in qualities (*yon tan*), unlike the twelve previous ones. Before Mi-la-ras-pa's biography, he also adds Nāropā's and Mar-pa's life stories, which appear under the binary form. The logical conclusion is that he based his work on a collection of all fourteen biographies, but that the first two were lost when the DCNGBio was compiled. Clearly, they cannot have been composed later than 1361.

Furthermore, these Aural Transmission biographies, even though they function as a group, can also be used separately. In Rgyal-thang-pa's golden rosary, presented below,¹⁹⁹ there is a biography on Ras-chung-pa. Although Roberts attributes it to Rgyal-thang-pa, Marta Sernesi shows that not only is the colophon that concludes all other biographies by Rgyal-thang-pa absent from this text, but also that its structure is very different from the others: instead of the usual root verses and commentaries on each master's life, we find the typical structure in qualities of the Aural Transmission biographies.²⁰⁰ As it is quite unlikely that Rgyal-thang-pa would have modified his

¹⁹⁵ *Bde mchog snyan brgyud biographies* (DCNGBio). Darjeeling: Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang, 1983, pp. 133–401 (W21145); pp. 1–131 for Mar-pa's hagiography by Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po.

¹⁹⁶ See below, pp. 119–122.

¹⁹⁷ See the colophon of the DCNGBio, p. 400 (also LGNT, vol. 23, p. 488), which indicates that Rin-chen-rgya-mtsho composed the text during the year *'phar ba'i lo*, i.e. *lcags mo glang*, 1361, one year after Gzi-brjid-rgyal-mtshan's death.

¹⁹⁸ Sernesi 2010b, p. 411.

¹⁹⁹ See pp. 105–110.

²⁰⁰ Sernesi 2010b, p. 414.

style for just one biography, the scribe of this manuscript or one of his superiors must have added it while copying Rgyal-thang-pa's composition, thinking that Ras-chung-pa's biography was missing. Sernesi, like Roberts,²⁰¹ considers that this manuscript dates from the 14th or 15th century, thus advancing by one century Gene Smith's estimation.²⁰² In any case, besides confirming a date before the 1400s, this inclusion in Rgyal-thang-pa's rosary confirms the influence of the Aural Transmission biographies, and shows that they function in an autonomous way and can be used in other contexts than in the Aural Transmission golden rosaries.

The first available biography of Mi-la-ras-pa, the *Bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam thar* (or *Bu chen bcu gnyis*) allegedly composed by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and eleven other disciples of Mi-la-ras-pa, probably introduced the narrative style of the lineage: the presentation in two qualities (*rigs dang 'brel ba dka' spyad pa'i yon tan* and *ting nge 'dzin dang 'brel ba nyams myong ba'i yon tan*). Another old text from this universe is the biography of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, compiled by his disciple Dam-pa ras-chen and revised by Rgod-tshangs-pa.²⁰³ This text does not formulate the first quality in exactly the same way, but instead of the expected *yon tan* it reads: *rigs dang 'brel ba dka' spyad pa'i lo rgyud* (= *lo rgyus*), an expression which can be found in Mar-pa's biography from the BCZP. We can therefore surmise that the BCZP bases itself on an ancient form of this structure, doubtless modified by Byang-chub-bzang-po when he took up the compilation.

Mar-pa's biography in the Great Golden Rosary of the Bka'-brgyud (compiled after 1838)

In the course of my search for the most influential biography composed at the outset of the Aural Transmission, missing in the DCNGbio, it became clear that one biography in the first of the four volumes of the *Great Golden Rosary of the Bka'-brgyud*²⁰⁴ (KSTC-1) fulfilled all criteria. This rosary provides information on the masters of the 'Ba'-ra-ba Bka'-brgyud lineage, a

²⁰¹ Roberts 2007, p. 15.

²⁰² See preface of W23436 (Rgyal-thang-pa).

²⁰³ See Sernesi 2010b, pp. 411–412, for details on this biography which opens the *Ngam rdzong snyan brgyud kyi skor* (W23167), pp. 1–17. Contents on pp. 2–3.

²⁰⁴ “Sgra bsgyur chen po mar pa'i rnam par thar pa.” In: *Bka' brgyud gser phreng chen mo [Biographies of eminent gurus in the transmission lineage of teachings of the 'ba' ra dkar brgyud pa sect]*. Reproduced from the manuscript collections of Gra sku-zhabs Bstan-'dzin nor-bu. Dehradun: Ngawang Gyaltzen and Ngawang Lungtok, 1970. Vol. 1, pp. 149–202. The four volumes have been published in the LGNT, vol. 26–29 (*la-ha*), in the same edition. Mar-pa's biography is contained in vol. 26 (*la*), pp. 151–204.

sub-branch of the Stod-'brug lineage that also produced the rosary in which the aforementioned biography of Mar-pa by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa appears.²⁰⁵ The two rosaries, even though originating from the same lineage, do not use the same sources; this is obvious in the case of Mar-pa's biographies, which are very different. The masters described in these two collections have been identified by Franz-Karl Ehrhard on the basis of a 19th-century painting that depicts their lineage as presented in the four volumes of the *Great Golden Rosary of the Bka'-brgyud*, with bibliographical notes on most of them.²⁰⁶

The last volume of the KSTC-1 ends with Rig-'dzin Chos-dbyings-rdo-rje's biography (1772–1838), but this does not indicate that all biographies were composed in the 19th century. The collection is a composite and its manuscript switches from *dbu can* to *dbu med* in the middle of the third volume. Biographies from Tilopā to Mi-la-ras-pa share the same structure (four qualities for Tilopā and Nāropā, two for Mar-pa and Mi-la-ras-pa); this is also the case for Ras-chung-pa's biography which only appears in the 15th-century compilation (Mon-rtse-pa) but not in the KSTC. Sgam-po-pa's biography in both collections is the one composed by his disciple 'Ba'-rompa Dar-ma-dbang-phyug. Given that among all biographies in the KSTC, the ones that share the same structure are those of Aural Transmission masters (Tilopā to Mi-la-ras-pa), it seems quite obvious that their origin can be ascribed to someone from that lineage. Some of the texts in the first volume end with auspicious phrases, mostly the words *sarva maṅgalam* or their Tibetan equivalent (*dge'o*, *bkra shis*). Sometimes—for instance in the life-stories of Mar-pa, Sgam-po-pa, Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras (1161–1211), Rgod-tshang-pa and Yang-dgon-pa—the wishes are longer. As the style of these wishes does not reflect the origin of the texts they conclude, they may be examples of editing carried out in the 19th century.

These late editorial changes aside, it is very likely that Mar-pa's biography itself represents a version of the text composed at the outset of the Aural Transmission, which Gtsang-smyon attributes to Ras-chung-pa. An Aural Transmission collection recently published in the LGNT confirms this hypothesis; one finds in vol. 23 ('a) a series of texts called *Wish-Fulfilling Gem of the Lineage (brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu)*. As already mentioned in the introduction, this expression refers to the first of three sets of practices of the Aural Transmission called “wish-fulfilling gems”: knowing about the wish-fulfilling gem of the lineage constitutes the indispensable preliminary practice allowing disciples to embark upon the wish-fulfilling gem of the path of

²⁰⁵ Mon-rtse-pa, see above, p. 46.

²⁰⁶ Ehrhard 2009.

ripening (*smin lam yid bzhin nor bu*), and the wish-fulfilling gem of the path of liberation (*grol lam yid bzhin nor bu*).²⁰⁷ That collection of biographies of the early masters of the Aural Transmission is comprised of texts gathered from three different sources, as seen by their numbering and page layout. The first collection, numbered *ka* to *tsa* with a few items missing (*ta*, *tha*, *da* and *pa*),²⁰⁸ has a homogenous layout (six lines per page, same *dbu med ductus*) and style (bipartite structure in *yon tan*). All texts correspond exactly with the ones from the DCNGBio in numbering and content. The noteworthy difference is the addition of three biographies before that of Mi-la-ras-pa and two afterwards. Among the former, of course, figures Mar-pa's biography, numbered *ga*; it is missing from the DCNGBio, which, as we saw, can be considered the source of the BCZP. Apart from a few changes in grammatical links between phrases, etc., that biography is the same as that of the KSTC. Since the *Bka' brgyud gser phreng chen mo* served as a basis for my study of this group and its influence on later biographies, the biography from this collection will be called KSTC-1 when I refer to it specifically, and the biography from the *Lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* will be called KSTC-2. When "KSTC" is mentioned, it refers to the text itself, regardless of minor differences between the versions.

The importance of this *rnam thar* is demonstrated by the large number of versions of various lengths that are clearly derived from it. At least three biographies are exclusively based on this text and can be considered summaries of it, since they have the exact same *verbatim* quotes and structure in qualities. Most of the later biographies were also clearly influenced by it, along with other sources. We will look at these more loosely related texts below, but now let us examine texts from the Aural Transmission which summarize the longer version as found in the KSTC.

²⁰⁷ Sernesi 2010b, pp. 404–405. See also an explanation of that aspect in Chapter 1, p. 37.

²⁰⁸ The first collection is the only one with the words *Bgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu* at the beginning of each title. The two biographies added after those of the DCNGBios are those of Dus-zhabs-pa Rin-chen-rgya-mtsho (died in 1401, *lcags pho sbrug*, LGNT, vol. 23, p. 505) composed in 1417 (*me mo bya*, p. 506); and an autobiographical account by 'Brug-pa'i-sgom-chen Chos-grags-dbang-po (pp. 575–584). The latter's biography can also be found in BCZP, pp. 247–248; he was a disciple of the former, and therefore lived in the beginning of the 15th century. The whole manuscript for that collection may be dated around the same period. Biographies from other collections seem to have been added to it later to fill in certain gaps. This is the case, for example, with the biographies of Ltar-sgom-chen-po (*nga*, pp. 377–384), Zhang Lo-tsā-ba (*cha*, pp. 385–394), Dharaśri (*ja*, pp. 407–420), and so on. In this secondary set, there are eight lines of text. A third source is represented by the *Drin can ras ma'i rnam thar* (pp. 395–406), numbered *na*, with seven lines and no introductory title block.

One such summary is the “Rje btsun mar pa'i rnam thar” found in the DK-DZO,²⁰⁹ in the first of two volumes entitled “Ngam rdzong snyan rgyud” (KSTC.sum.1). It is preceded and followed by respectively Nāropā's and Mi-la-ras-pa's *rnam thar*. Next are Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's biography and two others, that of Rgya Thams-cad-mkhyen-pa, a.k.a Rgya pho-lung-pa, a master of the 12th century who met many masters of the time and belonged to the 'Bri-gung lineage;²¹⁰ and that of a certain Bla-ma Btsan-'phrang-ba who was apparently one of his disciples. It is unclear whether all biographies are the work of the same author. Apart from that of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, they all follow the two-part structure of qualities of awakening to one's potential and qualities of *samādhi*, and it is therefore possible that they actually compose one work, as the text ends with the words *brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu'o*.²¹¹ Thus it was likely composed by a disciple of Bla-ma Btsan-'phrang-ba during the 13th century within the Aural Transmission, as these words indicate.

Mar-pa's biography follows exactly that of the KSTC. One aspect that makes the KSTC longer is the addition of commentaries offered on the various verses of prediction by Mar-pa's masters, and/or remarks concerning different versions (e.g. how Mar-pa lost his texts in the water). These details are absent from the KSTC.sum.1. Otherwise, the singularities, such as the absence of 'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba, are the same. Most sentences and expressions are similar, apart from the omission of certain details in KSTC.sum.1.

Two further short versions in *dbu med* are found in the *Lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* (LGNT), in the midst of two other rosaries of the Aural Transmission. The first is found in a “rosary of wish-fulfilling gems of the Aural Transmission” which contains twenty-one biographies of mostly obscure masters of the lineage, up to the 15th century (KSTC.sum.2).²¹² The first six biographies, until Khyung-tshang-pa Ye-shes-bla-ma (1115–1176), are not signed. Mar-pa's biography is the shortest of all three summaries; it mainly contains the various verses of prediction, blessing, prayer, etc. attributed to Mar-pa or his masters, as well as the different titles in *yon tan*. The second text is made up of “Additional story excerpts from the Cakrasamvara Aural Tantra” (KSTC.sum.3).²¹³ It contains eleven biographies ranging from

²⁰⁹ DK-DZO, vol. 63, pp. 82–110.

²¹⁰ One of his compositions follows the last biography.

²¹¹ DK-DZO, vol. 63, p. 172.

²¹² KSTC.sum.2: “Mar pa lo tsā'i skabs.” In: *Snyan brgyud kyi brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu'i phreng ba*. In: LGNT, vol. 22 (*za*), pp. 276–283.

²¹³ KSTC.sum.3: “Mar pa lo tsā ba'i lo rgyus.” In: *Bde mchog snyan brgyud kyi lo rgyus khol bur phyung ba*. In: LGNT, vol. 22 (*za*), pp. 515–532.

Vajrayoginī and Tilopā to Zhang Lo-tsā-ba (d. 1237), hence dating from the beginning of the Ras-chung Snyan-brgyud lineage.

The authorship of Mar-pa's biography in the Aural Transmission

The authorship of the original biography composed within the Aural Transmission was difficult to pin down until the discovery of the KSTC-2, whose colophon states:

These were the qualities of master Mar-pa Lo-tsā-ba Blo-gros.
They were drawn from father Shangs-pa Mar-ston's mind.²¹⁴

Shangs-pa Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas²¹⁵ was one of the three main disciples of Khyung-tshang-pa, Ras-chung-pa's foremost disciple; the other two were Ma-gcig 'Ong-jo and Dge-sdings-pa. These three transmitted the lineage to Zhang Lo-tsā-ba, who died in 1237.²¹⁶ We do not know Mar-ston's exact dates, but he must have been active at the end of the 12th century. According to the *Deb ther sngon po*, he was born in a serpent year in Shangs, a district of Gtsang, and became a learned monk and holder of the Aural Transmission. The attribution of the biography to Shangs-pa Mar-ston does not appear in the KSTC-1 and is not mentioned in any other biographies. It is, however, corroborated by a number of indications.

First is the aforementioned colophon of Gtsang-smyon's *Life of Mar-pa*, where the yogin states that he has mainly drawn from Ras-chung-pa's and Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's versions. Given that no one else mentions Ras-chung-pa's biography of Mar-pa—one would expect Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba or Kah-thog Rig-dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu to mention it in their survey of the various sources given the weight such authorship would carry—it seems unlikely that he was the author. What probably happened is that, just as Gtsang-smyon staged Ras-chung-pa as the author of Mi-la-ras-pa's biography, he indicates that Ras-chung-pa composed a biography on Mar-pa, when the text he used was actually composed by Ras-chung-pa's grand-disciple.

Second, the biography is an early one but not the earliest: the text's autonomy from other versions and from songs, its utilization in collections which end with early masters (Khyung-tshang-pa in the KSTC.sum.2,²¹⁷

²¹⁴ KSTC-2, p. 171: *sbyangs pa can bla ma mar pa lo tsa ba blo gros kyi yon tan nol lpha shangs pa mar ston gyi ihugs nas phyungs pa'o*.

²¹⁵ See his biographies in the DCNGbio, pp. 289–295, and LGNT, vol. 23, pp. 367–376. The two versions are identical.

²¹⁶ See Sernesi 2004 and 2011a for more details on these masters.

²¹⁷ As the first six biographies in the KSTC-sum-2, up to and including Khyung-tshang-

Zhang Lo-tsā-ba in the KSTC.sum.3,²¹⁸ Gzi-brjid-rgyal-mtshan or his disciple in the DCNGBios, or the KSTC-2) speak in favor of an early date, as does the importance of biographies in the Aural Transmission. The bipartite structure in *yon tan* however shows that it is not among the earliest biographies, as this style was initiated in Mi-la-ras-pa's biography, probably the *Bu chen bcu gnyis*, which influenced all other biographies of the lineage. Mar-pa's biography by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, for instance, does not follow the same structure in two qualities that we would expect from an author of the Aural Transmission. If Ngam-rdzong ston-pa had known of this style when "writing" his biography of Mar-pa, he probably would have followed it. But he did not, indicating that he actually composed it earlier, and incidentally that the KSTC was compiled later, giving more weight to a composition at the end of the 12th century.

Another indication of this is that most of the verses of prediction and vision during Mar-pa's search of Nāropā are very probably derived from Rngog Mdo-sde's version of the life of Mar-pa. Such correspondence could not be explained if the KSTC was Ras-chung-pa's work, as it would then be contemporary with that of Mdo-sde. As most of these verses are not found in songs, they must come from another source, and the likeliest is Mdo-sde's version. It therefore follows that the KSTC took its shape under that influence, even though it clearly presents an independent knowledge of Mar-pa's life that was probably transmitted within the Aural Transmission lineage from Mi-la-ras-pa onwards.

It is quite surprising that no biography mentions the authorship of Marston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas when we consider the impact this biography

pa, do not indicate any author but the seventh, Mar-ston's, does, it is possible that the six constitute a group composed by Mar-ston, even if this hypothesis is not backed by any textual indications. Mar-ston certainly could have composed a longer biography on Mar-pa, with details and commentary, and summarized it in that version. Or alternatively, KSTC.sum.2 could be the original, which was supplemented by some of Mar-ston's disciples with his oral comments, as the many traces of orality in the KSTC show (see Chapter 3, p. 185 ff. for details). However, as it has been greatly condensed so as to retain only the verses, this is unlikely.

²¹⁸ The last biography of the collection, that of Zhang Lo-tsā-ba, was composed by a disciple who calls himself Dge-slong Grub-pa-dpal-bzang-po: LGNT, vol. 22, p. 637. He seems to have been responsible for the compilation of the whole collection, even though he is not the author. See his remark p. 619, at the opening of Zhang Lo-tsā-ba's biography: "The lineage up to this point is the work of some who are lamas, scholars, and yogins. Here, are the qualities of my own master, the Dharma-lord Lo-tsā-ba, as immeasurable as stars in the sky [...]" *'di yan chad kyī brgyud pa ni bla ma dang mkhyen pa dang rnal 'byor pa (?) mnyam pa rnamis kyis mdzad pal 'dir rang gi bla ma chos rje lo tstsha ba'i yon tan ni mkha' ltar gzhāl du med cing [...]*. In any case, this confirms that by the mid-13th century, this bipartite structure in qualities was widespread.

had on later works. Given that only one of the two versions bears his signature, and that no other text follows this lead, it was possibly a late addition based on oral information, but no later than the beginning of the 14th century, when the KSTC-2 was compiled. It would have been strange to add the name of a “minor” member of the lineage as the author if this was not the case, so it is likely that Mar-ston was really the author. Were he not, Ras-chung-pa—or Khyung-tshang-pa—would have been better candidates.

Text progression

Now that the author of the most important foundation of Mar-pa’s biographical tradition has been determined with some certainty, let us explore the general structure of the text and the differences between various versions. The KSTC and its summaries—i.e. the various versions of the Aural Transmission’s account of Mar-pa’s life—contain two parts, or two qualities. The first covers Mar-pa’s youth, first journey to India, and first return to Tibet. The second is divided into seven further “qualities” and covers the second journey to India and the last part of Mar-pa’s life in Tibet. In sum:

- I. The quality of his undergoing hardships, linked with his potential (*rigs dang ’brel pa dka’ ba spyad pa’i yon tan*, p. 150);²¹⁹ and
- II. The quality of his experience, linked with meditative absorption (*ting nge ’dzin dang ’brel pa nyams su myong ba’i yon tan*, p. 170).

²¹⁹ This is translated as “qualities of practicing austerities in relation to his family line” by Quintman and “the quality of enduring hardships, connected with the family” by Sernesi. The translation makes sense for Mi-la-ras-pa, as his family plays a major role in the first part of his life when he faced many hardships because of it. In the framework of Mar-pa’s life however, this is surprising in that he leaves his birth family quite early. His own family troubles appear towards the end of his life when his son Mdo-sde dies, and in any case are not mentioned in this biography. Family is not the main point in this section. The use of this expression, which can be found in all biographies divided into two “qualities,” shows that they all follow a common source, probably the *Bu chen bcu gnyis*. Be that as it may, we saw that in the framework of Mar-pa’s life the first occurrence of the presentation in qualities is found in the MKNT, where the first of the two Aural Transmission titles is separated into two qualities: *rigs sad pa rgya gar du byon pa’i yon tan*: “the quality of going to India because he has awakened to his potential,” and *dka’ ba’i spyod pa mthar byung ba’i yon tan*: “the quality of completing his enduring of hardships.” I therefore choose the translation “The quality of his undergoing hardships, linked with his potential” as it makes more sense in the context of Mar-pa’s life and is backed by Rngog Mdo-sde’s interpretation, though I am aware that it is probably not what authors or readers from the Aural Transmission understood. Thanks to Marta Sernesi who drew my attention to this point in the course of a private conversation (04.02.2012).

1. The quality of decoding symbols and of being urged [to go back to India] (*brda' bkrol zhing bskul ttab pa'i yon tan*, p. 170);
2. The quality of being prophesized as a worthy vessel (*snod ldan du lung btsan pa'i yon tan*, p. 173);²²⁰
3. Prophecies of the meetings (*'jal [sic] bar lung stan*, p. 174, concerning Mar-pa's visits to his gurus, all of whom predict that he will meet Nāropā);²²¹
4. The quality of being uplifted by the [guru's] kindness (*brtse bas dbugs dbyung ba'i yon tan*, p. 180, regarding Mar-pa's solitary quest of Nāropā and his visions of him);
5. The quality of being accepted [as a disciple] in accordance with [Tilopā's] proclamation (*bka' bzhin zhal gyis bzhes nas thugs kyis bzung ba'i yon tan*, p. 186, about the last meeting of the two men, the attack of the *dākinīs*, and the transmission of the Aural Transmission);
6. The quality of the prophecy and of self-liberation (*lung bstan rang grol gyi yon tan*, p. 189, repeating the same prediction by Nāropā, mentioned pp. 173, 186 and 189, here with a commentary); and
7. The quality of possessing meditative absorption (*ting nge 'dzin dang ldan pa'i yon tan*, p. 191). This last section which relates Mar-pa's return to Tibet, is divided into four parts:
 - a. The quality of fame because of the strength of his lineage (*brgyud pa'i rtsal ba snyan par grags pa'i yon tan*);²²²
 - b. The quality of being introduced to Mahāmudrā thanks to the strength of the blessing (*byin gyis rlabs kyi rtsal gyis phyag rgya chen po ngo sprod pa'i yon tan*, p. 193);²²³
 - c. The quality of being unobstructed as to appearance thanks to the strength of his experience (*nyams myong gi rtsal gyis snang pa la thog sdug med pa'i yon tan*, p. 194); and

²²⁰ There are three sub-prophecies, or declarations, as this term can also be translated: *snyan rgyud lhun grub snod ldan du lung stan pa'i yon tan*, *mdo rgyud thabs lam gyi snod ldan du lung stan pa'i yon tan*, *zhal gyis bzhes nas thugs kyis bzung ba'i yon tan*. Only the first two are found in the KSTC.sum.1 and KSTC.sum.3. The third prediction, given by Nāropā and Tilopā, is found elsewhere in the text. The KSTC.sum.2 retains it and it is the only one mentioned by BCZP, which only relates Tilopā's prophecy).

²²¹ KSTC.sum.1, p. 92, and KSTC.sum.3, p. 523, have *mjal*.

²²² This is what is written in all KSTC.sum, in KSTC-2 (p. 162) and in the BCZP. In the KSTC-1, p. 191, it is written: *brgyud pa'i rtsa ba snyan par grags pa'i yon tan*.

²²³ The word *yon tan* is omitted in KSTC-1 but present in other versions.

- d. The quality of entering another's body thanks to the strength of his meditative absorption (*ting nge 'dzin gyi rtsal gyis grong 'jug mdzad pa'i yon tan*, p. 196).²²⁴

The BCZP adopts this same structure except in the sixth and seventh qualities.²²⁵ Most of the plot revolves around Nāropā, who is the be-all and end-all of Mar-pa's experience and development. Naturally, the masters who link Mar-pa with Nāropā—Spyi-ther-pa,²²⁶ Paiṇḍapā, and Prajñāsimha—are described with care. Nāropā is, of course, the most important guru in all biographies; however, in Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's version for example, Jñānagarbha and Śāntibhadra also play an important role, which is much reduced in this text. Jñānagarbha is actually completely absent from the story, which shows that this text belongs to a different family of biographies. In these, Mar-pa's travels in India begin with Nāropā, as opposed to Ngam-rdzong's version where he first goes to meet Jñānagarbha. Śāntibhadra, whose name alternates with that of Kukuripa in the KSTC,²²⁷ is the only one besides

²²⁴ There are four instances of entering another's body on a pigeon, a *dri*, a deer, and a lamb.

²²⁵ Part 6 and 7 are modified in BCZP:

6. *lung bstan rang grol gyi yon tan* (p. 86), two parts: a. the prophecy (*lung bstan pa ni*) (p. 86); b. qualities of self-liberated desire (*'dod pa rang grol gyi yon tan*, p. 88), four parts: i. the quality of fame of the strength of his lineage (*brgyud pa'i rtsal gyis snyan par grags pa'i yon tan*, p. 88); ii. the quality of being introduced to Mahāmudrā thanks to the strength of the blessing (*byin labs kyi rtsal gyis phyag rgya chen po ngo 'phrod pa'i yon tan*, p. 90); iii. the quality of being unobstructed as to appearance thanks to his power over *nādis* and *vāyus* (*rtsa rlung gi rtsal gyis snang pa la thog ba dugs med pa'i yon tan*) (p. 91); iv. the quality of entering another's body thanks to the strength of his meditative absorption (*ting nge 'dzin rtsal gyis grong 'jug mdzad pa'i yon tan*, p. 92).

7. The quality of not being ordinary but of appearing for the benefit of beings as an emanation body (*rang rgyud pa ma yin par sprul pa'i skus sems can [?] gyi don la byon pa'i yon tan*, p. 95). This last part is absent from the KSTC, but is based on Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's biography of Mar-pa, where he explains why Mar-pa is said to be an emanation of Ḍombiheruka, according to La-chings Yon-tan-'bar's vision. Ngam-rdzong ston-pa places this vision at the end of the text, as does BCZP, but DRNT places it at the beginning of the biography. Thus Ngam-rdzong ston-pa must be another source of BCZP, in addition to KSTC, which is logical considering that these two authors represent the two branches of the Aural Transmission.

²²⁶ In the KSTC, the name of this Newari guru is sometimes spelled Spyi-ther-pa or Sphyi-ther-pa, sometimes Dbu-ther-pa (pp. 171, 191). The different spellings show that this edition is not based on an oral version but on a manuscript in *dbu med*. It has always been clear that the KSTC is a later, faithful copy of this original version. The nickname "Spyi-ther-pa" means "Bold Head". Since no monk would ever be called this, he must have been a secular Vajra Master. Thanks to Hubert Decler for this suggestion.

²²⁷ Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin (TWNB, pp. 643–644) distinguishes between Kukuripa and

Nāropā to be cited, but here too Nāropā was instrumental in Mar-pa's visiting him. Maitrīpā is mentioned, but without any details. These peculiarities—Jñānagarbha's omission and the minor importance of Maitrīpā—are given prominence in the songs, which shows that they may not play a significant role in this biography's genesis. For example, details about Maitrīpā—the visions Mar-pa has at his place, his experiences, etc.—are clearly derived from the songs, but they are not given here.

Nāropā's central role explains why the plot is relatively uncluttered. There are only two journeys to India, and no secondary adventures. 'Brog-mi's training, for example, is not mentioned in most of the KSTC versions.²²⁸ This silence is unique and underlines the antiquity of the text, which is not an amalgam of diverse elements. What is quite surprising for a text from the Aural Transmission is that Mi-la-ras-pa is mentioned only once, by allusion.²²⁹ Then again, most biographies do not mention him

Śāntibhadra. For him, the first is one of Tilopā's masters and the second figures among Nāropā's disciples. Mar-pa would have met both, and it would have been Kukuripa that he saw on the banks of the poisoned lake after Nāropā's prophecy, and Śāntibhadra who counts among his five great masters. In many biographies, only Śāntibhadra is mentioned, and in some—KSTC, "U-rgyan-pa" and Gtsang-smyon—both names are given; Kukuripa is mentioned in the first part of the text; Śāntibhadra in the second (Nāropā's quest). The KSTC considers them as one, interchanging the names seamlessly. Kukuripa appears in the list of the 84 *mahāsiddhas* but is described as living near Kapilavastu and Lumbini, not in South India. Gtsang-smyon also alludes to this place, see Tsangnyön 1982, p. 25, when Mar-pa hides from Gnyos the identity of the person who introduced him to Mahāmāyā by sending him to Kapilavastu. Tshe-dbang-nor-bu situates Śāntibhadra's interaction with Mar-pa in Kapilavastu, but 'Gos Lhas-brtsas, who also studied with him, places it in Rajgir (*rgyal po'i khab*). Glangs-lha-gzigs Ras-pa (*Opening Eyes*, p. 63) says that Śāntibhadra is sometimes called Kukuripa because he is the most important holder of the *mahāsiddha* Kukuripa's lineage. They are referred to as Kukuripa Senior and Kukuripa Junior in the same way that Śabari is sometimes called "Saraha Junior" (*bla ma 'dis mjal bas ku ku ri pa dang/ zhi ba bzang po gcig tu byed pa nil ku ku ri ma [pa ?] che ba'i brgyud 'dzin gyi mchog yin pas/ dpal zhi ba bzang po la ku ku ri pa chung ba zhes pa stel dper nal shā ba ri pa la sa ra hā chung par grags pa bzhin nol*). For him, "Kukuripa" is another name for Śāntibhadra, who is the only one that Mar-pa meets, and should be understood as Kukuripa Junior. This is also the opinion of the 4th Mtshur-phu regent, who calls him "the one known as a second Kukuripa" (*ku ku ri pa gnyis par grags pa*) in his biography of Mar-pa (quoted in Palpung, pp. 189–190).

²²⁸ He is mentioned *passim* in the KSTC.sum.2, pp. 276–277, and in BCZP. In the latter case, this indicates the influence of other biographies on this 16th-century text.

²²⁹ KSTC-1, p. 194: the text says *jo mo dang mi gnyis kyis chang lbug re/ ja rtsam re skyel du phyin tsa nal* when the KSTC-2, 165 indicates: *jo mo dang mi la 2 kyis chang blug re dang ja tsam re skyel* [...]. The KSTC.sum.3, p. 530 says *jo mo dang mi la gnyis kyis chag blug re dang*... Mi-la is dropped from the KSTC.sum.1 (p. 102) but the passage also

much. Among Mar-pa's disciples, Mar-pa Mgo-yags²³⁰ and Rngog Chosrdor receive far more attention. This may be because Mi-la-ras-pa was the subject of an independent biography from an early time on.

A unique feature of this narrative is the importance given to the first return to Tibet, during which Mar-pa is shown under an unflattering light: Gnyos, who accompanied and helped him during the initial journey, is recognized and welcomed, but Mar-pa is ignored at first and has to leave home before he is honoured with offerings. He progressively attracts students, starting with Rngog Chosrdor, Mar-pa Mgo-legs, and finally gathers nineteen main disciples. He then goes back to India when Nāropā has "entered the practice." It is only when he returns to Tibet for the last time that he is finally recognized as a great master and settles in Lho-brag.

One noteworthy difference between both KSTC versions and their summaries is that on several occasions the longer text mentions parallel versions or uncertainty surrounding some events. This is the case with Mar-pa's loss of texts,²³¹ or Ākarasiddhi's visit to Tibet,²³² for example, where Marston notes that according to some, Ākarasiddhi spoke Tibetan, but not according to others. In all versions Ākarasiddhi is said to have taught Nag'tsho, Atiśa's translator, but for Marston it is unsure whether or not the Kashmiri siddha concluded the transmission before going back to India, citing Mar-pa's anxiety that his influence on the Guhyasamāja transmission may be shadowed. The text says that Ākarasiddhi is aware of these fears either because he received a prophecy or through his heightened perceptions. The fact that these differences are present in both the KSTC-1 and -2 versions shows that they are part of the original, which in turn indicates that Marston's main sources were the various oral accounts circulating in his time.

We find two types of remarks in Mar-pa's biographies in general: those found in old texts, which mention *passim* conflicting versions without a deep perception of themselves as editions of previous versions; and later critical remarks by authors such as the 2nd Dpa'bo or Kaḥ-thog Rig'dzin who call attention to disparities in the narrative while referring to more or less clearly

appears in "U-rgyan-pa" (in a slightly different context), p. 170: *jo mo dang mid la gnyis kyil ja rtsam re re dang chang slug u re re bskyal ru phyin tsa na.*

²³⁰ As was mentioned above (p. 48, n. 106), the name of this faithful disciple of Mar-pa alternates in all biographies, and this is particularly true in the KSTC and its summaries, with the following repartition: Mgo-legs in the KSTC-1 and KSTC.sum.3, Mgo-yags in KSTC-2 and KSTC.sum.1. Not mentioned in KSTC.sum.2.

²³¹ KSTC-1, p. 164, KSTC-2, p. 137.

²³² KSTC-1, pp. 161–162, KSTC-2, pp. 134–135.

identifiable sources. These authors no longer rely on oral narratives, but instead refer to texts. The remarks found in KSTC-1 and -2 sound like hearsay, and have been deleted from all summaries and later texts, such as those by “U-rgyan-pa” and Gtsang-smyon Heruka. It is probably not the case that the KSTC is borrowing from other known versions, as we would then expect to find mention of ’Brog-mi or Jñānagarbha, who are important in most other biographies. The fact that these remarks are present in both versions indicates that they belong to the original version, which is quite independent from any other version. This “purity” of the text is evident when the KSTC is compared with “U-rgyan-pa’s” version which, on the contrary, gives a great deal of importance to Mar-pa’s songs. To reconcile both versions, “U-rgyan-pa” adds many improbable details and travels, which make the smooth narrative of the KSTC that he borrows become quite chaotic.

Another feature that must be noted is that many verses are presented in the KSTCs, including Mar-pa’s gurus’ verses of prediction that he would meet Nāropā, his visions of Nāropā, his own declarations concerning his lineage, or his practice of entering another’s body. As we have seen, these verses are probably based on Rngog Mdo-sde’s depictions. A unique feature of the KSTC-1 and -2 is that these verses are systematically commented on (excepting the ones on the fame of Mar-pa’s lineage). These commentaries which are added after each verse give the impression that this text is actually a record of Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-’byung-gnas’s teaching on Mar-pa’s life. It may be the case that he was commenting on a pre-existing version of Mar-pa’s life descending from Ras-chung-pa, and that his remarks, together with the pre-existing narrative, was written down by one of his disciple at that time. As in Sgam-po-pa’s lifestory of Mar-pa, we would therefore be in the presence of a pseudepigrapha.

From this analysis, we may conclude that the biography found in the *Great Golden Rosary of the Bka’-brgyud* and in the *Wish-Fulfilling Gem of the Lineage* is the work of Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-’byung-gnas, one of the important lineage holders of the Ras-chung Snyan-brgyud in the second half of the 12th century. His main sources were oral accounts that he had received from his masters, as well as Rngog Mdo-sde’s biography, to which he orally added his own commentary. This was written down by disciples and from that point onwards circulated in writing among Aural Transmission practitioners and beyond, thus becoming a major foundation of Mar-pa’s biographical building. Even though this record appeared quite late in the tradition and was three generations in the making, it is quite likely that it existed orally in some form beforehand, and that the structure in qualities, at least, was already present, which would explain why most early texts present the corresponding titles.

Conclusion

These three biographies—four if we include the two early ones from the Rngog clan—constitute the major foundations of Mar-pa's biography. Even if they share certain aspects, they are generally quite different—apart, of course, from the fact that they are meant to represent the same person's life and therefore also have a good deal in common!

The most singular version is that by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa; it is the only one that begins with Jñānagarbha and it relates some highly original episodes in a very lively voice. In it, Mar-pa is vividly depicted as a tantric disciple and, later, guru with a strong character. It is probably contemporary with the second most important source of our knowledge of Mar-pa's life, Rngog Mdo-sde's biography. This version lacks a very distinct voice, perhaps because its most significant contributions are the verses in the second half which were taken up by most later versions. Its importance has therefore been shadowed by the influence it bore on the elaboration of the ensuing tradition of Mar-pa's life story. It is, however, quite generous in basic details, such as Mar-pa's year of death (a bird year) at eighty. The most influential, though not the earliest, version is the biographical tradition represented in the KSTC which can be linked to the Aural Transmission. It is replete with details about Mar-pa's life in Tibet. Its general progression and the emphasis on Nāropā has had a lasting effect on the tradition, where it occupied a central position until it was supplanted by Gtsang-smyon's composition in the early 16th century. Most aspects of later versions were established through these major foundations of Mar-pa's life story.

2.1.2. Minor foundations

A second set of foundations could be seen as minor since it did not leave such a lasting mark on later works. In this category are biographies by Sgam-po-pa, Bla-ma Zhang and an unknown author whose text belongs to a Mdo-chen Bka'-brgyud rosary. To these three minor foundations can be added Rngog-2, allegedly Rngog Chos-rdor's work, which was presented with the major foundations together with the other Rngog texts, but whose impact was limited and therefore is more of a minor foundation.

2.1.2.1. Biography attributed to Sgam-po-pa Bsod-nams-rin-chen (1079–1153)

Sgam-po-pa and his work

Sgam-po-pa figures among the founding fathers of the Bka'-brgyud lineage as we know it today, and is responsible for its implantation under a more

institutional guise.²³³ He met Mi-la-ras-pa towards the end of the latter's life, after having already developed his knowledge and meditation skills with many masters, most of whom were holders of Atiśa's lineage. He only stayed thirteen months "at Mi-la-ras-pa's feet," before furthering his training in the mountains of Central Tibet at his master's demand. Regardless of the brevity of their time together, Sgam-po-pa considered himself a holder of Mar-pa's lineage, as the biographies included in his *bka' 'bum* show (Tilo, Nāro, Mar-pa, Mi-la). No biographies of masters from Atiśa's lineage are found in his collected works.

Despite Sgam-po-pa's importance in the Bka'-brgyud lineage and the presumed antiquity of the biography of Mar-pa found in his *bka' 'bum*, I have classified it as a "minor foundation" as it has never been as influential as the three mentioned above. The text is found in the first volume of Sgam-po-pa Bsod-nams-rin-chen's complete work and is probably contemporary with the biographies by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and Rngog Mdo-sde, as none of the three contain any cross-references. But while Rngog and Ngam-rdzong's works are replete with details and were considered important sources by most later authors, Sgam-po-pa's version is quite straightforward and has largely been ignored, except by Bla-ma Zhang. One reason that might explain the inconsequence of this text is that Sgam-po-pa's complete works did not spread much until their first printed edition in 1520. Ulrich Kragh has shown in his study of the *Dwags po bka' 'bum* that the Dags-lha-sgam-po xylographic print did much to confirm Sgam-po-pa's influence on the Bka'-brgyud lineage.²³⁴ Naturally, this visibility was made possible by the

²³³ The term "Dwags-po Bka'-brgyud lineage" is used in reference to all Bka'-brgyud lineages before the division into twelve sub-schools (according to a traditional presentation) that originate with four disciples of Sgam-po-pa and eight disciples of one of the four, Phag-mo-gru-pa (1110–1170). This name therefore refers to the common core syllabus of the Bka'-brgyud lineage as it is known today, which is largely based on Sgam-po-pa's fusion of the two transmissions he had received: the Mahāmudrā of his master Mi-la-ras-pa, and the Bka'-gdams-pa teaching coming from Atiśa (see Trungram 2004, p. 183, for a detailed presentation of the *bka' phyag zung 'brel*). The phrase Dwags-po Bka'-brgyud is also used more specifically to refer to Sgam-po-pa's teachings as they were preserved at his seat of Dwags-lha-sgam-po by his nephew Sgom-tshul. When referring to the more tantric teachings of the Bka'-brgyud lineages originating with Mar-pa—those found in the *Bka' brgyud sngags mdzod* for example—the expression Mar-pa Bka'-brgyud is used. It then contrasts with "Shangs-pa bka'-brgyud," which is another "bka' brgyud" lineage ("command lineage," see Miller 2005, p. 369, for a short discussion of this term) unrelated to Mar-pa as it originates from the corpus of teachings that Khyung-po-rnal-'byor obtained from Niguma.

²³⁴ Kragh 2013. Kragh sums up his work (p. 365) as one that shows how "new textual technologies inspire and force interpretive communities to rethink the way a text is perceived and used," and how this "changes the nature of texts, how they are used, and how

large distribution that print enabled, but also because the text itself had become much more manageable than the one found in the manuscript. This was accomplished by three main means: the editors rearranged the contents of the *bka' 'bum* into forty independent texts; they arranged the texts in an implicit order reflecting a concret layout; and they edited the language, modernizing and standardizing as necessary.²³⁵

In addition to this redaction-critical perspective, Kragh adopts a source-critical approach which is also very useful as far as Mar-pa's life is concerned; I will therefore follow his lead and borrow that which is relevant to this study. First, Kragh distinguishes between two forms of authorial ascriptions: "oral attribution," which signifies that a given work is claimed to have been spoken by Sgam-po-pa but not to have been written by him; and "literal attribution," characterizing texts that may have been written by his own hand. According to Kragh, only three texts belong to the latter category and further study is needed in all three cases to fully verify their authorship.²³⁶

Mar-pa's life story belongs to the first category; it is said to be pseudo-epigrapha in that it takes the form of disciples' records of their master's teachings, written down by memory (*zin bris*). In the xylograph (and in all later editions), the *Hagiography of Lord Mar-pa and the Venerable Mi-la*²³⁷ forms one unit, and neither title nor colophon states that it is Sgam-po-pa's composition. The text, however, belongs to a longer work which begins with

they are understood." To this end, he takes the example of the spread of xylographic printing in the 15th and 16th centuries, and how this imposed editorial modifications in the *Collected Works* of Sgam-po-pa. Kragh is not the first to broach the topic. Trungram 2004, pp. 94–95, presents a concise survey of the various editions of the *gsung 'bum*. Quintman 2006/2014 and Roberts 2007 deal specifically with the question of Mar-pa's and Mi-la-ras-pa's biographies. All of them were preceded by the 16th-century 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud hierach Padma-dkar-po, who expresses in his *Gsan yig* (p. 311) his own doubts concerning the collection. Here is what he says, as translated in Kragh 2013, p. 394: "As for the *Manifold Sayings* of the lord Zla-'od-gzhon-nu, which are found in the print [made] at [Dags-la] Sgam-po, it seems that [the editor generally] strove to compile authentic sayings, but that he also forced together [some] fragmented texts dealing with the [yoga practices] of mixing and transference (*bsre 'pho*), and [even] allowed [some texts] to enter into this [collection] that definitely were written by other [authors]. Hence, there is a need to examine [its authenticity] elsewhere." (*rje zla 'od gzhon nu'i bka' 'bum sgam por par du bzhuḡs la'ang gsung gtsang ma sgrig ma 'ishal pa dang' bsre 'pho la sogs pa'i gzhung thor bu 'ishangs pa dang' gzhan gyis byas nges pa 'dir bcug pa sogs snang bas logs su dpyad rgyur bzhaḡ*). See also Sernesi 2015, pp. 487–488.

²³⁵ See the development of these points in Kragh 2013, pp. 376–384.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

²³⁷ Sgam-po-pa, vol. 1, pp. 25–46 (W23439): *Rje mar pa dang rje btsun mi la'i rnam thar*. See also the presentations of this text in Roberts 2007, p. 66, Quintman 2014, p. 44, and Trungram 2004, p. 98; Sobisch 2002, pp. 179–183.

Tilopā's and Nāropā's biographies—and here the title does indicate Sgam-po-pa's authorship. Thus, by analyzing the xylographed version of the *Dwags po bka' 'bum*, scholars assumed that all biographies from Tilopā to Mi-la-ras-pa were composed using notes taken during Sgam-po-pa's oral teachings. Signs of this are the “he said” (*gsung*) scattered through both biographies; this verb, the honorific form of the verb “to say,” is used to show the speaker's respect for the person he is quoting—i.e. Sgam-po-pa... or so it seemed.

Kragh's study of the manuscript edition that probably served as a basis for the xylograph of Sgam-po-pa's works²³⁸ indicates that this oral attribution may be questioned. Since the manuscript has been reproduced in volumes 9–12 of the *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, it is possible to verify his assertions.²³⁹ In this version, Mar-pa's life story is not part of a neatly-delineated “hagiography of Lord Mar-pa and the Venerable Mi-la,” but belongs to a larger “rosary” of lives from Tilopā to Sgam-po-pa, without a specific title.²⁴⁰ The last biography, Sgam-po-pa's, was removed from the xylographic edition and replaced by a new one composed by the xylograph's publisher, Sgam-po Bsod-nams-lhun-grub. In the manuscript, however, Sgam-po-pa's life story ends with a colophon that states that “the hagiographies of the lords, uncle and nephew, were composed by Rgyal-ba Khyung-tshang-pa.”²⁴¹

According to Kragh, this indicates that it is incorrect to assume Sgam-po-pa's authorship of the preceding biographies, and that they were actually composed by Khyung-tshang-pa Ye-shes-bla-ma (1115–1176), a Bka'-gdams-pa master who later in life received Ras-chung-pa's Aural Transmission and became the next lineage holder.²⁴² While the evidence plainly points to such a conclusion, the fact remains that this text is a pseudo-epigrapha. Thus, even though Khyung-tshang-pa may be the one who composed the biographies, editing them as he saw fit, they may very well have

²³⁸ See Kragh 2013, pp. 370–376, for a description of the “Lha dbang dpal 'byor Manuscript” and the “Dags lha sgam po Xylograph”.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 372. He lists seven editorial changes between the manuscript and its reprint, but considers that apart from these (e.g. new line-drawings of the Bka'-brgyud masters, volume labels, etc.), the reproduction of the manuscript seems to be entirely reliable.

²⁴⁰ Sgam-po-pa (ms), vol. 9, pp. 2–29. Mar-pa's biography is on pp. 15–18. See Kragh 2013, p. 387, n. 74 for his presentation of this subject.

²⁴¹ Sgam-po-pa (ms), vol. 9, p. 29: *rje kbu dbon gyi rnam thar rgyal ba khyung tshang bas mdzad pa'o*.

²⁴² For Khyung-tshang-pa Ye-shes-bla-ma's life-story, see for example the one composed by Dan Martin on *Treasury of Lives*: <<http://www.treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Khyungtsangpa-Yeshe-Lama/8460>> accessed on 11/09/2013) or BA, pp. 441–443.

been taught by Sgam-po-pa. The difficulty, of course, is that Khyung-tshang-pa is not supposed to have been Sgam-po-pa's disciple, but Ras-chung-pa's. But since both Sgam-po-pa and Ras-chung-pa were Mi-la-ras-pa's disciples, it is quite possible that Khyung-tshang-pa, a Bka'-gdams-pa who, like Sgam-po-pa, held the Aural Transmission, may have met Sgam-po-pa, received his teaching, and been able to quote him. This is actually the impression we get when we read Sgam-po-pa's life story in the manuscript:²⁴³ Sgam-po-pa is repeatedly called "Rin-po-che," and the "he said" (*gsung*) are even more prevalent than in the previous biographies, often used when describing meditative experiences. Moreover, one of his group teachings (*tshogs chos*) is quoted.²⁴⁴ Therefore, despite the new evidence provided by Kragh, I still believe that this biography of Mar-pa actually reflects Sgam-po-pa's teaching, even if the real author is Khyung-tshang-pa, and I will consider Sgam-po-pa to be the intellectual author of Mar-pa's biography. However, the fact that he did not actually compose the biography may be one more reason why the text has not been very influential.

Mar-pa's biography

Compared with the other biographies, Mar-pa's is only half as long as Mi-la-ras-pa's (six pages vs. eleven). Between Tilopā and Nāropā the difference is even more pronounced—one page for Tilopā, preceded by three on tantras and their transmission in general, compared with seventeen for Nāropā. Sgam-po-pa's life story (in the manuscript) is approximately as long as Mar-pa's. Sgam-po-pa gives more details on Mi-la-ras-pa's life than on Mar-pa's; his tone is more inspired and the descriptions more vivid and exalted, even though both are more down-to-earth than later hagiographies. As both life stories end in more or less the same way, minor differences are noticeable. For example it is said that both Mar-pa and Mi-la-ras-pa remain constantly in their direct vision of suchness, but if the first never seems to meditate (even though he is never disturbed from his *samādhi*), the second is in constant meditation. Another difference is that Mi-la-ras-pa's songs are mentioned on three occasions, while Mar-pa's are ignored and none of the anecdotes seem to be based on known songs. This would indicate that Sgam-po-pa's source was not Mar-pa's songs, but the stories he heard from his master Mi-la-ras-pa and/or from Rngog Chos-rdor,²⁴⁵ along with their circles of

²⁴³ Sgam-po-pa (ms), vol. 9, pp. 26–29.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28: *bla ma de'i zhal nas ni/ tshogs chos gsung ba'i skabs 'gar ru/ [...]*.

²⁴⁵ It should be noted that in this text, the disciple who receives the most attention from the author is Rngog Chos-rdor, who even gets a biography of his own at the end of Mar-pa's. This could indicate that he gave Sgam-po-pa information on Mar-pa's life or that

disciples, although it is unlikely that Sgam-po-pa actually relied on Chosrdor's text, at least not the version that can be found in Rngog-2.

This reliance on the narratives of the followers of Mar-pa explains that the story mainly focuses on Tibet; Mar-pa's training in India, so central to Ngam-rdzong's and Mdo-sde's biographies as well as in the later tradition, is outlined here only in two and a half lines that underscore the merit that Mar-pa accumulated in order to meet masters such as Nāropā:²⁴⁶

As for his qualities, he stayed six years in the presence of Nāropā without ever being separated [from him]. [Sgam-po-pa] says that his merely meeting Nāropā suffices to prove [Mar-pa's] accumulation of merit.

Here Mar-pa only undertakes two journeys to India (three if we count the first foray into Nepal). During the second, Nāropā teaches him almost nothing because he has “entered the practice”²⁴⁷ and keeps silent. What stands out especially are the offerings received by Mar-pa and his acquisition of an important position within Tibetan society. His accumulation of wealth (“seventy black *'bris*, a yak-hair tent, a dog, and some porcelain”) attests to his status, even though Sgam-po-pa repeatedly underlines Mar-pa's interest in receiving offerings, which echoes *'Brog-mi's*²⁴⁸ and illustrates the importance of making offerings in order to receive Dharma:²⁴⁹

They offered a horse to master Mar-pa. The master jokingly said: “If your horse is a token of your respect, it is a lot, but if it is an offering [to receive my teaching], it is not much!”

These remarks point to a third reason why, despite its age, this text has not been very influential: its sketchy lay-out and lack of picturesque details do not leave a long-lasting impression on the reader. There are no dates of birth or death; descriptions are very basic and down-to-earth.

That said, it still deserves its status as a foundation since it somehow represents an independent source of knowledge of Mar-pa's life. Several later

at Sgam-po-pa's period and in his circle, he was considered extremely important. It should be remembered that Mi-la-ras-pa relied on Rngog as his guru.

²⁴⁶ Sgam-po-pa, p. 28: *yon tan gyi dbang du byas nal nā ro pa'i spyān sngar lo drug pa bzhugs pa la son pa cig kyang ma byung! bsod nams bsags pa'i rtags nā ro pa dang mjal gcig pus chog pa yin gsung!*

²⁴⁷ See the part on Nāropā below, pp. 213–215, for an explanation of this expression.

²⁴⁸ Sgam-po-pa, p. 26: *'brog mi lo ts̄tsha ba chos la dam par byung nas*, “*'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba appeared to be sparing with his teachings.*”

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

authors mention it, which shows that it was known, and Bla-ma Zhang bases his work on it to a large degree. Its very lack of ambition goes to show that the contents have not been overly meddled with, which may actually be an asset where bare facts are sought.

2.1.2.2. Biography composed by Bla-ma Zhang (1123–1193)

The author and his work

Bla-ma Zhang G.yu-brag-pa Brtson-'grus-grags-pa lived three generations after Mar-pa. His personal title comes from a retreat hermitage he founded in the late 1160s at G.yu-brag, the “turquoise cliff,”²⁵⁰ and he received his name after being fully ordained in 1148. His clan name, Zhang, is that of an old aristocratic family, the Sna-nam clan, whose ancestors supplied brides to members of the imperial hierarchy, thus becoming their “maternal uncles” (*zhang*).²⁵¹ Zhang Rin-po-che, as his contemporaries called him, was a very controversial figure of 12th century Tibet, as much for his doctrines²⁵² as for

²⁵⁰ It is curious that the name that stuck was G.yu-brag-pa, G.yu-brag being only one out of seven “practice places” (*sgrub gnas*) where Bla-ma-Zhang stayed in retreat. He had seven secret names that were linked to these. The main monasteries he founded in his native Tshal region were Yang-dgon Monastery in 1175 and Gung-thang in 1187 (See Sørensen & Hazod 2007, p. 83, n. 52, p. 86, n. 62 & p. 94). He was also called Gung-thang Bla-ma-Zhang.

²⁵¹ See Martin 2001, pp. 45–47. As Martin suggests, this noble lineage did not influence Zhang’s life overly, and he himself preferred the name Sna-nam when signing his work. See also Dotson 2009, p. 25 ff.

²⁵² See Jackson 1994 on the debate stirred by Sa-skya Paṇḍita on Sgam-po-pa’s and Zhang’s approach of Mahāmudrā, which he links with Hāshang Mohayen’s subitist approach, and Martin 2001 & 1992 for a translation of one of Bla-ma-Zhang’s major works, the *Path of ultimate profundity* (*Lam zab mthar thug*). Yamamoto 2012, p. 104, explains the differences between Zhang and the Bka'-brgyud in general on the one hand, and the Sa-skya lineage on the other by introducing the idea of “style” He says:

Whoever may have been the disputing parties [...] it seems clear that at this time, when the future of Buddhism in Central Tibet was still very much up for grabs, two different camps were gradually being separated out, and two very different visions of the Buddhist path and the role therein of intellect, reasoning, and scholarship were being offered up for consideration, and in increasingly polarized terms. Lama Zhang represented [...] one pole of this opposition, the one that emphasizes direct experience and downplays intellect and reasoning.

That there are doctrinal issues at stake here seems to me undeniable. But the degree of mutual incomprehension between the competing parties [...] suggests to me that what is really at issue here goes much deeper than doctrine. Attempts have been made at analyzing the controversies on another level, but they have so far been bogged down by partisanship. [...] The real point [...] is that both sides have a lot of history on their side [...] and I think it would be more productive to look at the way

his political activity.²⁵³ He initiated the Tshal-pa Bka'-brgyud lineage, one of the four great lineages coming from Sgam-po-pa's disciples, which is now extinct. He was not a direct disciple of Sgam-po-pa, but one of his root lamas was Dwags-po Sgom-tshul, Sgam-po-pa's nephew and heir. It is generally considered that one of his early masters was Rngog Mdo-sde, Rngog Chos-rdor's son, but there are doubts that this is actually the case.²⁵⁴ He then studied with Mal yer-pa-ba, a disciple of a Mi-la-ras-pa's disciple Gling-kha-pa, and with 'Ol-kha-ba Grol-sgom-chos-g.yung, a disciple of Sgam-po-pa and 'Ba-ri Lo-tsā-ba.²⁵⁵ Hence Bla-ma Zhang was the recipient of Mar-pa's lineage, which came down to him through Mi-la-ras-pa and Sgam-po-pa's lineage, as well as from Rngog's. Zhang told the life-stories of his forefathers in the *Mdzad pa rnam thar gyi skor*, which contains ten biographies, one of which is Mar-pa's.²⁵⁶ To the four biographies composed by

these different approaches have waxed and waned depending on historical circumstances than to take sides. Looking at this as a conflict between different "styles of religious practice" (*chos lugs*) is one way of not taking sides.

²⁵³ See Yamamoto 2012, pp. 46–78, for a summary of Zhang's life based in large part on his auto-biography; see also Sørensen & Hazod 2007.

²⁵⁴ Although the *Deb ther sngon po* and *Lho rong chos 'byung* list Rngog Mdo-sde among Bla-ma Zhang's disciples, Zhang is never listed among Mdo-sde's students. More importantly, Zhang declares in the autobiographical list of his forty-four teachers that his first root-guru was Rngog Stod-lung-pa chen-po. Mdo-sde came from Gzhung, and no association with Stod-lung is known. Zhang's master may therefore be someone related to Rngog Lo-tsā-ba Blo-ldan-shes-rab and the Gsang-phu institute near Lha-sa.

²⁵⁵ See Yamamoto 2012, pp. 82–96, for a discussion of Zhang's lineage. Carl Yamamoto underscores the breadth of Zhang's learning: Zhang claims in the *Brgyud pa sna tshogs*, ZKB, vol. 1., pp. 293–307, that he received 15 major lines of transmission, and in the *Rtsa ba'i bla ma sna tshogs kyī 'thob byang*, ZKB, vol. 1, pp. 307–316, he lists 44 masters from whom he received a total of 141 teachings. In appendix 2, p. 347, Yamamoto lists the root lamas as follows: Dwags-po Sgom-tshul (1116–1169), Rgwa-lo Gzhon-nu-dpal, Mal Yer-pa-ba (1105–1170), 'Ol-kha-ba (1103–1199), Vairocana-vajra, Rngog Mdo-sde, and Gshen-pa. In appendix 3, pp. 349–355, he details the various masters as listed in the *Rtsa ba'i bla ma sna tshogs kyī 'thob byang*. According to the *Deb ther dmar po*, p. 121, Zhang had a karmic connection (*las 'brel*) with 44 masters, among whom six became his root lamas (the first three mentioned above were the most important). Sørensen & Hazod 2007, p. 85, n. 56, also offers a list of Zhang's six root lamas, as does Schaeffer 2000.

²⁵⁶ "Gro ba'i mgon po zhang g.yu brag pa'i gsung mdzad pa rnam thar gyi skor chos tshan bcu gsum" (ZKB) In: *Dpal ldan tshal pa bka' brgyud kyī bstan pa'i mnga' bdag zhang g.yu brag pa brtson 'grus grags pa'i gsung 'bum rin po che, bla ma zhang gi bka' 'bum*. Kathmandu: Sherab Gyaltsen (Gam-po-pa Library), 2004. vol. 1, pp. 113–366. "Rje btsun Mar-pa'i rnam thar," pp. 139–146. Within the thirteen parts that the title refers to, there are the ten mentioned biographies plus three other works on the lineages Zhang inherited; on what he received from each of his masters; as well as an autobiography.

Sgam-po-pa (from Tilopā to Mi-la-ras-pa), he added one on Sgam-po-pa and one on his nephew Sgom-tshul, and four on his other masters (Bla-ma bshen-pa, Rgwa-lo, Mal Yer-pa, and Bhe-ro-pa).²⁵⁷ Among his alleged six—or seven—root lamas, he omits two: 'Ol-kha-ba and, tellingly, Rngog Mdo-sde. The latter is not even mentioned at the end of Mar-pa's biography, which is where he appears in many other sources. This reinforces the idea that he may not have been counted among Zhang's main masters, even though Zhang may have been familiar with the Rngog transmission.

Mar-pa's biography

Even though Zhang's work was composed quite early, in the second half of the 12th century,²⁵⁸ it is only a "minor foundation" of Mar-pa's life tradition as some parts of the text are based on both Sgam-po-pa and Rngog Mdo-sde, and as it has not had much influence on the rest of the tradition. Roberts and Quintman remarked that for Mi-la-ras-pa's biography, Bla-ma Zhang "inserted brief passages [from Sgam-po-pa], omitted others and summarized and modulated."²⁵⁹ Here, however, even though Sgam-po-pa's influence can be inferred from similar episodes of entering another's body and the general progression of the text, the most likely sources are Mdo-sde's version and Mar-pa's songs. In fact, song extracts are referred to on several occasions and even quoted.

Mar-pa's Indian experiences are much more detailed in ZKB than in Sgam-po-pa's biography, which really focused on Tibet. As for the journey, it mainly revolves around the meeting with Nāropā and stresses the siddha's importance and realization, even more than Mar-pa's own actions. In this context, Rngog Mdo-sde's influence is quite obvious. Here is how Bla-ma Zhang describes Mar-pa's last journey to India and his relationship with Nāropā when the latter enters yogic practice:

Then, when [Mar-pa] reached Phullahari, he was told that the Glorious Nāropā had engaged in a beggar's practice: he had covered his body with bone ornaments and was holding a *ka-pāla* and a *khatvāṅga* staff. Dogs and men, good and bad, came

²⁵⁷ Ngam-shod gshen-pa (See Sørensen & Hazod 2007, p. 84, n. 55) figures among the teachers Zhang met in his youth. The other three are Zhang's meditation masters. The first is Rgwa Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal, a disciple of Tsa-mi Lo-tsā-ba and Sa-chen Kundga'-snying-po (See Sørensen & Hazod 2007, p. 78, n. 30); Mal Yer-pa is a student of Mi-la-ras-pa's disciple 'Bri-sgom-ras-pa (See Sørensen & Hazod 2007, p. 78, n. 33) and the third is the Indian *mahāsiddha* and alchemist Vairocana-vajra (see Schaeffer 2000).

²⁵⁸ Roberts 2007, p. 71, dates it between 1160 and 1193.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69; see also Quintman 2014, p. 63.

to meet him. He extended his skull-cup to all of them and begged. Some offered food, such as boiled rice, some gave flowers, some gave earth, some gave stones, and some poured dirt. A group of bandits threw a hooked knife. This and the rest, everything that was poured, melted to the brim as nectar as soon as it was poured and [Nāropā] drank it.²⁶⁰ Master Marpa looked for him in all the towns and charnel grounds, and met him in such a ground. He cast a handful of gold at his face and poured another in the skull-cup; this melted and [Nāropā] drank it. Twice he invited [Nāropā] to act as the *ganacakra* master.²⁶¹

When we compare this episode with those found in Rngog Mdo-sde's text and its summary (Rngog-1), it appears that even though they are clearly related, the wording is not identical. We may therefore conclude that Zhang did not rely on a written version of Rngog's text, but on oral stories. The reliance on an oral version of Mdo-sde's *rnam thar* can also be deduced from an analysis of the description both texts make of Mar-pa's passing, in similar circumstances but with differing details. Here is how Zhang expresses it:²⁶²

When leaving his body, [Mar-pa] gathered his disciples and said: "If meditating, anyone can become enlightened. But awakening without meditation, that is enlightenment!" With these words, a drop of blood [appeared] on the aperture of Brahma on top of his head and, filled with light, he passed.

The text is noteworthy in that its author is willing to supply details which may seem shocking, even though they would not be so in a tantric context (faeces as a consecration substance for instance). We see this also in the con-

²⁶⁰ This passage can be compared to MKNT, p. 172 (see below, p. 279, for the translation) and to Rngog-1, itself a summary of MKNT, in MPSB, vol. 1, p. 4: "He was begging for alms from everyone. When he asked a group of bandits for alms, they extracted four sharp razors from their girdle and threw them in the skull-cup. In the begging bowl, [the blades] melted completely as if butter had been thrown. It is said that he then gulped it down and left." (*thams cad kun la slong slong gsung ba yin tel jag pa tshan gcig la slong slong gsung bas chu gri rnon po bzhi rked nas bton nas thod par bcugs tsa nal slong tshan nang du mar bcugs pa bzhin du ltems kyis zhu nas hub byas nas bzhud skad!*) To compare with Zhang, p. 141: *jag pa tshan gcig gis gri gug bcug/ de la sogs te ci dang ci blug pa thams cad blug ma thag tu bdud rtsir ltem ltem bzhu yin gsol zer nas!*

²⁶¹ ZKB, pp. 141–142.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 146; to be compared with MKNT, p. 187 (see below, p. 293). It must be noted that the description of Mar-pa's death does not appear in Rngog-1 but is present in Rngog-2, although it is quite different from Zhang's version.

text of Mi-la-ras-pa's life story²⁶³ where Mi-la-ras-pa is described exhibiting his penis to his aunt and cousin. These accounts were probably circulating orally but were not included by Mdo-sde or Sgam-po-pa in writing; they were also excluded from later narratives. Since Bla-ma Zhang emulates the exalted practice of Indian siddhas, he therefore proposes aptly colorful accounts. Note the following passage about Mar-pa's quest for Nāropā; it is quite different from other versions and clearly highlights the visionary character of their meetings:²⁶⁴

Then, wishing to invite the Glorious Nāropā to the consecration ceremony (*rab gnas*) of a temple, he looked for him but could not find him. Collecting a vase, offering substances, and so forth, he waited in prayer. In the dimming light, [Nāropā] did not come, but at dusk a naked man with matted hair appeared in the sky and landed in a large open space. He laid a piece of excrement in the skull and smeared some on each of the practice supports' mouths: all of the statues smiled. The guru then danced away and disappeared without a trace. He also flew in the sky riding a lion and so on: he had mastered various miracles. It is said that sometimes Lama Mar-pa would hear him, and sometimes he would see him directly.

Based on these observations, we can conclude that Zhang's biography of Mar-pa might have been classified as belonging to the second phase of Mar-pa's hagiographies, that of the "ground floor," as it builds on Rngog Mdo-sde's and Sgam-po-pa's versions, as well as on songs. It seemed, however, that it would be more fitting to consider it a foundation, albeit a minor one, as it must have been composed during the 12th century by a famous author. The fact that this text, like Sgam-po-pa's, has not had much influence on the ensuing tradition can be explained by its brevity, although it does contain interesting and unique details.

2.1.2.3. Golden rosaries of the 'Brug-pa lineage

The two collections

Two of Mar-pa's biographies have a great deal in common and are therefore presented together here. They are found in two collections of the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud lineage. The first one, called "Mar-pa's Hagiography," is found

²⁶³ Roberts 2007, p. 73, and Quintman 2014, p. 65.

²⁶⁴ ZKB, pp. 142–143.

in the *Biographies of the Bka'-brgyud Lineage, beginning with Vajradhara*.²⁶⁵ The collection is a lengthy golden rosary of the little-known Mdo-chen bka'-brgyud lineage, a sub-branch of the 'Brug-pa lineage started by Ma-bdun-pa Mdo-bo che-ba (12–13th century).²⁶⁶ Mar-pa's biography is not very long, but it is quite original and probably belongs to the foundational phase of Mar-pa's biographical tradition. It is part of a two-volume manuscript in *dbu med* that was filmed by the NGMPP in [b]Tsum in 1994 and was later digitalized by the TBRC.²⁶⁷ As its title indicates, it begins with biographies of Vajradhara and of Tilopā's Indian masters of the four directions, and continues with biographies of the general Bka'-brgyud and then specifically 'Brug-pa Bka'-brgyud masters. The last hagiography is that of Lhun-grub-bkra-shis of the Gur clan (15th century?).²⁶⁸

Mar-pa's biography is closely related to, and is probably one of the sources of, the "Immaculate Hagiography of the Supreme Being Mar-pa Lotsā-ba Meaningful to Behold," which figures in the *Golden Rosary of the Rwa-lung dkar-brgyud*²⁶⁹ and appears in two editions in the TBRC.²⁷⁰ The biographies span from Vajradhāra to Padma-dkar-po (1527–1592) and constitute a golden rosary of the Bar-'brug lineage. The work takes its name

²⁶⁵ "Mar pa'i rnam thar." In: *Bka brgyud kyi rnam thar thog mar rdo rje 'chang gi rnam thar nas rim par bzhugs so*, pp. 43a–47b.

²⁶⁶ See Ehrhard 2008, pp. 13–28, for an introduction to Ma-bdun-pa and his lineage, with a general overview of the development of the 'Brug-pa lineage. The *Rosary of Rubies* translated in the book is a chronical of this lineage composed by Brag-dkar-rta-so Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug (1775–1837). The outline of the text where Mar-pa's hagiography appears is given on pp. 99–101.

²⁶⁷ The two volumes are, respectively, 365 and 332 folios. They were filmed by the NGMPP under reel-nos. L 481/4 and L 481/5 to L 482/1 and digitalized by the TBRC with the no. W21237. Thanks to Marta Sernesi for pointing out the correspondence of the NGMPP manuscript with the TBRC reference, as well as Professor Ehrhard's outline of the two volumes.

²⁶⁸ An account of the Gur clan's history and a family tree is given in Ehrhard 2008, pp. 28–32. Ehrhard does not give any dates for the Gur clan members until the 17th century.

²⁶⁹ "Skye mchog Mar-pa lo tsa'i rnam thar dri med mthong ba don ldan." In: *Rwa-lung Rosary*, vol. 1, pp. 138–165.

²⁷⁰ The first, W19222, is a four-volume xylograph printed in Bhutan in 1771–1772 and again in 1799–1803 after it was destroyed by fire. The 1799–1803 Spungs-thang xylographic edition of Mar-pa's life was carved by a certain 'Phrin-las-spun-'tsho (*Rwa-lung Rosary*, p. 165). The second edition (W23861) is a three-volume manuscript set preserved at Rta-mgo Monastery in Bhutan. Both versions are identical, except that the xylographic edition includes the name of each biography's carver, and the manuscript adds one *rnam thar*, that of Mi-pham Chos-kyi-rgyal-po (1543–1604), 16th throneholder of Rwa-lung Monastery.

from Rwa-lung, a monastery south-west of Lha-sa founded by Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras (1161–1211); it was the 'Brug-pa lineage's main seat until a schism arose over a dispute on the identity of Padma-dkar-po's reincarnate. This collection is designed as a rosary of the lives of the Rwa-lung abbots. It was compiled after Padma-dkar-po's demise, and the manuscript edition was supplemented with the life of the 16th Rwa-lung throne-holder, Mi-pham Chos-kyi-rgyal-po.

If the last biography in a collection is indicative of its date of compilation, it seems plausible that the *Mdo-chen Rosary* as a whole was assembled in the 15th century and the *Rwa-lung Rosary* at the beginning of the 17th. Despite these relatively recent dates it is likely that Mar-pa's biography is much older.

According to Peter Alan Roberts, who studied Ras-chung-pa's biography,²⁷¹ the *Rwa-lung Rosary* is based on the *Mdo-chen* one. Andrew Quintman, who worked on Mi-la-ras-pa's life, also found that they do have much in common.²⁷² In the case of Mar-pa's story, the influence of the *Mdo-chen Rosary* on the *Rwa-lung* one is equally obvious, as long tracts of texts have been copied with minimal editing. Therefore, this seems to be an example of several biographies of one rosary being copied into a later rosary, which would in turn imply that parts of the later compilation are the work of a single author. A likely candidate for the authorship of the *Rwa-lung Rosary's* first part is Sangs-rgyas-'bum 'Bras-mo Jo-btsun, who signed two biographies of the collection: Nāropā and Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras. In the colophon of the latter's hagiography, Sangs-rgyas-'bum states:²⁷³

This rosary of well-developed immaculate hagiographies of the space-like glorious guru[s?] was compiled in the enclosure of glaciers of Stag-ri by spiritual friend Sangs-rgyas-'bum 'Bras-mo Jo-btsun, by arranging five hagiographies into one.

²⁷¹ Roberts 2007, pp. 18 and 55.

²⁷² Private conversation (09/2013) and Quintman 2014, n. 47, p. 244. It should be noted that Mi-la-ras-pa's biography in the *Mdo-chen Rosary* (79 ff.) is much longer than the others in the volume, which average two to ten folios. In the *Rwa-lung Rosary*, however, Mi-la-ras-pa's life is roughly the same length as the other ones. According to Quintman, this text might be somewhat later than the one in the *Rwa-lung Rosary*. As far as Mar-pa is concerned, I have the opposite impression, but given the difference in length, both opinions might be valid and it is possible that Mi-la-ras-pa's biography in the *Mdo-chen Rosary* was expanded at a later date.

²⁷³ *Rwa-lung Rosary*, vol. 1, p. 452: *kye ma; dpal ldan bla ma nam mkha' lta bu yi/ rnam thar dri med legs rgyas 'phreng ba 'dil lstag ri gangs kyi ra ba rul ldege ba'i bshes gnyen sangs rgyas 'bum 'bras mo jo btsun gyis rnam thar lnga'i gung gcig tu bsgrigs nas bkod pa'ol*

In the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, there is a disciple of Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras by the name 'Bras-mo-ba.²⁷⁴ This may be the same person as the Sangs-rgyas-'bum who also authored Nāropā's biography. The above-quoted colophon speaks of a "rosary," and it is true that all biographies preceding Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras's are somewhat similar.²⁷⁵ This was noted by the publishers of the modern reprint, who state in the table of contents that the lives of Mi-la-ras-pa and Sgam-po-pa may also have been compiled by Sangs-rgyas-'bum.²⁷⁶ The main reason is that the same sentence can be found in all four texts: they state that the hagiography in question is a combination of five (or four) works into one. This sentence can also be found in Tilopā's life story, and Mar-pa's contains a phrase to the same effect. Thus, this would indicate that Sangs-rgyas-'bum—Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras's disciple—compiled the whole rosary, presumably in the early 13th century, based on four to five sources according to the biographies. Among these sources, foremost is the Mdo-chen Bka'-brgyud rosary, which would then have been compiled during the 12th century, and would therefore be a foundation of Mar-pa's biographical building.

Mar-pa's life story in the Mdo-chen Rosary

As it is difficult to reach a general conclusion about the authorship of the works of the *Mdo-chen Rosary* before Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras, let us focus on Mar-pa's biography. It is quite short (10 folios in *dbu med*) and simple, but presents noteworthy details. It stands out by what it omits rather than by what it states, and as with the other "foundations," this is an indication that the text was quite fresh and new, rather than being a synthesis of several previous texts.

²⁷⁴ *Lho rong*, p. 664: "Bras-mo-ba was named after his monastery in Nyang-stod. He acted widely for the benefit of beings." (*'bras mo ba zhes pa nil dgon pa'i ming yin tel nyang stod na dgon pa yod cingl'gro don yang rgya cher byung 'dug gol*); BA, p. 671. There is another Sangs-rgyas-'bum who was a throne-holder of Tshal-gung-thang Monastery (See Sørensen & Hazod 2007, vol. 1, pp. 100–101), but even though Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras met Bla-ma Zhang, it seems unlikely that this Sangs-rgyas-'bum, Zhang's disciple, is our author. He ruled between 1214 and 1231 and founded Sgom-sde Monastery in 1242. As he is roughly contemporary with 'Bras-mo-ba, the date of compilation of the rosary would not be modified even if he was the author.

²⁷⁵ Most of the biographies predating Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras's resemble each other, be it through colophons with similar wordings, source indications, look-alike auspicious wishes, or the recurring "two teachings" structure.

²⁷⁶ The author of the introduction to the *Rwa-lung Rosary*, Bhutan's 12th Rje mkhan-po Kun-dga'-rgya-mtsho (served 1769–1771), recognizes Sangs-rgyas-'bum's authorship only for Nāropā's biography. See *Rwa-lung Rosary*, vol. 1, p. 10.

The first omission is the relationship with Gnyos, who is not even mentioned. The second is Mar-pa's quest for Nāropā and the difficulties involved in meeting him during the last journey to India. Here it is only stated that after three years in Tibet, Mar-pa returned to India, where he received innumerable teachings and instructions from five siddhas, foremost among them Nāropā and Maitripā, as well as from thirteen yogins and paṇḍitas. While in India, he made offerings to Nāropā and presented him with a song about his realization during a *ganacakra*.²⁷⁷ It was only later, back in Tibet, when he was questioned by Mar-pa Mgo-yag about rumors that Nāropā had entered the practice that Mar-pa explained how he had searched for Nāropā. The quest is not described, but it is alluded to in a song that is only cited here but is quoted in the *Rwa-lung Rosary*. In this song, Mar-pa describes some of the difficulties of his last journey and the visions he had of Nāropā before encountering him.²⁷⁸

In some respects, this biography resembles that of Bla-ma Zhang, who does not mention Gnyos and states that Mar-pa collected gold in Stag-ri before going to India. Like in Zhang's work, songs are important and are used in a way that shows that the targeted audience knew them well. On the other hand, most episodes do not occur in India, but in Tibet, which may be an indication of the biography's source. Two Tibetans are mentioned, and the narrative about either one of them is more extensive than the stories about all the Indian gurus combined. These are the great Klog-skya from Dgyer-phu,²⁷⁹ and Mar-pa Mgo-yags. The latter is mentioned no less than four times, each time with details.²⁸⁰ Could this indicate that the biography originated with him or his lineage? It is hard to say, but as he is supposed to have told Mar-pa's life story,²⁸¹ it is possible that there existed a version related to him, and it makes sense that it would crop up in a 'Brug-pa Bka'-brgyud lineage rosary. What seems clear, in any case, is that the text must be quite early, and is most probably the origin of many recurring details, such

²⁷⁷ *Mdo-chen Rosary*, p. 45b. The song, quoted in the *Rwa-lung Rosary* and therefore recognizable, is generally sung during the first journey.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46b. The song, quoted in the *Rwa-lung Rosary*, pp. 150–153, corresponds to what has been translated in the *Life of Marpa*, pp. 137–140.

²⁷⁹ *Mdo-chen Rosary*, pp. 43b–44a and again pp. 44b–45a. It is to Klog-skya's son that Mar-pa offers the song about Saraha.

²⁸⁰ The four times are: p. 45a when Mar-pa first met him while collecting gold in Ngam-*ra*; p. 45b when Mgo-yags came to welcome Mar-pa in Nepal; p. 46a when Mar-pa taught at Mgo-yags's rich parents' institute, and p. 46b in Lho-brag when Mgo-yags questioned Mar pa about his relationship with Nāropā.

²⁸¹ See Gtsang-smyon Heruka's colophon, translated on pp. 139–140 below.

as the five and thirteen masters, and the four disciples who delighted Mar-pa.

Mar-pa's life story in the Rwa-lung Rosary

As we have seen, the *Rwa-lung Rosary* is much indebted to this early version of Mar-pa's biography. Apart from the beginning, the end, a few details, and the songs, the whole text has been imported without any major modifications.²⁸² As Sangs-rgyas-'bum declares towards the end of Mar-pa's life that he composed this hagiography by summarizing the essential content of four biographies,²⁸³ it is clear that one of these is the *Mdo-chen Rosary*. Strangely enough, however, the three others do not seem, comparatively, to have had much influence on the elaboration of the text. The two specificities of the *Mdo-chen Rosary*—Gnyos' absence and the minimal description of Nāropā's practice—remain, despite the insistence of most other sources on these two points.

The additional end suggests Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's influence. Similar episodes of entering another's body, deity visions, and stories (the ants climbing on Mar-pa's hand for example) are narrated. The progression of the first journey—five years without Nāropā followed by seven years by his side—is also reminiscent of that tradition, even though here too the source was probably the *Mdo-chen Rosary*.

Another influence may have been that of Mar-ston's narrative. There is, for instance, a bipartite structure, although quite different from that of the Aural Transmission. The two parts, entitled “teachings” rather than “qualities,” are repeated in certain other biographies by Sangs-rgyas-'bum, as follows:

- A. Displaying how to proceed on the path as if he had an autonomous support;²⁸⁴
 - a. Showing the greatness of his enduring hardships as a worthy vessel;
 - b. Showing the greatness of his qualities by having experiences;

²⁸² *Rwa-lung Rosary*, pp. 139–141, expands on *Mdo-chen Rosary*, p. 43a, while adding details from elsewhere. Then, *Mdo-chen Rosary*, pp. 43b–47a, is copied *texto* in *Rwa-lung Rosary*, pp. 142–153. The few additions are the three songs that amount to seven pages and one passage about gold collection in Tibet: *Rwa-lung Rosary*, p. 147, ll.4–6.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 164: *rnam thar bzhi'i nying khu bsdus pa*.

²⁸⁴ The titles in Tibetan are as follows: A: *rten rang rgyud pa ltar lam bgrod par bstan pa*, p. 139. a: *snod dang ldan tshul dka' ba spyad pa'i che ba bstan pa*, p. 139; b: *nyams su myong tshul yon tan gyi che ba bstan pa*, p. 153. B: *rang rgyud ma yin par sprul pa'i skur bstan pa*, p. 161.

B. Showing that he is not an autonomous [being] but a body of emanation.²⁸⁵

The *Rwa-lung Rosary* also mentions the same first teacher as the KSTC, Klugyad dkyil-'khor-byed-pa'i slob-dpon, as well as the passage about the fame of Mar-pa's lineage. Several distinctive features, such as the detailed account of Mar-pa's ancestors, offspring, and spouses, may point to the fourth source, or may be innovations. Mar-pa is said to have had two wives, Chenma Hor-dge-ma and Chung-ma Tsam-phyag-thung;²⁸⁶ the first bore two sons, one of whom was Dar-ma-mdo-sde, and the second had five. He also had a *mudrā*, 'Phur-bza' Gsal-skyid, offered to him by Ston-pa Rgyal-rgyal as thanks for having received some initiations.²⁸⁷ Lastly, the text states that Mar-pa died at the age of 80, on the 14th day of the first month.²⁸⁸

These two related rosaries represent a version of Mar-pa's life which remained quite unknown. Most aspects of the *Mdo-chen Rosary* became widespread, but it is expected that this was due to this text's influence on later biographies—especially on “U-rgyan-pa”—which, in turn, became very influential. The explanation is twofold. First, it is unclear how this text circulated when it was composed, and whether it was part of the present rosary from the outset; if it was, its influence would have been limited to the 'Brug-pa lineage, and later even to the Mdo-chen branch of this lineage. Second, it is distinguished less by what it states than by what it omits, and these omissions would have disappeared as soon as another source was used to fill in the blanks. The *Rwa-lung Rosary* was probably known and used in 'Brug-pa circles, but it did not spread much further because it was preceded by a few highly influential texts (Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, Mdo-sde, Mar-ston), and superseded quite rapidly by longer, more complete biographies.

²⁸⁵ There is an opposition in the titles between the terms *rang rgyud pa*, literally “autonomous,” i.e. an ordinary being who has his/her autonomous mind-stream and is actually travelling the path, and *sprul pa*, an “emanation,” i.e. a realized being who only manifests *as if* he or she were travelling the path. This opposition may prefigure the tension between the two in Gtsang-smyon's biography of Mi-la-ras-pa, where he insists that Mi-la-ras-pa is not a reincarnate but an ordinary being who reached the state of Vajradhara in that very lifetime. For more details on Mar-pa as an emanation, see below, pp. 195–200. The two terms are differentiated in Dalton 2011, p. 38, addressing the question of whether Rudra was an emanation of the Buddha or a fully autonomous being.

²⁸⁶ *Rwa-lung Rosary*, p. 154.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150. This information actually comes from the *Mdo-chen Rosary*, p. 46a. It can also be found in the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, p. 41, where the girl is called Khur-bza' gsal-skyid. Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po also mentions a Gsal-skyid among Mar-pa's consorts.

²⁸⁸ *Rwa-lung Rosary*, p. 163: *dpyid zla ra ba stag gi zla ba'i yar tshes bcu bzhi*. Note the repetition of the month but omission of the most important: the year.

2.2. *The ground floor: biographies of the 13th century*

Upon the foundations laid by these six 12th-century biographies, a ground floor of longer, more mature biographies was built, clearly displaying the influence of this earlier stratum. Although only three texts are presented in this section, an additional five biographies were most probably composed during the 13th century, especially the second half.²⁸⁹ These were presented in the previous part together with the foundation to which they are related for the sake of argument, but they chronologically belong to the period we are looking at here. As pointed out in the introduction,²⁹⁰ this sudden upsurge of biographies might be explained in part by the increasingly competitive situation in which the Bka'-brgyud school found itself. These texts, as the metaphor of the ground floor indicates, were in turn sources of inspiration for later authors. As such, the three presented below can be singled out: they are particularly original and quite lengthy, and they had a major influence on the next stage of biographies, the "walls."

2.2.1. Biography composed by Don-mo ri-pa (b. 1203) [circa 1245]

The compilation and its author

This biography is part of a golden rosary of the 'Bri-gung Bka'-brgyud lineage that was partially translated into English by Khenpo Könchog Gyaltsen and published in 1990 under the title *Great Kagyu Masters*.²⁹¹ The whole collection is called *Great Kagyü Biographies: a Treasury of Jewels that is the Source of All that is Desired*.²⁹² It was compiled by Rdo-rje-mdzes-'od in the middle of the 14th century. As Roberts has demonstrated,²⁹³ the first part, up to Ri-khrod-dbang-phyug's biography, may have been put into writing by Don-mo-ri-pa under Ri-khrod-dbang-phyug's dictation around 1245, as indicated by the colophon by Don-mo-ri-pa and a note inserted in Rdo-rje-mdzes-'od's text after he took up the compilation a century later:

[Ri-khrod-dbang-phyug] asked me to write as he told them the story and complete liberation of the Bka'-brgyud masters; I therefore have put into writing a fraction of these past masters' stories, without adding or removing anything, as the precious

²⁸⁹ The five are: Rngog-1 and probably Rngog-2, *Rwa-lung Rosary*, KSTC.sum.1 and KSTC.sum.3.

²⁹⁰ See p. 34.

²⁹¹ Konchok Gyaltsen 1990, pp. 197–121, for the translation of the section on Mar-pa.

²⁹² *Bka' brgyud kyi rnam thar chen mo rin po che'i gter mdzod dgos 'dod 'byung gnas*.

²⁹³ Roberts 2007, pp. 9–11.

master told them, for the benefit of those who see only what they have in front of them.—Up to this point, this is Bla-ma Don-mo-ri-pa's work.²⁹⁴

Hence, the actual composition of Mar-pa's biography can be attributed to Ri-khrod-dbang-phyug (1181–1252), a disciple of 'Bri-gung-skyob-pa 'Jig-rten-mgon-po (1143–1217) whose lineage spread to the west of Tibet. Marta Sernesi²⁹⁵ questions the attribution of all preceding biographies to that author insofar as we can not be certain that all biographies preceding the one by Ri-khrod-dbang-phyug were actually dictated by him. But given that the colophon uses the plural,²⁹⁶ this possibility should not be ruled out, especially as a certain linguistic continuity in the various biographies can be observed.²⁹⁷

Sources

The most obvious source of this biography is the one by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, which is used almost *verbatim* throughout, including many details that do not appear elsewhere. Since the general plot is the same, this differentiates these biographies from most others, in particular with regards to Mar-pa's meeting with Nāropā, which only happens after a first five-year journey to India. The graphic encounters of Mar-pa with Jñānagarbha and Śānti-bhadra, present in both texts, show a close filiation of Don-mo-ri-pa's *rnam thar* with Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's. Beyond this obvious relationship, however, the differences that may be observed can be primarily traced back to the MKNT's influence.

²⁹⁴ DRNT, p. 472: [...] *bka' brgyud kyī bla ma rnams kyī lo rgyus rnam thar ji ltar bshad pa bzhin du bris shig gsung nas! bla ma rin po che'i gsung las ji ltar byon pa las 'bri snon med par bla ma gong ma rnams kyī lo rgyus zur tsaṃ phyogs cig tshur rol mthong ba rnams kyī don du yi ge'i ris su bkod pa yin nol! l'di yan bla ma don mo ri pas mdzad!*

²⁹⁵ Sernesi 2010b, p. 419, n. 43.

²⁹⁶ DRNT, p. 472: *bka' brgyud kyī bla ma rnams kyī lo rgyus*, “story of the Bka'-brgyud masters.”

²⁹⁷ For example, most of the first biographies are divided into three or four parts, and most start by listing the previous master's disciples, etc. This gives the impression that the collection is a whole, compiled by a single author, although there were actually two: Don-mo-ri-pa and Rdo-rje-mdzes-'od a century later. In contrast, in “U-rgyan-pa's” golden rosary, Mar-pa's biography bears the bipartite structure in qualities, but Mi-laras-pa's does not, reinforcing the idea that they do not belong to a coherent string of biographies but were assembled at a later date. This point could be studied further by searching all of these *gsar phreng* for indications of whether they are a whole entity or have been pieced together artificially.

Many passages are identical with Rngog Mdo-sde's version, and some details discovered there have been repeated here. We find, among others, the names of Mar-pa's father and mother (Mar-ston Dbang-phyug-'od-zer and Rgya-mo-'od-de) and Mar-pa's time of death: at dawn on the 14th day of the horse (fifth) month of a bird year (*bya'i lo rta'i zla ba'i tshe bcu bzhi pa'i nyi ma ri rtse la shar ba*),²⁹⁸ at age 88, which would mean that Mar-pa lived from 1006 to 1093.²⁹⁹ Certain details also enrich Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's narrative and create an elaborate story. This is the case with the description of Mar-pa's last journey to India and his quest for Nāropā. Don-mo-ri-pa is the author who follows most faithfully Mdo-sde's descriptions of the various prophecies that Mar-pa receives and his visionary encounters with Nāropā. The verses quoted are almost identical; the two versions are even more closely related than are the MKNT and Rngog-1. Many of the digressions found in Mdo-sde's text³⁰⁰ have been left out, so that the text is quite fluid despite its distinct sources.

Besides the influence of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and Rngog Mdo-sde, the Aural Transmission's influence is also felt, as this text uses the structure in qualities introduced by Rngog and systematized by Mar-ston. Here the text is divided into three. A first part is added to the two customary qualities of the Aural Transmission in order to accommodate details found in Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's biography as well as to provide a general presentation of Mar-pa. Don-mo-ri-pa provides the following:

1. The quality of obtaining the prophecies (*lung bstan thob pa'i yon tan*), p. 137;³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ MKNT, vol. *ca*, p. 187, DRNT, p. 176.

²⁹⁹ According to the dates accepted by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba and Tshe-dbang-nor-bu. They might also be 994–1081 or 1118–1105. See below, p. 301.

³⁰⁰ Mar-pa's second trip to India according to the MKNT (p. 172) is quite puzzling: when Mar-pa returns to India, Nāropā is engaging in yogic practices in charnel grounds, so he entrusts Prajñāsiṃha with some items for Mar-pa's use. Nevertheless, Mar-pa meets Nāropā and receives many instructions from him. But in fact, the story of Mar-pa's quest for Nāropā actually takes place during the third voyage (p. 175 ff.), and presents all of the usual predictions of Mar-pa's future meetings with him.

³⁰¹ There are two prophecies/declarations: one as an emanation and one as an authentic disciple. There are three sub-prophecies within the first one; the third is the one of the *dākinī* met by Yon-tan-'bar as related by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa in the conclusion of his life of Mar-pa. The other two, by the Buddha and Padmasambhava, are unknown. The second part is made up of four quotations (two by Tilopā, one each by Riripa and Kasoripa, which appear in MKNT).

2. The quality of undergoing hardship, linked with his potential (*rigs dang 'brel pa'i dka' ba spyad pa'i yon tan*), p. 139;³⁰² and
3. The quality of his experience, linked with meditative absorption (*ting nge 'dzin 'brel ba'i nyams su myong ba'i yon tan*), p. 147;
 - 3.1. The decoding of symbols and being urged [to go back to India] (*brda' bkrol zhing bskul ma btab pa*), p. 147;
 - 3.2. Prophecies of meeting the guru (*bla ma dang mjal bar lung bstan pa*), p. 148;³⁰³
 - 3.3. Being uplifted by the [guru's] kindness (*brtse bas dbugs 'byung ba*), p. 154;³⁰⁴
 - 3.4. Being cared for with compassion according to [Tilopā's] proclamation (*bka' bzhin thugs rjes bzung ba*), p. 160;
 - 3.5. The prophecy of his liberation (*rang grol du lung bstan pa*), p. 160;
 - 3.6. Possessing the strength of meditation absorption (*ting nge 'dzin rtsal dang ldan pa*), p. 170:
 - 3.6.1. Great fame due to the strength of his lineage (*rgyud pa'i rtsal gyis snyan pa che ba*), p. 171;
 - 3.6.2. How he is introduced to Mahāmudrā through the power of the blessing (*byin rlabs kyi rtsal gyis phyag rgya chen po ngo sprod tshul*), p. 171;
 - 3.6.3. Mastery over subtle winds and mind thanks to the strength of his meditative absorption (*ting nge 'dzin gyi rtsal gyis rlung sems la mnga' brnyes pa*), p. 172:
 - 3.6.3.1. Being unobstructed as to appearance (*snang ba thog rdugs myed pa*), p. 172;
 - 3.6.3.2. Mastery over entering another's body (*grong 'jug la mnga' brnyes pa*), p. 172.

Finally, as regards the versified text, we could finally note that Mar-pa's songs and the people to whom he sang them are mentioned,³⁰⁵ as was the case in Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, but no song is quoted *in extenso*. On the other hand there are many verses in the second part, mainly attributed to

³⁰² This relates Mar-pa's first two journeys of five and seven years to India, up to his first return to Tibet together with Gnyos.

³⁰³ Mar-pa's quest of Nāropā with various masters and his solitary quest.

³⁰⁴ Meeting with Nāropā.

³⁰⁵ DRNT, p. 169: *de phyis mar pa mgo legs la bzhangs so*. "Later, he sang [his experience] to Mar-pa Mgo-legs," the experience being Mar-pa's meeting with Saraha, which became his most famous song. Many songs are also mentioned on p. 170: *de'i dus su dpal nā ro pa dang mjal lugs dang/ gdams ngag zhus lugs la stsogs pa mgur du bzhangs sol*

Nāropā or other masters of Mar-pa, which are derived from the MKNT. The only verses attributed to Mar-pa appear in the last part (3.6), when he is definitively back in Tibet; they are used to illustrate the strength of his meditative absorption, the power and blessing of his lineage, and his own realization. They are also found in the MKNT as well as in the texts it inspired: KSTC, “U-rgyan-pa,” Mkha’-spyod-dbang-po, Gtsang-smyon, etc.³⁰⁶

Thus, Don-mo-ri-pa draws on Ngam-rdzong ston-pa’s narrative and specific episodes while using the structure of the KSTC and adding whole passages from the MKNT. This compels him to modify some motifs of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa’s and makes the text much more substantial than both earlier versions. While Ngam-rdzong ston-pa’s version downplayed it, Rngog’s influence reestablished the importance of Nāropā in Mar-pa’s life story, especially regarding the third journey, thus creating a very complete and balanced version of Mar-pa’s life.

2.2.2. Biography composed by Rgyal-thang-pa Bde-chen-rdo-rje [circa 1258–1266]

The collection and its author

This biography of Mar-pa appears in a golden rosary of the ’Brug-pa Bka’-brgyud lineage composed by Rgyal-thang-pa Bde-chen-rdo-rje. The collection was published in 1973 by the Sungrab Nyamso Gyunphel Parkhang on the basis of a manuscript conserved in Hemis Monastery in Ladakh that both Roberts and Sernesi date to the end of the 14th century or beginning of the 15th.³⁰⁷ Gene Smith says in the preface that Rgyal-thang-pa was probably a disciple of Rgod-tshang-pa Mgon-po-rdo-rje (1189–1258)—who was one of the main disciples of the founder of the ’Brug Monastery, Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras (1161–1211)—as Rgod-tshang-pa’s biography is the last of the volume. This supposition is backed by the collection’s colophon which explains that the first copy belonged to Dbang-ston Bde-legs-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po and was written by Gdog Nor-bu-bzang-pa. This owner may have been Rgod-tshang-pa’s disciple Bde-legs-rgyal-mtshan (1225–1281) who founded the monastery of Ne-rings in 1259.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ See the correspondences between various versions of these verses in the footnotes of the translation of Mdo-sde’s life.

³⁰⁷ Roberts 2007, p. 16, Sernesi 2010b, p. 413. They correct Smith’s dating (in the preface to the volume, p. 4, of the PDF W23436) on the basis of the manuscript’s supplementary colophon (p. 619). This scribe identifies himself as Zur Legs-pa-rgyal-mtshan and states that he copied the text five generations after it was compiled.

³⁰⁸ See Sernesi 2010b, p. 413 for the translation of this colophon. She refers to BA, p. 751, and *Lho rong*, p. 751, for snippets of information on that master.

There exists another copy of the collection by Rgyal-thang-pa published in fragments in the volumes *phi*, *bi* and *mi* of the LGNT. The different biographies, ranging from Mar-pa's (*ca*) to Rgod-tshang-pa's (*da*) are inexplicably interspersed with other biographies unrelated to Rgyal-thang-pa's collection and not numbered correctly. The biography of Dbon-ras Dharma-seng-ge (1177–1237/38) composed by his disciple Dge-slong Rin-chen-sangs-rgyas, included in the Hemis manuscript, is not part of this collection and probably never was given that the numbering from Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras³⁰⁹ to Rgod-tshang-pa is continuous.³¹⁰ The different biographies are therefore part of one manuscript collection, with four texts dropped or lost at the beginning of the LGNT version (it begins with Mar-pa, numbered *ca*). This manuscript has a general colophon indicating that the volume belonged to a certain Lcags-zam Bla-rang-pa Gdan-pa Nyi-ma-bzang-po. This could be Thang-stong-rgyal-po's (1361?–1485) son. The two manuscripts are therefore almost contemporary, and were created more than a century after the text's composition by Rgyal-thang-pa.

Francis Tiso³¹¹ quotes a Tibetan informant who describes the graph of the Hemis manuscript as being of the *'bru yig* style, i.e. a condensed form of *dbu med* whose round letters look like grains. In the Hemis manuscript there are two miniature portraits at the beginning of each biography: the person described in the biography is to the left and one or two of the *mahāsiddhas* of the four lineages (*bka' babs bzhi*) to the right. The one exception to this rule is the biography of Ras-chung-pa, which, as seen in the section on the Aural Transmission, cannot be attributed to Rgyal-thang-pa. Here, Ras-chung is portrayed to the right and Ti-phu-pa to the left—further proof that this biography was not part of the original. When the scribe copied the manuscript, he probably copied the drawings as well, but the masters of the four lineages having already been illustrated, he must have switched sides and added Thi-phu-pa instead. The illustration to the right of the last biography represents Rgyal-thang-pa. In Mar-pa's biography, the two masters to the right are Su-ma-ti Kun-tu-bzang-mo (the *dākinī* Sukhadari) from the Eastern lineage, and Thang-lo-pa, from the Northern lineage.

Concerning the date of composition of the original collection, Roberts calculates that Rgyal-thang-pa could have composed the last biography of the volume, Rgod-tshang-pa's, shortly after the latter died in 1258. At the

³⁰⁹ LGNT, vol. *bi*, pp. 301–342, numbered *tha*.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. *mi*, pp. 1–58, numbered *da*; no author indicated in the modern table of contents, but Rgyal-thang-pa's signature figures in the colophon, p. 57.

³¹¹ Tiso 1989, p. 274, n. 2. He provides a translation of Mī-la-ras-pa's biography in Rgyal-thang-pa's rosary.

end of most colophons, we read that each biography was composed at the behest of a Slob-dpon 'Od-zer-mgon-po. Here is the colophon of Mar-pa's biography:

The complete liberation, wonderful and particularly elevated, of Lord Mar-pa from Lho-brag, which is said to bolster faith, has been perfectly compiled by Rgyal-thang-pa Bde-chen-rdo-rje at the request of Slob-dpon 'Od-zer-mgon-po, who possesses the wealth of study, contemplation and meditation of texts, reasoning and key-instructions. Lama, please heed me! I pray the powerful Mi-la-ras-pa to take me, the *ma-ni-ba*, as his disciple during all of my lives!³¹²

'Od-zer-mgon-po's identity is not known, but there is someone by that name who acted as Gsang-phu ne'u-thog Monastery's abbot for 35 years,³¹³ that is, according to Roberts calculation, until 1266; the allusion to study and reasoning may indeed refer to the study institute of Gsang-phu. Even though that identity and this calculation are uncertain, they could be used to place the possible date of composition of the collection between 1258 and 1266, i.e. fifteen to twenty years after Don-mo-ri-pa.

As for Rgyal-thang-pa Bde-chen-rdo-rje's identity, he belonged to the Rgyal-thang-pa clan.³¹⁴ In the colophon to Mar-pa's life story, he calls himself a *ma ni ba*, i.e. a wandering bard, and he addresses his prayers to Mi-la-ras-pa.³¹⁵ In some of the other colophons, he calls himself "someone practicing in the glaciers" (*ri khrod gnas 'dzin gangs sgom*). He may have been a monk of the 'Brug-pa tradition who wandered from one monastery to another and settled for a few months in Gsang-phu, where he composed his

³¹² GLNT, p. 187: *rje mar pa lho brag pa'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar zhing khyad par du 'phags pal dad pa'i sgo 'byed ces pal lung rigs man ngag thos bsam bsgom gsum gyi nor gyis phyug pal slob dpon 'od zer mgon po nas skul nas/ rgyal thang pa bde chen rdo rjes sbyar ba rdzogs soll //bla ma mkhyen noll //dbang phyug mi la res chen gis bdag ma ni ba tshe rabs thams cad du rjes su bzung du gsoll* The wording of LGNT, vol. *phi*, p. 168, is quite different, but the essential information is the same.

³¹³ See BA, p. 329, and Vitali 2012 (*Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i yid 'phrog*), p. 64. The name of the abbot is spelled Sgros 'Od-zer-mgon in the *chos 'byung* studied by Vitali. It specifies that he was abbot of Gsang-phu ne'u-thog Gling-smad.

³¹⁴ Ehrhard 2008, p. 104, n. 4 mentions two of his descendants, Rgyal-thang-pa chen-po Bsam-gtan-'od-zer and Rgyal-thang-pa Zil-gnon-rdo-rje.

³¹⁵ Stein 1959, p. 324, p. 402, n. 14, p. 505, indicates the *ma ni bas* are travelling entertainers who claim to be followers of Mi-la-ras-pa. The term is also more generally used for masters renowned for their practice of Avalokiteśvara. These remarks about Mi-la-ras-pa and Rgyal-thang-pa being a *ma ni ba* appear only in the colophon of the 1973 edition, not in the LGNT version.

rosary. This would explain his anonymity, the narrative quality of his work, and the diversity of his sources. Furthermore, the biography's division into mnemotechnic eulogy and explanatory verses lends itself quite easily to oral presentations by a traveling bard. The clearly hagiographic tone and the recurrence of edifying episodes where Rgyal-thang-pa justifies Mar-pa's behavior (his bad temper, his jealousy towards Ākarasiddhi) reinforce the idea of a teaching for common people, even though the style is clearly written. The oral speech markers of preceding versions have completely disappeared and the text is very clearly structured through grammatical cases.

Mar-pa's biography

Mar-pa's life story is divided into eighteen verses and their commentaries. The subjects of the verses can be summarized as follows:

- Verse 1: prophecies of Mar-pa by the Buddha, Tilopā, etc.
- Verse 2: past lives
- Verses 3–5: birth and youth
- Verses 6–10: first journey to India
- Verses 11–15: second journey to India and settling in Tibet
- Verse 16: third journey to India
- Verses 17–18: conclusion and death

In general, travels to India are less developed here than in previous biographies. Rgyal-thang-pa relies mainly on the progression found in the KSTC to present the greater part of the first journey to India and the last return to Tibet, thus adhering to the line of texts that place Nāropā at the heart of the story. Unlike the KSTC, however, three journeys are described in this biography, and many episodes are described after the second trip that generally take place during the last journey in other texts: the meeting with *yoginīs* that make fruits fall by gazing at them; the visits of the charnel ground of Ramadoli and of Rin-chen-tshul temple in Nepal, and so on. This is justified by the fact that the establishment of Mar-pa's family in Tibet is more central (the KSTC focused mainly on disciples), and that this settling takes place after the second return. Thus, all of the songs that Mar-pa usually sings when he returns from India after the last voyage have been shifted to the second one. Another innovation of the same ilk is Mar-pa's illness during the second journey, which is described as being a manifestation of obstacles that can only be overcome by the strength of his compassion for the beings of Tibet.

The settling in Tibet is rendered in a novel fashion. Here, Bdag-med-ma, Mar-pa's wife, is mentioned for the first time, even though the episode

where she appears was already present in the KSTC.³¹⁶ Rgyal-thang-pa specifies that she is called “Ma-1 Jo-mo-bzang-nge,”³¹⁷ which is an indication of the metaphoric signification of Bdag-med-ma's name as a reference to Nairātmyā, Hevajra's consort.³¹⁸ He also mentions Mar-pa's seven or eight sons³¹⁹ and describes Mdo-sde's birth in detail. He may have based some of his information on Rngog-2 – both texts mention a wife called Jo-mo Snyemo-bzang-nge, nine sons, and Se'u Shākya-rgyal's controversy on whether one of Mar-pa's newborn was a boy or a girl.³²⁰ He also adds many more details about Mar-pa's family setting. Rgyal-thang-pa relates Nāropā's prediction of Mdo-sde's death for the first time, specifying that he died falling off a horse. These descriptions are all used by Rgyal-thang-pa for educational purposes; in verse thirteen and its commentary (pp. 175–176), for example, he conveys how Mar-pa's activity is in fact the display of the creation and perfection phases of the Hevajra maṇḍala.

Rgyal-thang-pa includes some song extracts that he attributes to Mar-pa but these are not part of the later, more extensive *vitae* by Gtsang-smyon Heruka and Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba,³²¹ where most songs have been provided. These verses seem to have been created by Rgyal-thang-pa with a poetic aim. Other well-known songs (the one to Painḍapā at the Rin-chen-tshul temple; Saraha's dream) are mentioned without being cited. Also, several narratives not found in the KSTC are based on passages that Mar-pa gave in songs. All of this shows that even though Rgyal-thang-pa did not quote the songs, he considered them one of the main sources of his knowledge on Mar-pa. An-

³¹⁶ KSTC, p. 194. See quotation above, p. 81, n. 229, for details on that passage.

³¹⁷ GLNT, p. 173.

³¹⁸ The name of Bdag-med-ma is explained in the biography by the 4th Mtshur-phu regent (see Palpung, pp. 197–198), who writes that it was Nāropā who advised Mar-pa to take a *mudrā* to enhance his realization, and that Mar-pa named his wife Bdag-med-ma when he gave her the Hevajra empowerment. Later, he established relationships with eight women—Phyag-thung-ma, etc.—to correspond with the eight Gauris of Hevajra's maṇḍala.

³¹⁹ GLNT, p. 174: Rgyal-thang-pa lists seven sons but says there should be eight, quoting a prediction by Nāropā and a song by Mar-pa: “Some say he had eight children. They say that because Guru Nāropā predicted that ‘his eight sons would be like a rainbow,’ and because in one of his songs master Mar-pa himself says: ‘I have eight children and eight close [spiritual] sons!’ (*‘ga’ zhiḡ ni bryad ‘khrungs par dang ‘dod/ de yin par dang / bla ma nā ro pa’i gsung nas/ /bu bryad nam mkha’i ‘ja’ tshon ‘dral ces pas lung bstan dang / bla ma mar pa rang gyi mgur nas/ /bu bryad nye ba’i sras bryad yin/ ces pa yang gsung / des na sras bryad du nges par ‘dod pa ‘dug gol*).

³²⁰ See Rngog-2, p. 25, GLNT, p. 174.

³²¹ Cf. for example the song of determination (verse 6, p. 147), or the song where he describes his activity as belonging to the maṇḍala of Hevajra (verse 13, p. 176).

other source is Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's biography, from which several passages have been borrowed, such as the one in the orchard with the *yoginīs* who induce Mar-pa's vision of Nairātmyā, or when he enters the body of a *rāksasa* in Bodhgayā³²².

This biography therefore mainly follows the Aural Transmission's version found in the KSTC, even though a large part of the narrative—its form, its apologetic quality, and several new passages—is the work of Rgyal-thang-pa, who anticipated Gtsang-smyon as an artist bringing his personal touch to a tool used to educate disciples. Even though most episodes are found in other early biographies (Ngam-rdzong, Rngog-2, KSTC), they have been greatly expanded by the author. One point which is totally new in the context of Mar-pa's biography is Mi-la-ras-pa's crucial role in Mar-pa's last trip to India. Although it may have been based on a previous biography of Mi-la-ras-pa, it clearly demonstrates Rgyal-thang-pa's artistic creativity.

2.2.3. Biography attributed to “U-rgyan-pa”

The author

This important biography of Mar-pa was published by the Smarntsis shesrig spendzod in 1972 with an introduction by Gene Smith, in the *Rosary of Wish-Fulfilling Gems of the Bka'-brgyud* (*bka' brgyud yid bzhin nor bu yi phreng ba*). This collection reproduces a golden rosary composed of the life stories of early masters of the 'Bri-gung Bka'-brgyud lineage, the lives of three masters of the Smar-pa bka'-brgyud lineage, and those of Mar-pa and Mi-la-ras-pa attributed to Sgam-po-pa (see above). The first two units belong to the same manuscript edition (in *dbu can*), and the third is a xylograph; all three were preserved in Kangyur Rinpoche's library.

The 'Bri-gung rosary begins with Tilopā's biography and includes the life stories of Mar-pa and of 'Gar Chos-ldings-pa Gzhon-nu-rdo-rje (also called Shākya-dpal or 'Gar Dam-pa, 1180–1240). 'Gar Chos-ldings-pa was a disciple of 'Jig-rten-mgon-po and the founder of Chos-sdings Monastery.³²³ In the preface of the 1972 edition, the collection was mistakenly attributed to the *mahāsiddha* U-rgyan-pa Rin-chen-dpal (1230–1309), as the author of

³²² GLNT, pp. 170–171, is based on Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, pp. 97–99.

³²³ This monastery has several names. It is called Chos-sdings Rin-chen-spungs-pa or Dpal Rin-chen-spungs-pa in the two colophons. The *Deb ther sngon po* (BA, p. 603) calls it Rlung-shod-dar Chos-sdings; it also mentions another monastery that was founded by 'Gar Chos-sdings-pa, Phur-dgon Rin-chen-gling in Kong-po. This is referred to as Rin-chen-gling, in Phu-lung in Spo by van der Kuijp 1988, p. 6. See the short account on the life of 'Gar-dam-pa Chos-sdings-pa (or Mgar-dam-pa) in BA, pp. 602–603.

the last two biographies in the collection signs with the name “U-rgyan-pa”. Leonard van der Kuijp³²⁴ has pointed out that these are the biographies of two of the throne holders of the Chos-sdings Monastery, the first being 'Gar Chos-sdings-pa, the founder, and the second being one of his successors, Dar-ma-'bum (1222–1293).³²⁵ According to van der Kuijp, U-rgyan-pa was the nephew or grand-nephew of 'Gar Chos-ldings-pa, as well as his successor on the seat; the *Deb ther sngon po* states that he was his nephew.³²⁶ If one is to believe the colophons, the two biographies were composed by U-rgyan-pa in 1295 and 1304, respectively. He may as well have selected the previous biographies of the collection. 1304 is therefore a *terminus ante quem* for the date of composition of Mar-pa's biography.

As far as the author of the other biographies in the collection is concerned, two (those of Sgam-po-pa and 'Jig-rten-mgon-po) are signed by their respective students, the 'Ba'-rom Bka'-brgyud founder 'Ba'-rom-pa Dar-ma dbang-phyug (1129–1199/1200), and Spyan-snga Shes-rab-'byung-nas (1187–1241). The other ones (from Tilopā to Mi-la-ras-pa as well as Phag-mo-gru-pa) are anonymous. It is possible that U-rgyan-pa composed them, but this is problematic. First, the fact that there are biographies by other authors in the rosary bears witness to a composite collection; why would U-rgyan-pa have composed biographies until Mi-la-ras-pa but used someone else's texts for Sgam-po-pa and 'Jig-rten-mgon-po? Second, another edition of the same text shows that Mar-pa's biography can be used in other contexts, with no apparent tie to U-rgyan-pa. Charles Manson, whose research is devoted to Karma Pakshi, found in Dpal-spungs a manuscript in cursive script of a *gser phreng* called the *Golden Rosary of Jewels of Bka'-brgyud Hagiographies (Bka' brgyud rnam thar, rin chen gser gyi 'phreng ba bzugs pa'i dbu phyogs lags so)* compiled by Ye-shes-rgyal-mtshan, one of the 3rd Karma-pa Rang-byung-rdo-rje's (1284–1339) disciples.³²⁷ This compilation, which

³²⁴ van der Kuijp 1988, pp. 3–7.

³²⁵ The first colophon (“U-rgyan-pa,” p. 561) is translated in van der Kuijp 1988, p. 3: “[...] was composed by U-rgyan-pa, a monk of the highest [tantric] vehicle on the 15th day of the fourth [or: fifth] month (*dbar zla ra ba*) of the wood-female-sheep year [May 1295] in the monastery (*dgon pa*) of Chos-sdings-rin-chen-spungs-pa, the religious institution (*chos grwa*) of the illustrious Chos-sdings-pa.” The second colophon (“U-rgyan-pa,” pp. 633–634) is translated in van der Kuijp 1988, p. 4: “This hagiography of the lama who includes [in himself] all the Victorious ones was compiled by U-rgyan-pa on the twenty-fifth day of the fifth [or: sixth] month (*dbar zla 'bring po*) of the wood-male-dragon year [May/June 1304] in the monastery of Dpal Rin-chen-spungs.”

³²⁶ *Deb ther*, p. 709.

³²⁷ The name of this attendant of the 3rd Karma-pa is given in the *Rosary of Crystal Gems*, Diwakar, vol. 1, p. 325. The manuscript is now available from TBRC (W3CN674).

may be dated to the middle of the 14th century, pieces together biographies by various authors; that on Karma Pakshi (1204–1283) was composed by Rang-byung-rdo-rje.

Mar-pa's biography in this collection is the same as the one found in U-rgyan-pa's *gser phreng*, and in all likelihood is the one reproduced in the 2011 computerized edition of the MPSB.³²⁸ The first page of the manuscript edition³²⁹ is illuminated by colour drawings of Nāropā and Mar-pa. The script is not very condensed and reproduces a version very similar to the 1972 *dbu can* edition, songs included. The spelling is sometimes more correct (*dgos* for *rgos*, etc.), and some passages, which were added as notes in the 1972 edition, appear as main text. Some phrases are written in red with no apparent reason, as they often seem to be rather inconsequential. The main difference is that a date of death has been added, while there is none in the *dbu can* version: Mar-pa is said to have died on the 14th day of the fifth month of the bird year (*bya lo rta zla'i tshes bcu bzhi'i nyi ma shar*), at the age of 84. This detail is also present in the 2011 computerized edition. These elements would indicate that the *dbu med* version actually represents a later edition of the text, or at least a later evolution of it, and that the *dbu can* version in U-rgyan-pa's collection could be considered its source. The dates of compilation of both collection fit with this hypothesis.

According to a recent compilation of Mar-pa's biographies undertaken by Mkhhan-po Rgyal-mtshan-phun-tshogs of the Dpal-spungs-shes-rab-gling Monastery in Northern India, Ye-shes-rgyal-mtshan was the author of Mar-pa's biography.³³⁰ Even though this opinion is not substantiated, it seems likely that Rgyal-mtshan-phun-tshogs believes that the *dbu med* version is the source of the *dbu can* one, and that Ye-shes-rgyal-mtshan was not only a compiler, but also the author of several of the biographies preceding that of Karma Pakshi. This would mean that Mar-pa's biography could be dated to the turn of the 14th century, after the second Karma-pa's passing.

Be that as it may, the fact that there are at least two editions of the same text makes the attribution of Mar-pa's life to U-rgyan-pa on the ground of another biography's colophon in only one collection rather tenuous; the same can be said for the attribution to Ye-shes-rgyal-mtshan. However, in the absence of more concrete evidence, I will continue to call this biography

³²⁸ "Sbyangs pa can bla ma mar pa blo gros kyi rnam thar." In: *Lho brag mar pa lo tsā'i gsung 'bum*. [Beijing]: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2011. Vol. 1, pp. 28–93. There is no mention of the fact in the book, but when compared, both texts show the exact same differences from the 1972 edition.

³²⁹ Thanks to Charles Manson for providing photos and information on that manuscript, and informing me about its inclusion in the TBRC collection.

³³⁰ See e.g. Palpung, p. 175.

“U-rgyan-pa’s,” even though it is quite unlikely that he was the author. U-rgyan-pa and Ye-shes-rgyal-mtshan probably simply collected various biographies to which they added their own—about his uncle for the former, his root-guru for the latter—in order to confirm the validity of their lineage at the time of composition, the beginning of the 14th century. In all likelihood, Mar-pa’s biography was composed at the end of the 13th century; given the influence of several previous biographies, it could not have been much earlier. The reason why this particular biography was included in both rosaries is probably that it was the most complete at the time, as it combined several pre-existing versions with Mar-pa’s songs.

Mar-pa’s biography and its sources

This biography has 68 pages in *dbu can* and 89 in *dbu med*: approximately 20 more than Rgyal-thang-pa’s and Mar-ston’s (50 pages), 30 more than Don-mo-ri-pa’s (39 pages), and 60 more than Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and Rngog Mdo-sde (20 pages). Its length is explained mainly by the fact that many of Mar-pa’s songs are included *in extenso* in the biography. The bipartite division of the KSTC is repeated in this biography, albeit out of order and incomplete as far as the second quality is concerned. Although a seven-part division is announced, in fact only the first quality—on prophecies—is explicitly mentioned; some qualities are referred to without specific numbering, and others are ignored.³³¹ The two parts are:

1. The quality of undergoing hardships, linked with his potential, p. 106; and
2. The quality of experience, linked with meditative absorption, p. 126.³³²

In his study of Mi-la-ras-pa’s life, Roberts found that the biography from “U-rgyan-pa’s” rosary had much in common with Rgyal-thang-pa’s composition, and deduced that they had a common ancestor, which he identifies as a biography composed by Khyung-gtsang-pa, a secret disciple of Ras-chung-

³³¹ The same pattern applies to both versions. What might have been considered a copy error can therefore be ruled out. The text probably took this form from the outset. The parts which are indicated (without numbering) are the following (first pagination: *dbu can*; second: computerized): *brda bkrol zhing bskul gdab pa’i yon tan* (p. 126; p. 45); *lung bstan rang grol gi yon tan* (p. 139; p. 58); *byin brlab kyi rtsal gyis phyag rgya chen po ngo sprod pa’i yon tan* (p. 169; p. 87); *nyam[s] myong [gi] rtsal gyi[s] snang ba la thog rdug[s] med pa* (p. 170; p. 88); *ting nge ’dzin gyi rtsal gyis grong ’jug mdzad pa’i yon tan* (p. 171; p. 88).

³³² MPSB, p. 28 and p. 45, respectively, for the computerized edition.

pa.³³³ In Mar-pa's case, it is obvious that the common ancestor is the biography composed by Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas and conserved in the KSTC.³³⁴

Despite this clear influence, "U-rgyan-pa" does not rely on a unique source but rather combines several versions, which explains the somewhat confused narrative. He begins—until the meeting with Gnyos and the journey to Nepal—by using Mar-ston's version, only modifying some details which may have seemed unclear to him. Mar-ston, for example, says that Mar-pa's father was a subject of the Rnyi-ba clan's lord;³³⁵ "U-rgyan-pa" states that he was a Rnying-ma-ba adept! From Mar-pa's meeting with Nāropā (during the first voyage in the KSTC, but the second in "U-rgyan-pa") until his ensuing return to Tibet, the quest for Nāropā, and finally settling in Lho-brag, the two texts are very similar.

Fragments from other sources are inserted between these passages inspired by Mar-ston. The first notable addition appears between the first journey to Nepal and the meeting with Nāropā: this part reflects the *Mdo-chen Rosary's* influence and describes several return trips between Nepal and Tibet even before Mar-pa went to India. With this addition, "U-rgyan-pa" fills several gaps in the KSTC, notably the omission of 'Brog-mi, Lo-skya, and the song with Sarahā, which are presented in detail in his version.³³⁶ This, however, takes place at the cost of a laborious and unlikely progression. For example, Mar-pa is said to have traveled several times between Tibet, Nepal, and India, meeting Jñānagarbha and Maitrīpā (*me tri ba*) before joining Gnyos again in Nepal five years later. In the KSTC, the meetings and travels with Gnyos are coherent, but when combined with several additional trips, it all becomes highly improbable, as it is unlikely that Gnyos would have waited so long for Mar-pa in Nepal. In the *Mdo-chen Rosary*, the passage is more straightforward because Gnyos is not mentioned.

³³³ Roberts 2007, p. 18.

³³⁴ It must be remembered that what Roberts identifies as Rgyal-thang-pa's biography is actually the Aural Transmission's biography, found *verbatim* in the DCNGbio and added to Rgyal-thang-pa's rosary. See Sernesi 2010b, pp. 412–415, for details. Both Mar-pa's and Ras-chung-pa's biographies in "U-rgyan-pa's" golden rosary are therefore similarly indebted to the Aural Transmission.

³³⁵ KSTC, p. 150. Sørensen & Hazod 2007, p. 711, n. 5, indicate that this is one of the two powerful dynastic and post-dynastic clans from Lho-brag (the other being the Shudphu clan). See Dotson 2012, pp. 192–193, for some more details and bibliographic references. This was also the name of the clan of Sgam-po-pa's father.

³³⁶ Given the proximity between the Mdo-chen and Rwa-lung rosaries, it is unclear which of the two was the source. My guess is that it was the *Mdo-chen Rosary*, as some details in the *Rwa-lung Rosary* (the first stay at 'Brog-mi's residence and Mar-pa's *mūdras*) are absent from "U-rgyan-pa's" version.

Several other episodes also point to Rngog Mdo-sde's influence on this text, such as the first description of the Nālandā masters associated with the various doors.³³⁷ This influence may also account for "U-rgyan-pa's" dismissal of Mar-ston's hesitations concerning Gnyos' throwing Mar-pa's texts in water: "U-rgyan-pa" accuses him unequivocally.

Another specificity of this version is the prominent place devoted to songs. Almost half of the text is occupied by Mar-pa's songs, including all of the "eight great songs"³³⁸ (except the one on the prophetic dream by Mi-laras-pa, which appears only in later versions) and five others (also present in the versions by Gtsang-smyon and Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba). Many details from the songs are repeated in the main narrative, which also contributes to its motley aspect. The descriptions of Maitrīpā, who is the subject of many songs, and "U-rgyan-pa's" efforts to transform the two journeys described by Mar-ston into three—in his songs, Mar-pa indeed states that he went thrice to India—are cases in point. A plausible source would be a collection of songs which may have existed only orally at the time, and that was put into writing for the first time here. The inclusion of these songs and of narrative details appearing therein explain the length of the biography, its confused and synthetic character, and the key role it played within the tradition.

Thus this biography, the longest written in the early 14th century, can be traced back to four main sources: Mar-pa's songs, the Aural Transmission version of the KSTC, the *Mdo-chen Rosary* and Mdo-sde's work. Mar-ston's account provides the text's main organisational structure, and the songs explain its length. Its influence on the later tradition comes from the fact that it is a blend of several sources and therefore a comprehensive version that has been reproduced in several different media and appears in distinct golden rosaries. In much the same way than the KSTC's authority was lost when Gtsang-smyon Heruka proposed his own grand, synthetic version—which is in large part derived from both the KSTC and "U-rgyan-pa" —"U-rgyan-pa's" also lost its prominence and was replaced as the biography of choice by the Madman's account.

Conclusion

The three biographies described as the "ground floor" of Mar-pa's life histories—Don-mo-ri-pa, Rgyal-thang-pa, and "U-rgyan-pa"—as well as the *Rwa-lung Rosary* that belongs here but was presented together with the foundations,³³⁹ all share the same general form: they are longer texts which

³³⁷ "U-rgyan-pa," pp. 114–115, MKNT, p. 169.

³³⁸ See p. 178 for a study of Mar-pa's songs and the meaning of this expression.

³³⁹ Four other biographies were probably compiled during the 13th century: Rngog-1 and

build on the earlier stratum of biographies and present many cross-references. All have been influenced by Mar-pa's songs and are separated into parts, even if Rgyal-thang-pa's separations are verses rather than titles proper. They all appear in the context of larger collections which present whole lineages and allowed their authors to legitimize their transmissions at a time—the second half of the 13th century—when they were in an increasingly competitive environment. These biographies constitute a floor in the sense that they in turn influenced later authors who built two kinds of walls upon their more mature narrative structure: load-bearing walls in the form of lengthy or authoritative biographies, and dividing walls made up of shorter texts that summarize previous accounts or more general religious histories.

2.3. *The walls: biographies of the 14th and 15th centuries*

During the 12th and 13th centuries, most biographies were composed within the framework of hagiographies (*rnam thar*) and golden rosaries (*gser phreng*). The latter are serial collections of the former, i.e. textual units relating the edifying lives of saints belonging to the author's lineage. Their aim is to trace the pedigree of their author in order to attest to his authenticity. They are generally placed at the beginning of his complete works, thereby endorsing the rest of the collection. Another genre of literature, which appeared quite early³⁴⁰ but really flourished in the 14th and 15th centuries, is that of religious histories (*chos 'byung*).³⁴¹ These Buddhist chronicles have a more global perspective than hagiographies, and they generally trace the story of a particular lineage from the Buddha all the way down to the author. They are conceived as whole entities whose parts—the life-stories of various individuals—function organically. These narratives are generally

2, and KSTC.sum.1 and 3. These four, however, are summaries rather than elaborations, and did not supersede their sources. They may be “floors,” but not floors on which walls are built.

³⁴⁰ See van der Kuijp 1996, pp. 46–47.

³⁴¹ Several of the texts studied in this section do not strictly belong to the *chos 'byung* genre but are rather called *deb ther*. As van der Kuijp 1996, p. 44, and 2006, pp. 4–7, remarks, however, the name *deb ther* is a loanword of Persian or Greek origin which entered the Tibetan semantic field via Mongolia in the second half of the 13th century, and which means “book.” The *Red Book* (*Deb ther dmar po*) and *Blue Book* (*Deb ther sngon po*) are historical narratives whose epithet probably comes from the colour of the cloth that protected the original documents, as with Wittgenstein's *Blue* and *Brown Books*. *Deb ther* are therefore not an independent genre but can be subsumed under *chos 'byung*.

rather condensed; they outline the main events of an individual's life or sometimes offer only snippets of information about their subjects. They are meant to be more factual than longer narratives, and often comment more critically than *rnam thar* on the traditions they describe, thereby helping us judge the diachronic evolution of Mar-pa's life-writing. Five out of seven of the biographies called "walls" belong to this genre.

Just as some foundations were major and some were minor, some walls are more prominent than others in terms of length or visibility, and can thus be compared to load-bearing walls. This is the case for the hagiographies composed by Zhwa-dmar Mkha'spyod-dbang-po and Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje from the Rngog tradition, and the religious histories composed by Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po (*Opening Eyes*), Rta-tshag Tshe-dbang-rgyal (the *Lho rong chos 'byung*), and 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal (the *Deb ther sngon po*). The influence of this last author is not so much biographical as chronological: his rendering of Mar-pa's life did not spread further within the tradition, but the dates of birth and death that he suggested (1012–1097) were hugely successful.

2.3.1. Some short biographical passages

Bcom-ldan-ral-gri (1227–1305), the abbot of Snar-thang from 1262 to 1305, briefly mentions Mar-pa in his *Bstan pa rgyas par rgyan gyi nyi 'od*,³⁴² where he associates him with Gnyos. This text, which presents the sūtras and tantras translated into Tibetan and their translators, states that neither man seems to have produced a significant number of translations. Translations mentioned are the traditions on the Guhyasamāja by Jñānapāda (*ye shes zhabs*) and Nāgārjuna (*'phags bskor*), as well as Hevajra and key instructions.

Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290–1364) only writes a short paragraph on Mar-pa in his religious history composed in 1322,³⁴³ in which he repeats the traditional presentation of three journeys to India (probably derived from Mar-pa's songs). He names four main masters—Nāropā, Maitrīpā, Śāntibhadra and Pham-mthing-pa—from whom Mar-pa mainly received Guhyasamāja (Bu-ston himself received that transmission from a lineage tracing back to Mtshur-ston), Cakrasamvara, Hevajra, Mahāmāya, Catuspīṭha and many key instructions.

³⁴² Schaeffer & van der Kuijp 2009, pp. 233–234, for the mentioning of Mar-pa and Gnyos.

³⁴³ *Bu ston chos 'byung*, p. 203; Obermiller 1931–1932, p. 218. See Martin 1997, no. 72, pp. 50–51, for bibliographical references.

2.3.2. Biography in the *Deb ther dmar po* by 'Tshal-pa Kun-dga'-rdo-rje (1309–1364) [1346]

The text and its author

The *Red Book*³⁴⁴ is a chronicle narrating the story of various dynasties, both secular—for example the Indian, Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan kings and rulers—and religious. It begins with the description of Buddha Śākya-muni's life and continues with the various transmission lineages and Tibetan abbatial successions. The author is Tshal-pa Kun-dga'-rdo-rje (1309–1364),³⁴⁵ who held the position of abbot (*dpon sa*) in the Tshal Gung-thang Monastery founded by Bla-ma-zhang from 1323 to 1350. He then passed the title to his younger brother and became a monk under the name Dge-ba'i-blo-gros. He had a personal connection with the Yuan court and was invited there for his enthronement; he met regularly with the dignitaries of his time, such as Bu-ston and the 4th Karma-pa Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje (1340–1383). He compiled the *Tshal pa bka' gyur* and gathered the complete works of his famous predecessor, Bla-ma Zhang.

Mar-pa's life story

Kun-dga'-rdo-rje presents Mar-pa's life in a page and a half, mainly concentrating on Mar-pa's masters and disciples. Given the brevity of the text, there are quite a number of pragmatic details, such as the place and date of birth, the age of his passing away, and various classifications of gurus: the two unrivaled lords, the five siddhas, and the thirteen masters with whom he had religious links are all listed.³⁴⁶ The notion of Mar-pa's four main disciples as the four pillars—Mtshur-ston, Rngog, Mes-ston and Mi-la-ras-pa, in the east, south, west and north, respectively—appears here for the first time, announcing the song of prophecy about Mar-pa's religious lineage (found in Gtsang-smyon and the *Bka' bgyud mgur mtsho*). There is also the prediction (present in MKNT, KSTC, “U-rgyan-pa” and Rgyal-thang-pa) that Mar-pa's “familial lineage will disappear like a celestial flower, but his Dharma lineage will reach as far as a river flows.”³⁴⁷ His children and disciples are

³⁴⁴ *Deb ther dmar po*, pp. 73–75, for the Bka'-brgyud lineage and Mar-pa. See Martin 1997, no. 77, pp. 53–54.

³⁴⁵ See Sørensen & Hazod 2007, vol. 1, pp. 200–202, for Sørensen's translation of that master's life from the *Gung thang dkar chag*.

³⁴⁶ *Deb ther dmar po*, p. 74 : rje 'gran gyi do med rnam gnyis [...] grub thob zhal lnga [...] chos kyi 'brel pa'i bla ma bcu gsum.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74: rigs brgyud rnam mkha'i me tog yal kyang/ chos brgyud chu bo'i gzhung ltar ring!

enumerated, and Mar-pa Mdo-sde receives some attention. Contrary to all expectations, the account does not seem to be related in any way to Bla-ma Zhang's biography, and it is difficult to pinpoint any clear sources. Kundga'-rdo-rje actually seems to be quite innovative, re-arranging the data he found in previous accounts to fit the format of a larger religious history with a particular focus on the clans and lineages of Tibet.

2.3.3. Biography composed by Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po (1350–1405)

The text and its editions

Mar-pa's biography composed by the second Zhwa-dmar, Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po Dri-med-dpal-ye-shes, is called the *Key of the Secret Treasury: Hagiography of the Sovereign Dharma Lord Mar-pa the Translator*.³⁴⁸ It is missing from his complete works printed in Gangtok in 1978 using a manuscript kept at Rumtek monastery.³⁴⁹ Two versions in cursive script of the biography can be found in other collections. The first appears in a golden rosary by Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po preserved at the Beijing Library; the text is stained or erased here and there and lacks some pages, and is therefore quite difficult to read. Another text by the same author appears at the beginning of the DCNGbio, published in Darjeeling in 1983 by the Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang from a Ladakhi manuscript in cursive script.³⁵⁰ This manuscript is actually made up of two collections: a rosary of the Aural Transmission ranging from Mi-la-ras-pa to 'Gro-mgon-gzi-brjid-pa (1290–1360), and Mar-pa's biography by Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po. The latter is written in a small, condensed *dbu med* script, except for three folios at the end which seems to have been penned by a different scribe. One folio (pp. 77–78) is missing, but the episode it contains—Mar-pa's song during his last voyage through Nepal—can easily be reconstructed on the basis of other biographies.

Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po was a disciple of the 4th Karma-pa Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje (1340–1383). He lived during a period when the Karma Bka'-brgyud lineage was very successful under the hegemony of the Phag-mo-gru-pa clan whose first ruler, Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan, held sway over the 'Khon clan

³⁴⁸ *Chos kyī rje mnga' bdag mar pa lo tszha'i rnam par thar pa gsang ba mdzod kyī lde mig.*

³⁴⁹ The English introduction to the collection declares that the manuscript comes from Ladakh. However, according to Mkhan-po Chos-grags-bstan-'phel (private interview, 28/09/2010), he and Stobs-dga' Rin-po-che discovered the five volumes of the manuscript in Lung-ra, Bhutan, in a meditation cave where the 2nd Zhwa-dmar had stayed.

³⁵⁰ A third version is now available in LGNT, vol. 24, pp. 197–326. According to Dan Martin's *Tibskrit* (2016 version), it might come from the Potala collection.

and the Sa-skya lineage.³⁵¹ Zhwa-dmar-pa's biography on Mar-pa is part of a two-volume golden rosary ending with his masters' life stories and autobiographical narratives dealing mainly with dreams, visions, and memories of past lives. According to 'Be-lo in the *Rosary of Crystal Gems*,³⁵² no extensive biography on Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po was composed by his disciples; the main sources for his biography were therefore the chronicles by 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba and Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba.³⁵³ He traveled widely, stopping in meditation places, and finally settled in Kong-po, where he founded Dga'-ldan-ma-mo Monastery in 1386.³⁵⁴ This is probably where he composed his biographies on Mar-pa, Mi-la-ras-pa and Tilopā; he indicates in the colophon that he worked in Gnod-mdzes-mkhar, "Sumbha's citadel,"³⁵⁵ on Dga'-ldan mountain (Tuṣitā). Each biography has an individual colophon,³⁵⁶ but none except Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje's³⁵⁷ mentions a date.

Sources

As far as the biography itself is concerned, it is not divided into qualities and it is therefore clear that it does not belong to the Aural Transmission collection to which it was added. The most influential version seems to be "U-rgyan-pa's," from which characteristic passages are borrowed almost *verbatim*.³⁵⁸ As it is more detailed and less condensed, Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po's version is easier to understand. Like "U-rgyan-pa," he presents all songs in their entirety. He also adds a few songs, mainly in the first part of the journey, when Mar-pa presents his realization to his masters Kukuripa, Maitrīpā

³⁵¹ For a presentation of that period, see Sernesi 2010a and Sperling 2004.

³⁵² Diwakar, vol. 1, pp. 509–510.

³⁵³ BA, pp. 540–545 (*Deb ther*, pp. 637–643), *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, pp. 980–990.

³⁵⁴ See BA, p. 543.

³⁵⁵ The name of an *asura* killed by the goddess Durga. The place is spelled Gnod-mdzismkhar in the Aural Transmission collection.

³⁵⁶ Most other biographies were composed by Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po "at the feet of the sovereign god Brahma" (*mnga' bdag lha gtsang po* or *gtsan po*).

³⁵⁷ KWNT, vol. 2, p. 319: *'brug gi lo*. This is probably 1394; Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje died in 1383 and Mar-pa's biography was composed after 1386, when Dga'-ldan-ma-mo was built. The Karma-pa's biography was composed in a Padmasambhava practice place (*slob dpon chen po padma sambha ba'i sgrub gnas lkog 'phreng gi ri khrod chen por yongs su grub pa'o*).

³⁵⁸ An example of direct borrowing is the name of the place where Mar-pa first met Gnyos. "U-rgyan-pa," p. 107, says it is *rtsang myang stod rtsis kyi lha khang*. Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po (KWNT, p. 4) states it is *nyangs stod rtsibs kyi lha khang*, while KSTC, p. 151, states it is in a guest-house (*mgron khang*) in Nyang-stod rtsibs.

and Nāropā. Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po also follows "U-rgyan-pa's" presentation, derived from the *Mdo-chen Rosary*, of the meeting with Nāropā finally taking place after five years in India, in contrast with the KSTC.

The unfolding of Mar-pa's early education and travels is closely linked with "U-rgyan-pa." After a turbulent childhood, Mar-pa decides to leave for India. On the way he meets Gnyos, with whom he travels to Nepal. After receiving transmissions from Nepalese gurus who upset Gnyos, he returns to Tibet to gather provisions and study with 'Brog-mi, who has just come back from India. He receives some teachings from 'Brog-mi, but the amount of offerings required upsets him, so he leaves to collect gold in Stag-ri then continues on through Dgyer-phu. There he meets Glog-skya then returns to Nepal, where he will stay three years before finally reaching India. The time he spends in India, as in "U-rgyan-pa," is divided into two parts: during the first, which lasts five years, he meets Jñānagarbha, Kusulipa, etc. and during the second he mainly studies under Nāropā, Kukuripa, and Maitripā over the course of seven years, then returns to Tibet. Many details about his relationship with his disciples and the offerings he receives there are supplied. Here too, the narrative is very much based on "U-rgyan-pa's" version. This is also the case for the second voyage that is spent searching for Nāropā and receiving predictions from his other gurus. The two texts recap the journeys to India in the same way:

Thus, in general, the Venerable traveled thrice to India. The first time he stayed five years, the second seven, and the last six years and seven months, to which five months for a farewell tour were added: he thus spent nineteen years there.³⁵⁹

The last part of the text, where Mar-pa settles in Tibet, is also inspired by "U-rgyan-pa," though it is far more detailed. Some episodes are presented

³⁵⁹ KWNT, p. 70: *de ltar rje btsun gyis spyir rgya gar du lan gsum byon pa las snga res lo lngal bar pa lo bdun/ gnas kyi phyi ma la lo drug dang zla ba bdun/ phyi phyag bskor ba la zla ba lnga ste lo bcu dgu bzhugs!* To be compared with "U-rgyan-pa," p. 143: *spyi rgya gar du lan gsum phyin pa lal dang po res lo lngal bar res lo bdun/ phyi ta res lo drug zla ba bdun/ phyi phyag bskul ba la zla ba lnga dang lo bcu dgu bsdas.* Other versions are slightly different: MKNT, p. 185: *phyir rgya gar du lo ril po bcu dgu ngo nyi shu tsam bzhugs nas!* KSTC, p. 191: *bla ma mar pas snga phyi gnyis la na ro pa can du lo bcu gnyis/ mai tri pa la sogs pa can du lo bdun tel lo cu dgu rgya gar du bzhugs lol* DRNT, p. 165: *spyir rje mar pas snga phyi gsum la rgya gar du rje nā ro pa can du lo bcu gnyis tsam dang/ rje mai tri pa can du lo ngo bdun tsam mol spyir lo nyi shu tsam bzhugs sol* GLNT, p. 184: *dka' thub dang dka' spyad kyi sgo nas lan gsum byon pa/ de yang lo nyi shu hril ba bcu dgu rgya gar gyi gnas su bzhugs nas.* This summary does not appear in either Sgam-po-pa or Bla-ma Zhang, except when Zhang mentions rumours about Mar-pa, p. 144: *rgya gar du lan gsum byon/ snga phyi sdoms pas lo bcu gnyis bzhugs.*

for the first time: this is the case, for example, with Mar-pa's nine wives and the circumstances of Mar-pa's son Mdo-sde's death, which was alluded to for the first time in Rgyal-thang-pa's hagiography. The date of Mar-pa's death is a blend of several versions. The cursive edition of "U-rgyan-pa" (the one reproduced in the computerized MPSB) indicates that Mar-pa died on the 14th day of the horse month of the bird year, as do Mdo-sde and Don-mo-ri-pa. Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po also accepts that year and month, but says it happened on the third day. "U-rgyan-pa" gives Mar-pa's age as 84, while Mdo-sde and Don-mo-ri-pa say that he was 88 and Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po and Rngog-2 say he was 80. Mar-pa's parents' names are those found in Mdo-sde and Don-mo-ri-pa. As for the list of Mar-pa's disciples, it is again a mix of "U-rgyan-pa" for the four heart-sons and Don-mo-ri-pa for the ten main disciples. It can be noted that Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po continually refers to Mar-pa as *rje btsun*, "Venerable One," as does Rgyal-thang-pa.

Thus, Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po mainly bases his narrative on "U-rgyan-pa" while demonstrating knowledge of other versions. This is also shown by the length of the biography, the longest at that time, and the many added details, which greatly expand the descriptions of Mar-pa's life in Tibet, particularly regarding his wives.

2.3.4. *Opening Eyes*, the religious history composed by Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po (1386–1434) [1418]

The text and its author

This *Religious History of the Bka'-brgyud*, [called] *One Thousand Rays Opening the Eyes*,³⁶⁰ *Opening Eyes* in short, was composed by Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po, the 12th abbot of Gdan-sa-mthil, the abbatial seat of the Phag-mo-gru-pa school. Two of his brothers were abbots before him, and another one was the Phag-gru ruler Mi-dbang Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1374–1432, r. 1385). As a member of the ruling Rlangs-lha-gzigs clan, he was a very important hierarch of the early 15th century.³⁶¹

This Phag-gru religious history has been known to exist for a long time,³⁶² and it has acquired an illustrious reputation as the source of the *Lho*

³⁶⁰ *Bka' brgyud rin po che'i chos 'byung mig 'byed 'od stong* in Sørensen 2007, pp. 59–103. Mar-pa: pp. 62–65.

³⁶¹ See Sernesi 2010a, pp. 127–132, for the genealogy and biography of the author. Also the text B in Sørensen 2007, pp. 105–143, which is his biography, and Sørensen's introduction to this text, pp. 21–29. Also BA, pp. 589–595, and *Lho rong*, pp. 365–403. See also Czaja 2013 for a history of the Rlangs clan and the Ruling House of Phag-mo-gru-pa.

³⁶² The text is mentioned in Martin 1997, no. 110, p. 66.

rong chos 'byung. It is also mentioned by Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu within the framework of Mar-pa's biographies.³⁶³ It was not available until 2004, when it was published in the first of two volumes of the complete works of its author (comprised of seven texts) in the DK-DZO.³⁶⁴ It was republished in 2007 alongside the biography of Rlang-lha-gzigs Ras-pa by Per K. Sørensen and the Lumbini International Research Institute, with an introduction by Sørensen, in a collection called *Rare Texts from Tibet: Seven Sources for the Ecclesiastic History of Medieval Tibet*.³⁶⁵

The text was composed at Rtses-thang (the monastery founded by Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan, the first ruler of the Phag-gru clan) in 1418 at the request of Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po's brother, the ruler Gags-pa-rgyal-mtshan. The first part of the text traces the history of the Phag-mo-gru-pa lineage, from Vajradhara until the author's predecessor at Gdan-sa-mthil Monastery, Spyan-snga-rin-po-che Bsod-nams-bzang-po (1380–1416). It is followed by a genealogy (*gdung rabs*) of the Rlangs-lha-gzigs clan, the family linked with this monastery, and a brief summary of the different Bka'-brgyud lineages. It intends to be "a genealogy of the family which [can] reflect and sustain the status of the ruling clan of Central Tibet."³⁶⁶

Mar-pa's biography

The *Opening Eyes* bears witness to the wealth of its author's sources by alluding to the salient, and often debatable, points about each of the masters described. In Nāropā's case, for example, his many names are listed, as are the origin of and polemics regarding the appellation "Nāropā," the various assertions as to his birthplace and caste, his many disciples, and so forth. It is very interesting to see what questions about Mar-pa were prevalent at the beginning of the 15th century.

However, Rlangs-lha-gzigs Ras-pa's sources, which seem to provide most of his information, remain largely mysterious, as he tends to summarize them rather than follow or quote one in particular. It is likely that he knew of the most important texts, as well as of others presently unavailable. For

³⁶³ TWNB, vol. 3, p. 641. Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin refers to Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po by using his practitioner name, Rlang-lha-gzigs-ras-pa, thus pointing out that before becoming the abbot of Gdan-sa-mthil, he was recognized as a realized yogi, a *ras pa*.

³⁶⁴ DK-DZO, vol. *zhi*, pp. 1–180. See Sernesi 2010a, p. 126, table 2, for the contents of these two volumes with bibliographical references.

³⁶⁵ Sørensen 2007, texts A and B, with their respective introductions.

³⁶⁶ See Sernesi 2010a, pp. 141–142, for the various texts written with that same aim.

instance, he was the first to state that Mar-pa's mother was called Skal-ldan-skyid, which many subsequent authors repeated, and that Mar-pa was an emanation of Samantabhadra. Certain details that appeared in Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po's biography, such as Mar-pa's nine wives, have been replicated. The list of Mar-pa's disciples is inspired by the lists found in Donmo-ri-pa and Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po, and the latter may also have influenced the enumeration of the masters met in India. Yet Rlangs-lha-gzigs Ras-pa did not proceed by "copy and paste," but rather engaged in an exercise aimed at comparing and extracting the essence of data available to him.

The proposed dates of birth and death, namely 1024–1107 (*shing pho byi to me phag*),³⁶⁷ do not appear in any of the previous biographies, which all say he died in a bird year. In fact, no biography provides a date of birth, but it can be deduced using the age at which Mar-pa is said to have died. It is likely that Rlangs-lha-gzigs Ras-pa deduced his dates on the basis of information found outside of Mar-pa's biographical tradition.

We can also note the attention given to Mar-pa's disciple Mtshur-ston-dbang-nge (or 'Tshur-ston). Mtshur-ston's three main disciples—'Khon Gad-pa-ki-rti, Khams-pa Ro-mnyam-rdo-rje, and Physis-ston Bsod-rgyal³⁶⁸—inherited his Guhyasamāja transmission. This continued intact for three centuries, until it reached Tsong-kha-pa (1357–1419) and the lineage that followed him. Tsong-kha-pa, who died the year after this history was composed, was one of the Gdan-sa-mthil abbot's three root masters, and was referred to as the "second victorious who is freed from all rivals, the glorious Blo-bzang-grags-pa." This indicates the respect and support Mi-dbang Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan and his clan had for Tsong-kha-pa. In contrast with later rulers, who were less inclusive with their political and financial support, the Phag-mo-gru-pa regime, although belonging to a Bka'-brgyud circle, gave its support to a variety of groups, the reformist movement of Tsong-kha-pa in the first place.

2.3.5. Mar-pa's biography in two Rngog clan rosaries

The texts and their authors

Two long-awaited rosaries of the lives of the Rngog clan members, beginning with Mar-pa and presenting the history of that clan since the Tibetan Empire and up to the 15th century, were published in the *Lo rgyus rnam thar*

³⁶⁷ Tshe-dbang nor-bu repeats them while referring to this source: TWNB, vol. 3, p. 641: *bcu pa rlang lha gzigs ras pas [...] shing byi la 'khrungs brgyad cu rtsa bzhi me phag bar bzbugs*.

³⁶⁸ See BA, pp. 414–426, for a presentation of Mtshur-ston's disciples and his Guhyasamāja lineage.

phyogs bsgrigs in 2010, after having been buried in the Gnas-bcu-lha-khang of 'Bras-spungs for centuries.³⁶⁹ The two were critically edited by Marco Walther in his 2012 MA thesis,³⁷⁰ and were also released in a computerized form together with a wealth of material, mainly concerning rituals, originating with various members of that family and their disciples in that same year (even though the Dpal-btsegs edition is dated the previous year).³⁷¹ The two texts are almost identical, and it is obvious that one is a copy of the other. They are the main sources of information about the Rngog clan for both the *Lho rong chos 'byung* and the *Deb ther sngon po*, and thus offer crucial material for any study of these tantric masters from the Rngog clan of Gzhung who inherited Mar-pa's transmission.

The first text, the *Rosary of Precious Ornaments – Lives of the Successive Rngog pa Masters, Fathers and Sons*, was compiled by Dam-tshig-can-gyi-rdo-rje, referred to as Dpal-gyi-rdo-rje in the colophon of the second text, who is an enlargement of the first.³⁷² There is no Dpal-gyi-rdo-rje in the Rngog family, but someone with this name figures in a lineage of Dud-sol-ma.³⁷³ He was a disciple of Rin-chen-dpal, himself a disciple of Rin-chen-bzang-po (1243–1319), and a master of Bzang-po-dpal, himself a master of Rngog Byang-chub-dpal (1360–1446). Dpal-gyi-rdo-rje's master Rin-chen-dpal belongs to the Rgyal-tsha branch of the Rngog clan. His date of death is not provided, unlike those of his brothers, which indicates that he may have been still alive when Dpal-gyi-rdo-rje composed the *Rosary of Precious Ornaments*. Dpal-gyi-rdo-rje was also a disciple of Rngog Sangs-rgyas-seng-ge of the Gtsang-tsha branch (who may have died in 1345). He declares in the colophon that the text was compiled in a male iron-rat year, which may be 1300, 1360 or 1420.³⁷⁴ Given that the latest date of death provided is that of

³⁶⁹ LGNT, vol. 22, pp. 1–50. See the 'Bras spungs dgon du gzhugs su gsol ba'i dpe rnying dkar chag, entries no. 016990, p. 1508, for Bodhiśī's work, and no. 017030, p. 1511, for Punyaśrī's work.

³⁷⁰ Walther 2012 wrote an introduction about that clan's history and translated the second of the two rosaries into German. The results of his research have been published in Walther 2016. The Rngog clan is the subject of my own forthcoming dissertation.

³⁷¹ *Rngog slob brgyud dang bcas pa'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1, pp. 1–68.

³⁷² "Bla ma rngog pa yab sras rim par byon pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba." In: LGNT, vol. 22, pp. 1–24; *Rngog slob brgyud dang bcas pa'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1, pp. 1–34. The name Dpal-gyi-rdo-rje is given in LGNT, vol. 22, p. 50: *sngags 'chang dpal gyi rdo rjes bsgrigs pa las/ bcung zad phri msnan dang bcas pal rngog ston rim gnyis kyi rnal 'byor pa bho ti shris yi ger bkod pa'ol*

³⁷³ *Rdzong pa kun dga' rnam rgyal gyi gsan yig*, p. 421.

³⁷⁴ LGNT, vol. 22, p. 25: *mos pa'i dpal du 'gyur bsam nas/ ldam tshig can gyi rdo rjes sbyarl* [...] *lcags pho byi ba'i lo la sbyar ro*.

Chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan (who died in 1359), it cannot be 1300 and it is unlikely to be 1420 provided the gap between the death of the last masters mentioned and 1420. The most likely date of compilation is thus 1360, which fits with Dpal-gyi-rdo-rje's dates of activity.

The second text, the *Rosary of Jewels – Lives of the Rngog masters from Gzhung, Fathers and Sons, from Lord Mar-pa's lineage*, was written by Bodhiśri (Byang-chub-dpal)³⁷⁵ as a continuation of the previous text, whose ending verses are quoted. Bodhiśri is in all likelihood Spre'u-zhing abbot Byang-chub-dpal (1360–1446), since the last masters actually described, Don-grub-dpal and his cousin Sangs-rgyas-yon-tan, are his father and uncle. He may have authored or dictated this text quite late in his life as he also provides the name of his nephew and great-nephew who were Spre'u-zhing's abbots after him.³⁷⁶ This text may be the one referred to by Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu as the *Lo rgyus rin chen spungs pa* by Rngog Byang-chub-dpal, as the dates of birth and death of Mar-pa are the same (birth in a bird year, death in an ox year at 89). It is possible that the manuscripts of both texts were written down at the same time, as a second colophon of the *Rosary of Precious Ornaments* indicates that someone called Puṇyaśri (Bsod-nams-dpal) wrote the text while receiving teachings from Rngog Byang-chub-dpal (1360–1446) in a tiger year,³⁷⁷ possibly 1434, which may thus also be the year when the *Rosary of Jewels* was composed.

Mar-pa's biography

With regard to Mar-pa, the two texts are identical; the *Rosary of Jewels* presents some additional notes. A stand-alone biography of Mar-pa must have existed at the time, as the *Rosary of Jewels* concludes with the outset of Mar-pa's first journey to India³⁷⁸ and refers the reader for details to a certain hagiography for details. The hagiography's identity is not clearly specified, but it must be the *Rnam thar rim bzhi ma*. This text is mentioned by Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba and Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu. They

³⁷⁵ “Rje mar pa nas brgyud pa'i rngog gzhung pa yab sras kyi bla ma'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba.” In: LGNT, vol. 22, pp. 25–50. *Rngog slob brgyud dang bcas pa'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1, pp. 35–68.

³⁷⁶ BA, pp. 413–414: 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba says that Byang-chub-dpal's son or nephew Bkra-shis-dpal-pa was installed as abbot during the life of Byang-chub-dpal. He held the abacy for a long time and was succeeded by Byang-chub-dpal-grub, who was the abbot in 1476 when the *Deb ther sngon po* was compiled. The name of Byang-chub-dpal-grub is given in the *Rosary of Jewels*, p. 31.

³⁷⁷ LGNT, vol. 22, p. 25: *lcags pho byi ba'i lo la sbyar rol stag gi lo la rngog rin po che byang chub dpal la rngog lugs kyi chos skor rnam's bdag punya shris zhus pa'i dus su bris!*

³⁷⁸ LGNT, vol. 22, p. 27, l. 7: *zhib du rnam thar na gsal lo*.

only state that it was composed by “Rngog-pa.”³⁷⁹ Both rosaries and the *Lho rong chos 'byung* mention a *Rnam thar rim pa bzhi pa* among the texts composed by Rngog Rin-chen-bzang-po (1231–1307),³⁸⁰ and the 2nd Dpa'-bo quotes it when referring to Mar-pa's ancestor, Mar-pa Sha-ru-tse.³⁸¹ As this name does not appear anywhere else than in the two rosaries, it clearly indicates that Rin-chen-bzang-po's work is indeed the hagiography referred to in the *Rosary of Jewels*.

The two Rngog rosaries only relate Mar-pa's youth up to his first journey to India. They focus on Mar-pa's forefathers and family (wife and children) in far more detail than most other biographies, Mdo-sde's included, calling attention to the familial aspect of the Rngog transmission, and giving a good idea of how detailed the long hagiography must have been. Apart from the family context and other details, the text's general structure closely resembles that of the MKNT, tentatively attributed to Rngog Mdo-sde. This similarity is quite striking, for instance, when the *Rosary of Jewels* describes Mar-pa's arrival at Vikramaśīla University with its four paṇḍitas associated with the four gates.³⁸² This would seem to confirm that the MKNT did indeed originate with the Rngog clan.

These rosaries, despite being incomplete as far as Mar-pa is concerned, do offer the reader quite a lot of information about Mar-pa's biographical tradition. They inform us of the names of his ancestors, wives, and children, and refer to an important hagiography composed by Rngog Rin-chen-bzang-po in the late 13th century, which is bound to be a more elaborate rendering of Rngog Mdo-sde's version but which has not yet been found.

2.3.6. The *Lho rong chos 'byung*, religious history composed by Rtag-tshag Tshe-dbang-rgyal [1446 (rev. 1451)]

The text and its author

This Bka'-brgyud religious history was composed by Tshe-dbang-rgyal (1400?–1470?) of the Rtag-tshag clan, originating from Lho-rong county in south-east Tibet.³⁸³ This explains why the text's nickname was *Lho rong chos*

³⁷⁹ LGNT, vol. 24, p. 200, l. 2; TWNB, p. 640. Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin probably did not rely on the hagiography itself, but on Dpa'-bo's reference to it.

³⁸⁰ LGNT, vol. 22, pp. 21, l. 7, and 47, ll. 4–5; *Lho rong*, p. 62.

³⁸¹ LGNT, vol. 24, p. 200: *rngog pa'i rnam thar rim bzhi mar pa sha ru rtse bya ba yar lung las chad par 'dod*.

³⁸² See MKNT, p. 169, translated below, p. 276, and the *Rosary of Jewels*, LGNT, vol. 22, p. 27.

³⁸³ See van der Kuijp 2001 and Martin 1997, no. 118, for bibliographic notes on the publishing of the text.

'byung or *Rtag tshag chos 'byung*, depending on whether reference is made to the author's birthplace or his family,³⁸⁴ even though its author called it a *Religious History Clarifying the Teaching of the Muni*.³⁸⁵

Tshe-dbang-rgyal was raised at the Ri-bo-che monastery in Khams, the second main seat of the Stag-lung Bka'-brgyud lineage since the schism at the central seat, Stag-lung, in 1272, due to tensions within the ruling Ga-zi clan. Tshe-dbang-rgyal went twice to central Tibet, where he studied in particular with Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po at Gdan-sa-mthil monastery.³⁸⁶ It was at his request that Tshe-dbang-rgyal composed this religious history thirty years later, acknowledging his reliance on the *Opening Eyes* of his mentor in the colophon,³⁸⁷ where he says that it is because Chos-rjespyan-snga [Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan] asked him to expand his work that he gathered for many years all the information he could on the Bka'-brgyud lineages and their teachings.³⁸⁸ Tshe-dbang-rgyal structured his work after his predecessor's text, clarifying unclear passages and adding details gleaned from individual biographies, chronicles and so forth. He relied extensively on this source for his section about the Gdan-sa-mthil abbots and the Rlang-lha-gzigs clan. The text was composed in 1446–1447 and edited in 1451.³⁸⁹ All in all, it greatly expands on his sources, presenting all of the Bka'-brgyud lineages, and beginning with Buddha Śākyamuni instead of Vajradhara.

Mar-pa's biography

The core of Mar-pa's biography³⁹⁰ is indeed based on Rlangs-lha-gzigs Ras-pa's text, be it in terms of its chronological progression or of its listing of masters (the hundred and eight, fifty, thirteen, four, and two gurus of Mar-pa) and disciples (the four dharma-sons, the four heart-sons, the four disciples with an activity, and so on). The *Lho rong chos 'byung* adds a few other

³⁸⁴ See *Mkhas pa'i dga'i ston*, p. 840, where Dpa'-bo II "refers the reader to the *Lho rong chos 'byung* for a more detailed exposition of the Stag lung sect of the Bka' brgyud pa school" (van der Kuijp 2001, p. 70, n. 3).

³⁸⁵ *Chos 'byung thub bstan gsal byed*.

³⁸⁶ See a biography in van der Kuijp 2001, pp. 67–68; Sørensen & Hazod 2007, vol. 2, p. 740 ff., for a presentation of the author and the Stag-lung and Ri-bo-che Monasteries as well as their successive abbots.

³⁸⁷ *Lho rong*, pp. 844–845.

³⁸⁸ This request is not actually mentioned in the *Opening Eyes* itself, but in an *Explanatory Text on the Six Doctrines* (*Dpal na ro'i chos drug gi khrid yig bde chen gsal ba'i 'od zer stong ldan*, f. 3a) composed by Rlang-lha-gzigs Ras-pa. See Sernesi 2010a, pp. 138–139.

³⁸⁹ van der Kuijp 2001, p. 58.

³⁹⁰ *Lho rong*, pp. 31–50.

lists and does not repeat the polemics raised by the Spyān-snga. He modifies Mar-pa's dates³⁹¹ while clarifying his age and the year connected with every important milestone. Like 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba thirty years later, accurate dating is crucial for him. He says that he used chronicles (*lo rgyus*) and Mar-pa's songs (*mgur*) to establish the dates, specifying that his primary sources were the narratives of the Rngog tradition.³⁹²

Considering this bulk of details, it sometimes seems as if this text were completely different from the *Opening Eyes*, but based instead on the biography composed by Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po. It is indeed this latter text, although unmentioned, which seems to have been most influential, particularly as regards Mar-pa's daily life in Tibet. In the first biographies, the Indian experience expanded and became more detailed; here, Tibet is the focus, not so much in terms of teaching but rather of Mar-pa's lifestyle and relationships. Many developments concerning Mar-pa's final return to Tibet are copied almost verbatim from Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po, except for the modulations and abbreviations announced by the author. The passage listing Mar-pa's nine wives (in correspondence with Nairātmyā, Hevajra's consort, and the eight Gaurima in her entourage) and their qualities (radiant youth, faith, wisdom, compassion, devotion to the master, and observance of *samayas*) are the same in both texts.³⁹³ Mi-la-ras-pa's arrival, though it is simply summarized at this point of the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, is given in detail later.³⁹⁴ Another episode found in Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po that is adopted by

³⁹¹ *Lho rong*, p. 49: He did this by openly opposing the *Opening Eyes*: *chos 'byung mig byed du shing pho byi ba la sku bltams nas brgyad cu gya bzhi me mo phag la sku gshegs zhes pa nas' lo 'di la rje mar pa gshegs nas de dus mi la lo drug cu re brgyad dang' rngog mdo sde lo sum cu pa gcig 'ong bas dus mi 'grig gol* However, the dates he proposed are not found in any of the earlier texts available to us.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 50: *phal cher lo rgyus 'di ni rngog lugs kyi rjes su 'brang ba yin*.

³⁹³ KWNT, p. 98 ff., *Lho rong*, pp. 42–43.

³⁹⁴ KWNT, pp. 101–103, *Lho rong*, p. 43, but developed pp. 46–47. We can note in this respect that the nine-story tower Mi-la-ras-pa builds is mentioned in most texts from “U-rgyan-pa” onwards (either in the context of Mar-pa's or of Mi-la-ras-pa's life story), but that its name varies. In Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po, (KWNT, pp. 101–102) and in “U-rgyan-pa” (p. 188, in Mi-la-ras-pa's biography), it is called *mkhar dgu thog* or *sku mkhar dgu thog*; in the *Deb ther dmar po* (pp. 74–75), it is called *sku mkhar dgu thog* in Mar-pa's life story, but *gsras mkhar dgu thog* in Mi-la-ras-pa's (p. 78). Rgyal-thang-pa (p. 108) calls it *srog mkhar skye bo*. The *Opening Eyes* says *sras mkhar dgu thog* in Mi-la-ras-pa's life (*Opening Eyes*, p. 64). In the *Lho rong chos 'byung* it is only referred to as *mkhar* (p. 47) or *sras mkhar* (Mi-la-ras-pa indeed stops after seven stories—*sras mkhar thog bdun*, p. 76, and finishes later). The link between Mar-pa Mdo-sde and the tower is therefore unclear, and in the *Deb ther sngon po* (p. 516) Mar-pa even says “my nine-story tower” (*nga'i mkhar dgu thog*). In a colophon of the *Rtsib ri par ma* (*Gegs sel yid bzhin nor*

Tshe-dbang-rgyal concerns a strict retreat that Mar-pa undertakes: he tells Bdag-med-ma and Mi-la not to bother him for a month, so Mi-la-ras-pa also goes into retreat in Chu-gong-dpal-le. During a break, he learns that his master is giving instructions that he may need. When he goes to look for him, Gri'i-me'u-chung tells him that he saw Mar-pa in the mountains; Dol-pa-gag-ston says that he received teachings from him in the valley; each of the eight wives confirms that he was with her, and so forth. The story of Mdo-sde's death after falling off a horse on the way back from a tavern is also mentioned, as it was in Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po's narrative.³⁹⁵ Tshe-dbang-rgyal indicates that there are songs and stories at this point on how Mdo-sde enters another's body (*grong 'jug*)—passages which indeed can be found in Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po. Thus, the texts are clearly related; the *Lho rong chos 'byung* mainly summarizes its Karma Bka'-brgyud predecessor.

Tshe-dbang-rgyal therefore did what he set out to do, but without clearly citing all of his sources. Nevertheless, his transparent methods provide precious insight into what information was available in the middle of the 15th century, even though his dates and reasoning contradict most other sources, and even at times themselves.³⁹⁶

bu gsal byed snying po, vol. 6, p. 579), Mdo-sde is mentioned in connection with the tower, but it is not said that it is Mdo-sde's tower, only that Mar-pa composed the text for him at that place (*mar pas mdo sde'i don du sras mkhar du yi ger bkod pa las* [...]). The term *sras mkhar* can also simply mean “tower” or “celestial mansion.” It is only in Gtsang-smyon's rendering of Mi-la-ras-pa's life story that the link between Mdo-sde and the tower is established and the mansion becomes that of Mar-pa's son who plays an important role in the story. Professor Heather Stoddard (private interview, 12/10/2010), who undertook important renovations of the tower's roof in the late 1990s, said that there are paintings of Mar-pa, Mi-la-ras-pa, and others inside the tower. These can be dated to the 13th or 14th century, which is when the building became more important in biographies.

³⁹⁵ *Lho rong*, p. 46: *sras mdo sde chang sar rias brdabs nas dbu tshal par song bas rkyen te grongs/ phug ron gyi ro la grong 'jug mdzad pas/ rgya gar gyi nub phyogs o rgyan dang nye ba'i sar/ bram ze'i khye'u lo nyer bdun lon pa gsar du shi ba'i ro la grongs 'jug spos nas 'ga' ya dha ra'i sras bram ze ti pu pa zbes bya bar grags sol de'i bar du yang mgur dang grong 'jug mdzad pa sogs ni mbrjod par mi langl*. Cf. KWNT, pp. 114–118.

³⁹⁶ One example of this centers around the two different descriptions of Mar-pa Mdo-sde's reincarnation after he entered a pigeon's body. In Mar-pa's life story of the *Lho rong chos 'byung* (p. 46), Mdo-sde enters the body of a young brahmin in India and becomes the siddha Thi-pu-pa. In Dus-gsum-mkhyen-pa's life story (p. 155), Yon-tan-bzang-po, a contemporary of the Karma-pa, is identified as Mdo-sde, who had previously taken rebirth as a prince in India and an artist in Nepal (cf. Roberts 2007, p. 131).

2.3.7. Religious history composed by Kun-dga'-dpal-'byor (1428–1476)

Kun-dga'-dpal-'byor was the 10th abbot of the Rwa-lung Monastery founded by Gling-ras-pa. He was recognized as Gtsang-pa-rgya-ras's reincarnation, and thus became the second Rgyal-dbang-'brug-pa. Rngog Byang-chub-dpal-ba figured among his masters,³⁹⁷ and Gtsang-smyon Heruka was one of his disciples. He was renowned for his outstanding miraculous capacities, especially entering another's body (*grong 'jug*).³⁹⁸

His *Bkar-brgyud Religious History* (*Bkar* [sic] *brgyud chos 'byung*)³⁹⁹ is a short compilation of life stories of the masters belonging to the 'Brug-pa Bka'-brgyud lineage. It contains an outline of Mar-pa's life where the salient elements of Rlang-lha-gzigs Ras-pa's text are repeated. Kun-dga'-dpal-'byor gives the same dates for Mar-pa (1024–1107), the same names for his parents, and identical listings for masters and disciples; the text does not present any new element.

2.3.8. Biography composed by Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje [late 15th century]

The text and its author

The third biography on Mar-pa in the first volume of the MPSB is signed by a certain Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje, who declares that his root guru is Rje Rin-po-che Byang-chub-dpal-bzang-po,⁴⁰⁰ i.e. Rngog Byang-chub-dpal (1360–1446). According to the *Deb ther sngon po* and *Lho rong chos 'byung*, Byang-chub-dpal-ba died in 1446 at the age of 87, but according to Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje he died at 89. After Mar-pa's biography, a short account of the lives of Mar-pa's four main disciples has been inserted.⁴⁰¹ It is followed by a slightly more detailed account of the Rngog clan lineage, starting with Rngog Chos-rdor. Thus far, nothing much is known about the author. In the *Rngog slob brgyud dang bcas pa'i gsung 'bum*, there is one volume made up

³⁹⁷ See Sgrub-sprul Phrin-las-rgya-mtsho: *Dad gsum chu gter 'phel byed ngo mtshar zla ba'i me long*, p. 163. Compiled in 1845, this collection contains almost seventy biographies of Bka'-brgyud and more specifically 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud masters. Mar-pa's biography appears on pp. 53–74. Rngog Byang-chub-dpal, the last important master of the Rngog family lineage, designated Kun-dga'-dpal-'byor as the lineage's next holder and as the master who should conduct his funeral ceremonies.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

³⁹⁹ "Dkar brgyud chos 'byung." In: *Gsung 'bum*. Darjeeling: Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang, 1982, vol. 2, pp. 491–518 (Mar-pa: pp. 496–497). The spelling *dkar brgyud* for *bka' brgyud* is the one preferred in the 'Brug-pa lineage and some of the early Bka'-brgyud branches; it refers to the white garments yogins wore. See Smith 2001, p. 40.

⁴⁰⁰ MPSB, vol. 1, p. 162.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 157–158.

of two Guhyasamāja and one Nāmasaṅgīti commentaries by a Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje,⁴⁰² but it does not refer to the same person, as the author of the Guhyasamāja commentary was a disciple of Rgya Nam-mkha'-dbang-phyug, himself a disciple of Ram Rdo-je-grags, a contemporary of Rngog Mdo-sde (1078–1154).

Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje's biography on Mar-pa and the Rngog lineage was composed after the death of Rngog Byang-chub-dpal in the second half of the 15th century. It may be contemporary to the *Lho rong chos 'byung* (1446–1451) and the works of two other disciples of Byang-chub-dpal: the second Rgyal-dbang-'brug-pa Kun-dga'-dpal-'byor (1428–1476), and 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba, who composed the *Deb ther sngon po* in 1476.

Mar-pa's biography

This biography sports several titles: at the beginning, it is called—probably by the editors—*Wonderful Samaya, Hagiography of the Lord Mar-pa Lo-tsa-ba*.⁴⁰³ In the first colophon, that belonging to the biography proper, its name is *Inconceivable Qualities, Hagiography of Mar-pa*.⁴⁰⁴ It is likely that both titles were once the same and that the editors mistook *bsam yas* for *sa ma ya*, as the introduction states that “the qualities and complete liberation of Mar-pa are inconceivable.”⁴⁰⁵ A second colophon, also signed by Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje, concludes the section on the Rngog, and is called “Rosary of pearls.”⁴⁰⁶ This version of Mar-pa's life story belongs to the group of longer texts, and is approximately the same length as that ascribed to “U-rgyan-pa” (69 pages for the former vs. 65 pages for the latter in the MPSB edition), with which it has much in common.

The beginning of the hagiography is where the author is most involved in the process of editing. Even though his sequence closely follows Ngamrdzong ston-pa's, there are parts which are quite original, for instance the description of the time spent with 'Brog-mi,⁴⁰⁷ which is quite detailed and focuses on 'Brog-mi's greed and the fact that Mar-pa merely learns language from him. Mar-pa's return to Lho-brag and his decision to go to India is

⁴⁰² *Rngog slob brgyud dang bcas pa'i gsung 'bum*. Ed. by Dpal-brtsegs bod-yig dpe-rnying zhib-'jug-khang. Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2011, vol. 29 [vol. 250 in the Mes po'i shul bzhag series].

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 94: *Rje btsun mar pa lo tsā'i rnam thar ngo mtshar sa ma ya*.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159: *mar pa rnam thar yon tan bsam yas*.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94: *rje rin po che mar pa'i sku che ba'i yon tan rnam par thar pa la bsam gyis mi khyab kyang!*

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163: *mar pa'i bshad brgyud mu tig phreng ba*.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96.

quite original as well; some of the verses included in this section are also found in Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba's version. Otherwise, the biography rather straightforwardly follows Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's version: childhood; studies with 'Brog-mi; return to Lho-brag; meeting with Lo-skya at Gyer-phu; departure for Nepal via Skyid-rong and the Avalokiteśvara (Wa ti bzang po) temple;⁴⁰⁸ Nepal; meeting with Gnyos; Jñānagarbha and his entourage at Lakṣetra (five years); back to Mnga'-ris to reprovision; offerings to Jñānagarbha and Pendhapa, with the latter introducing him to Nāropā; prostrations in front of the *yi dam* rather than the guru; Maitrīpā; Bodhgayā/Gnyos; Kukuripa; Gnyos; Nāropā/Ākarasiddhi; cryptic verses; return to Tibet with Gnyos and destruction of texts; Lo skya (Saraha's song).

At this point, the first important return to Tibet,⁴⁰⁹ the text turns almost exclusively to "U-rgyan-pa's" version and follows it nearly *verbatim* until the end, songs included. It is particularly striking for the same partial structure in qualities (*yon tan*)—as we have seen, the bipartite plan was announced at the beginning of "U-rgyan-pa" but was not followed closely. It is the same here: Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje announces three parts at the beginning,⁴¹⁰ then presents the first but drops the other two, later adding the same titles found in "U-rgyan-pa" and calling them "qualities," even though he did not do so in his own introduction.

2.3.9. *Deb ther sngon po*, religious history composed by 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal (1392–1481) [1476]

The text

The *Deb ther sngon po* is probably one of the most widely used reference books in the domain of Tibetology. This "Blue Book" was compiled by 'Gos-lo Gzhon-nu-dpal and his team from 1476⁴¹¹ on and was xylographed

⁴⁰⁸ On the *Skyid rong rang byung 'phags pa*, "Kyirong Wati," see Kapstein & Gyurme 1991, n. 1119, p. 80; See also Ehrhard 2004, BA, p. 528, and Wylie 1962, p. 129.

⁴⁰⁹ MPSB, p. 110, "U-rgyan-pa," p. 123.

⁴¹⁰ The formulation of these three parts is specific. Even though they are not called "qualities," they are presented as such, MPSB, p. 94: *rje rin po che mar pa'i sku che ba'i yon tan rnam par thar pa la bsam gyis mi khyab kyang* [...]. The three are as follows: 1: Manifesting a formal body for the benefit of others, developing renunciation, and going to India (*gzhan don gzugs sku bzhes shing nges 'byung rgya gar byon tshul*); 2: studying, reflecting and meditating by relying on spiritual friends (*gshes gnyen bsten cing thos bsam sgrub pa mdzad pa*); 3: accomplishing the benefit of beings and reaching the pure realms for the benefit of others (*'gro don phrin las mdzad cing zhing kham sgrub pa byon pa*). This formulation is specific to this text.

⁴¹¹ See van der Kuijp 2006 for a rationale on compilation and printing datings, and on some peculiarities of the text, especially as regards dating.

in the following decade. The text had a large audience from the outset in Tibet and was equally successful in the West thanks to the 1949 translation by G. N. Roerich (1902–1960) and Dge-'dun-chos-'phel (1903–1952).

The section on Mar-pa was probably compiled in 1476, as 'Gos-lo's calculates that 30 years have elapsed at the time of composition since the demise of Rngog Byang-chub-dpal-ba (1360–1446). It opens with a short presentation of Mar-pa's life⁴¹² followed by a remarkably detailed account of Rngog Chos-rdor's familial lineage.⁴¹³ Both belong to the eighth part: twenty-four chapters on the "famous Dwags-po Bka'-brgyud [traditions] transmitted from the great translator Mar-pa."⁴¹⁴

Mar-pa's biography

A source analysis on Vairocanavajra's life presented by Kurtis Schaeffer⁴¹⁵ emphasizes the predominance of written texts over oral accounts in 'Gos-lo's work. In the case of Mar-pa's life story, it is so original when compared to previously studied materials that we can assume that 'Gos-lo composed it on the basis of his own cross references and calculations plus meticulous research on his source material. His work is anything but a simple copy of primary data. Many elements single this version out; foremost among them is Mar-pa's dating, 1012–1097. These are the dates generally accepted in the West though they can not be found in any texts composed prior to this one.⁴¹⁶ They likely represent 'Gos-lo's calculations rather than his reliance on another written source. The reason why this dating of Mar-pa's life has

⁴¹² *Deb ther*: "rngog pa'i brgyud pa'i skabs," pp. 483–499, BA, pp. 399–414. The part on Mar-pa runs pp. 483–490, BA, pp. 399–405.

⁴¹³ It must be remembered that the great Rngog abbot was 'Gos-lo's teacher. For "A Short Account of the Most Important Events in Zhönu Pal's Life" see Mathes 2007, pp. 131–147. The presentation of the Rngog clan is based on their two rosaries, see above, pp. 124–126.

⁴¹⁴ *Deb ther*: *mnga' bdag lo tsā ba chen po mar pa nas brgyud de dwags po bka' brgyud ces grags pa'i skabs*. pp. 399–848. BA: pp. 399–725.

⁴¹⁵ Schaeffer 2000, p. 370.

⁴¹⁶ An example of this is found in the *Life of Marpa* by Gtsang-smyon translated by the Nālandā Translation Committee. In his work, Gtsang-smyon did not indicate a date of birth and placed Mar-pa's death in a bird year, at 88. In a footnote, the translators (Tsangnyön 1982, p. 199) state that this probably refers to the water-bird year 1093 (which implies a birth date in 1006 if Mar-pa died at 88, i.e. 87), but note that many uncertainties surround Mar-pa's dates. In the introduction (p. xxvi), however, they throw all caution to the wind and state that that Mar-pa was born in 1012. This discrepancy shows the influence of the BA in Western Tibetology and in the knowledge of Tibet at large.

become so widespread is that 'Gos-lo uses it throughout his work as a basis for comparative dating of the various characters. Even though he insisted on the reliability of his presentation, which he claimed was based on a detailed analysis of ancient sources,⁴¹⁷ several later historians openly challenged his assertions on Mar-pa's dates.

His presentation of Mar-pa's travels is also quite original, despite a conventional beginning wherein Mar-pa learns translation with 'Brog-mi, meets Klog-skya and goes with Gnyos to Nepal, where he spends three years in the presence of Spyi-ther-pa and Painḍapā. Despite some chronological specificities, mainly concerning his quest for Nāropā during the second journey, it generally corresponds with the KSTC tradition. What is surprising, though, is that here Mar-pa embarks on his third voyage in order to meet Maitrīpā, whose fame is known to him. This divergence might be explained by the fact that 'Gos-lo knew that Maitrīpā was Nāropā's disciple and that he was active mainly after his master's demise. The rest of the narrative gathers the most common episodes: Saraha's dream, the four episodes of entering another's body, and his being an emanation of Dombiheruka, with this last point showing the influence of either Ngam-rdzong ston-pa or Don-mo-ri-pa.

Some episodes that 'Gos-lo found in earlier biographies of Mar-pa are also mentioned in other sections of the *Deb ther sngon po*. This is the case with Mar-pa's studies alongside 'Brog-mi's;⁴¹⁸ his meeting Mar-pa Do-pa when the latter is leaving for India and the former returning to Tibet;⁴¹⁹ and of course the story of Mi-la-ras-pa. 'Gos-lo reckons that this is narrated in some detail until the point where Mi-la-ras-pa leaves Mar-pa, as he saw "many interpolations and thought that this was the logical version."⁴²⁰

Conclusion

This third step of Mar-pa's biographical construction has been likened to the walls of a building in the sense that all of these biographies build on previous material, sometimes by adding new data, but more generally by either expanding or summarizing and synthesizing it. Biographies of this period are

⁴¹⁷ *Deb ther*, p. 1265: *rje mar pa nas rṅgog gi brgyud pa byung ba dang/ mi la nas sgam po ba'i brgyud pa byung ba rnam kyang yi ge rnying pa rnam la zhib mo zhib mor brtags nas nges pa thub pa'i lugs lags*. See BA, p. 1086.

⁴¹⁸ BA, p. 208.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

⁴²⁰ *Deb ther*, p. 518 (BA 432): *de yan chad cung zad zhib par bris tel/ bcos ma mang po mthong bas 'di tsam zbig 'thad pa yin no snyam nas bgyis so*. Mi-la-ras-pa's biography runs eleven pages in Tibetan (pp. 511–522) against less than seven for Mar-pa's.

quite eclectic, ranging from very short sketches to long texts replete with songs and details, such as the hagiography written by Zhwa-dmar Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po, which may be considered a load-bearing wall as it, in turn, influenced later texts. A wall can also be understood as that which encloses a space. In this phase of Mar-pa's life stories, the construction process has become less open; through building and expanding on previous biographies, the new ones have become quite predictable and rigidly defined. One difference between these texts and earlier works is that they eschewed the structure in qualities; only Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje retained it, even if he did not follow it very faithfully. It is on these walls, and on the preceding foundations and ground floor, that the best-known biography of Mar-pa was built. Comparable to a golden roof visible from afar, this was the biography composed by Gtsang-smyon Heruka: *Meaningful to Behold*.

2.4. *The roof: biography composed by Gtsang-smyon Heruka (1452–1507) [1505]*

In his book on Mi-la ras-pa's lives, Andrew Quintman shows how the work that Gtsang-smyon Heruka composed on the famous poet set a new standard for his biographers by combining a solid plot with many interconnected narrative details, thereby creating a literary masterpiece which "was capable of both eclipsing four hundred years of literary development and reshaping Tibet's religious landscape."⁴²¹ Quintman uses the metaphor of a gradual process of incarnation to illustrate the construction of the literary corpus describing Mi-la ras-pa's life, whose culmination is the biography by Gtsang-smyon. This final phase is seen as the incarnation of a vibrant portrait of Mi-la ras-pa, completed four centuries after his death. For Quintman, the analysis of Mi-la ras-pa's biographies is therefore akin to an anatomical dissection, aimed at distinguishing the various members of the body, and especially to identify their underlying structures as well as their relationships, thus defining the incarnation process.

Composition and edition of Mar-pa's hagiography

A similar image could also be used to describe Mar-pa's biographical tradition, but the metaphor of a house was chosen in this study in order to underline the building process of the tradition on the basis of the first texts available, rather than focus on the "end-product" embodied by the work of Gtsang-smyon. While Quintman's book is geared towards Gtsang-smyon's masterpiece even when analysing prior works, my study focuses on describing for themselves the foundations of Mar-pa's biographical tradition and

⁴²¹ Quintman 2014, p. 3.

the manner in which each biography was developed. This varying problematizing taken aside, Gtsang-smyon's biographies on Mar-pa and Mi-la-ras-pa occupy roughly the same position in their respective traditions: that of a pinnacle replacing earlier works and taking the place of choice in people's knowledge of these early masters, hence the analogy of the roof. One difference may be that as regards Mar-pa, there were no previous biographies of substantial length and breadth apart from those found in rosaries or religious histories. This lack of any other autonomous work until Gtsang-smyon gave his *Life of Mar-pa the Translator which is Meaningful to Behold*⁴²² even more magnitude.

As shown by Gene Smith and Marta Sernesi on the basis of indications given by Rgod-tshang-ras-chen, Gtsang-smyon dictated this hagiography to his disciple and secretary Śri Lo-paṅ-pa 'Jam-dpal chos-lha upon his return from Nepal in 1505.⁴²³ On the basis of an incomplete copy of the first edition that she found in the library of the Wellcome Institute in London, Marta Sernesi showed that 'Jam-dpal chos-lha was also the proof-reader of the xylographic print text which was published the same year, in the Madman from Gtsang's lifetime. She also lists the other people who contributed to the work on the basis of the xylographed text's damaged colophon and a handwritten copy of the missing pages.⁴²⁴ Therefore, contrary to Smith's conclusion,⁴²⁵ the text printed by Gtsang-smyon's close disciple Bsod-nams-blo-gros (1460–1541) was not the first one, though Bsod-nams-blo-gros may have been the person who ensured its distribution, as he gave several hundred copies to faithful disciples of the region.⁴²⁶ The printing projects of Gtsang-smyon and his disciples—who were both authors and editors—greatly contributed to the development of xylography in Tibet during the 16th century. This helped disseminating on a large scale the biographies of the first masters of the Bka'-brgyud lineage and subsequent holders of the doctrine Gtsang-smyon inherited, the Aural Transmission. As Schaeffer⁴²⁷

⁴²² *Sgra sgyur mar pa lo tsā'i rnam thar mthong ba don yod*. Abbreviated as “Gtsang-smyon” for the Tibetan version and “Tsangnyön 1982” for the English translation by the Nālandā Translation Committee.

⁴²³ Smith 2001, p. 289, n. 195; Sernesi 2011b, pp. 185–186. This figures in Rgod-tshang-ras-chen's biography on Gtsang-smyon, the *Heart of the Sun*, p. 235.5.

⁴²⁴ Sernesi 2011b, pp. 181 and 185–186.

⁴²⁵ Smith 2001, p. 74, for a listing of the various editions of Mar-pa's life by Gtsang-smyon.

⁴²⁶ Schaeffer 2009, p. 63. See also Bsod-nams-blo-gros's biography: Bya-bral-ba Tshul-khri-m-dpal-ldan: *Mkhas grub rdo rje 'chang bsod nams blo gros kyi rnam thar*, f. 42b2–43a6.

⁴²⁷ Schaeffer 2011, p. 467.

puts it, “the printers in Gtsang-smyon’s tradition collectively created a sort of canon of siddha story and song, a *gser ’phreng* [...] spread out over numerous individual publications and yet forming a coherent whole.”

This publication policy and the quality of the compositions made them the new references in Tibet as far as the Bka’-brgyud masters were concerned.⁴²⁸ This is why today, for Tibetans and Westerners alike, Gtsang-smyon’s vision of Mar-pa’s and Mi-la-ras-pa’s life stories holds authority. But, as is clear in this study and as Dan Martin emphasized in his book review of the *Life of Marpa*, Mar-pa’s life story is not as straightforward as Gtsang-smyon’s readers might believe.⁴²⁹

The madman from Gtsang’s life has been studied in detail by Stefan Larsson in his now published thesis, and it is also the object of several of his articles.⁴³⁰ Larsson says about 15th-century Tibet that, “while the political climate was characterized by conflict and fragmentation, the religious climate was characterized by, among other things, creativity, competition, systematization, and institutionalization.”⁴³¹ During the life of Gtsang-smyon, the Phag-mo-gru-pa dynasty lost power in Central Tibet to the Rin-pung-pa clan, whose ruler, Don-yod-rdo-rje (1462–1512), patronized Gtsang-smyon. Gtsang-smyon was one among many “mad yogins” who flourished in the 15th and 16th centuries.⁴³² The most famous yogins often belonged to the Bka’-brgyud lineages or to other lineages that emphasized meditation; they took the tantric siddhas as their role models, and, like them, often acted in an antinomian and provocative fashion. They often went against the grain of the Dge-lugs-pa tradition, whose doctrines emphasized monasticism and thorough scholarship. The Dge-lugs-pa monk’s ideal was to go back to Atiśa’s fundamental contributions to Tibetan Buddhism as presented in the *lam rim*, the stages of the path, while the ideal of the *smyon pa*, or mad

⁴²⁸ See Schaeffer 2009, pp. 54–72, and Schaeffer 2011 for a study of the printing projects of Gtsang-smyon and his disciples.

⁴²⁹ Martin 1984, pp. 83–92.

⁴³⁰ See Larsson 2009 for the thesis and Larsson 2012 for its publication. See also Larsson 2011a and 2011b.

⁴³¹ Larsson 2012, p. 25. See the entire introduction (pp. 10–30) for the background of the mad yogins of Tibet and the political and religious tensions of the time. See also DiValerio 2015.

⁴³² On “mad yogins” see DiValerio 2011 and 2015. David DiValerio studied the case of three so-called “madmen” (*smyon pa*)—Gstang-smyon, ’Brug-smyon (’Brug-pa Kun-legs, 1455–1529?) and Dbus-smyon (Kun-dga’-bzang-po, 1458–1532)—in his PhD thesis called “Subversive Sainthood and Tantric Fundamentalism: An Historical Study of Tibet’s Holy Madmen,” defended at the University of Virginia in 2011. For its publication see DiValerio 2015.

yogin, was to return to the original values of the Bka'-brgyud lineage embodied by Mi-la-ras-pa and his master Mar-pa. Schaeffer and Quintman both highlight how important Mi-la-ras-pa was for Gtsang-smyon, who followed his lifestyle, meditated in caves where Mi-la-ras-pa himself had meditated, and contributed largely to his renown.⁴³³

Before composing the biography that interests us here, Gtsang-smyon compiled a golden rosary of the Ras-chung Snyan-brgyud masters,⁴³⁴ from Vajrayoginī to his own guru, Sha-ra Rab-'jams-pa Sangs-rgyas-seng-ge, in 1494. In his golden rosary's 14-page/7-folio biography of Mar-pa, he anticipated the later version he would give of Mar-pa's life by following exactly the same outline but emphasizing instead the last journey, when Mar-pa receives from Nāropā the Aural Transmission, transference of consciousness (*'pho ba*), and entering another's body (*grong 'jug*). The *Life of Mar-pa the Translator which is Meaningful to Behold* is much longer than this first draft (71 folios in the first xylographic edition).⁴³⁵ It was partially translated into French by Jacques Bacot in 1937, then integrally translated into English by the Nālandā Translation Committee in 1982.⁴³⁶ The pages given here are from the Nālandā Translation Committee's *Life of Marpa*, which is the most accessible version of the text.

Mar-pa's biography and its sources

A comparative study of this work with the biographies that preceded it reveals Gtsang-smyon's talent as an artistic writer and compiler, as was pointed out by Quintman. An analysis of Gtsang-smyon's colophon to his *Life of Marpa*, enlightened by our knowledge of the above biographies, leads to a new hypothesis about his sources:

Thus, this hagiography of the Venerable Mar-ston Chos-kyi-blo-gros [called] *Meaningful to Behold*, has been transmitted orally and in detail to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa by the Venerable Mi-la and Mar-pa Mgo-legs. The Venerable Mi-la also

⁴³³ See Schaeffer 2007 and 2009, Quintman 2014 and Smith 2001, pp. 59–79, on the reformist movements of 16th-century Tibet.

⁴³⁴ "Bde mchog bka' 'gro snyan brgyud gzhung 'brel sa gcad dang sbrags pa." In: *Bde mchog bka' 'gro snyan rgyud*. Leh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1971. Vol. 1, pp. 5–360 (W30124: pp. 227–241 of the PDF, pp. 77–91 of the manuscript edition).

⁴³⁵ This xylograph is studied in Sernesi 2011b. It has the following characteristics: Wellcome Tibetan 44: xylograph, 8 x 45 (6 x 44) cm., 71 fols., 7 lines per page, vol. *ka*. Fols. 1, 2, 6, 51b, 53, 56, 69 and 70 are handwritten in black ink; fols. 3, 41, 51, 65, 66, 68 and 71 are damaged.

⁴³⁶ Bacot 1937, Tsangnyön 1982.

gave it to Ras-chung-pa, so that he and Ngam-rdzong ston-pa Byang-chub-rgyal-po could discuss it and compile the **most important of the original hagiographies**. To this, many biographies extracted from the manuals derived from the speech of Lama Rngog-pa, Mtshur-ston and Mes-ston were added.⁴³⁷

What was translated here as “the most important of the original hagiographies,” is actually less explicit in Tibetan, which only says *rnam thar phyi mo*, without specifying whether “hagiography” is singular or plural. Translators⁴³⁸ and scholars have generally interpreted the term as singular, presuming that the biography by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa was Gtsang-smyon’s main source. Now that this biography has been discovered, however, the conclusion is debatable, insofar as the two texts clearly belong to distinct traditions. Ngam-rdzong ston-pa initiates Mar-pa’s travels in India with the meeting with Jñānagarbha; in Gtsang-smyon Mar-pa first meets Nāropā. Differences between the versions are such that Tibetan scholars who read Ngam-rdzong’s biography with me but who were used to Gtsang-smyon’s version thought that Ngam-rdzong ston-pa must have “made a mistake”! Even though Gtsang-smyon undeniably made use of this text, it was certainly not his main source. On the other hand, he closely follows the structure and phrasing of the *rnam thar* conserved in the KSTC and in the Aural Transmission golden rosaries in general, i.e. the text attributed to Mar-ston Tshul-khri-m-’byung-gnas and later rewordings of that material. It is therefore likely that just as Gtsang-smyon staged Ras-chung-pa as the narrator of Mila-ras-pa’s biography, he chose to emphasize Ras-chung-pa’s responsibility in the elaboration of his own work, even though it is not Ras-chung-pa, but his grand-disciple, who wrote the source Gtsang-smyon is following the most.

The main structural variation in Gtsang-smyon’s text when compared to Mar-ston’s is that he adds a second journey comprising elements that unfolded during the first journey in his source material. This change can be explained by the fact that Gtsang-smyon bases his narrative very much on

⁴³⁷ Gtsang-smyon, p. 224: *de ltar rje btsun mar ston chos kyi blo gros kyi rnam par thar pa mthong ba don ldan ’di nyid/ rje btsun mi la dang/ mar pa mgo legs gnyis kyis/ ngan rdzong ston pa la zhib rgyas zhal nas snyan du bgyud pa dang/ rje btsun mi las ras chung pa la yang gngang bas/ ras chung pa dang/ ngan rdzong ston pa byang chub rgyal po gnyis bka’ bgras nas/ bsgrigs pa’i rnam thar phyi mo’i gtsa bor bzhugs pa las/ bla ma rngog pa/ tshur ston/ mes ston rnams kyi zhal nas byung ba’i yig cha la sogs rnam thar mang dag ’dzoms pa’i nang nas/*

⁴³⁸ Tsangnyön 1982, p 204, for example, says: “Originally, it was given orally and in full detail by Jetsün Mila and Marpa Golek to the teacher of Ngen Dzong. Jetsün Mila also gave it to Rechungpa. Then, Rechungpa and Changchub Gyalpo, the teacher of Ngen Dzong, discussed it and compiled a **biography**, which remains here as the main text.”

Mar-pa's songs, which clearly and repeatedly mention three journeys. For the sake of coherency, Gtsang-smyon adds a second journey, albeit a rather bland one. He also abandons the traditional Aural Transmission bipartite presentation in qualities, exchanging it for a chronological plan in five parts:

1. How [Mar-pa] was born and met the Dharma in general;
2. How, in particular, he went to India, underwent hardships for the sake of the teaching, received the holy Dharma from learned and accomplished masters, and brought it back to Tibet;
3. How experiences and realization were born in his mind through practice;
4. How he benefited the doctrine and beings therewith; and
5. How, after having benefited the doctrine and beings, he merged his formal body with the *dharmadhātu*.⁴³⁹

As stated in the colophon, Gtsang-smyon does indeed borrow a few elements from Ngam-rdzong that are completely absent from the KSTC, such as the initial meeting with 'Brog-mi Lo-tsa-ba. An episode influenced by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa but appearing in a modified aspect in the 16th century text is that of the crow snatching Mar-pa's protective amulet and carrying it away.⁴⁴⁰ In the early version, this happens during Mar-pa's stay at Jñānagar-bha's, and the yogin who helps Mar-pa get his amulet back is Kusulu the Great.⁴⁴¹ But here everything revolves around Nāropā, and it is Nāropā who paralyses the bird and gives the amulet back to Mar-pa.

In accordance with his statement that he has not simply followed the hagiographies by Ngam-rdzong and "Ras-chung-pa," but has also added data from the narratives by Rngog, Mtshur-ston and Mes-ston, Gtsang-smyon has indeed modified the KSTC kernel by including episodes which cannot be tracked back to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa. The most influential text in this regard is the biography composed by Rngog Mdo-sde (MKNT), as it recounts the visit Mar-pa pays Gnyos to borrow his manuscripts after Mar-pa's own were destroyed, and for the meeting with Atiśa. The fact that Gtsang-smyon mentions Bla-ma Rngogs-pa as a source may show that he knew that the MKNT had been composed by Mdo-sde.

⁴³⁹ Gtsang-smyon, p. 5: *sku skye ba bzhes nas spyir gyis dam pa'i chos dang mjal tshull bye brag tu rgya gar la byon nas chos phyir dka' ba spyad cing mkhas grub kyi bla ma rnams las dam chos nod pa bod yul du spyan drangs tshull ihugs nyams su bzhes pas nyams rtogs thugs la 'khrungs tshull de'i sgo nas bstan pa dang sems can la phan thogs mdzad tshull bstan pa dang sems can gyi don mdzad nas gzugs sku chos dbyings su thim tshul dang lnga las!*

⁴⁴⁰ Tsangnyön 1982, p. 98.

⁴⁴¹ Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, p. 85.

Rgyal-thang-pa also inspires one of the most specific aspects of Gtsang-smyon's biography, namely the instrumental role Mi-la-ras-pa played in his master's last journey to India in order to request the instructions on entering another's body "which bring buddhahood with little effort."⁴⁴² Even though Gtsang-smyon greatly improves this passage and gives it much credit by quoting Nāropā's verse of homage to Mi-la-ras-pa which was revealed to him in a vision,⁴⁴³ the outline of this episode was already present in Rgyal-thang-pa's text.⁴⁴⁴

Mes-ston tshon-po Shes-rab-rgyal-mtshan appears to have taken on a particular importance here which he did not have in previous versions. For example, Gtsang-smyon mentions four songs of Mar-pa either addressed to or requested by Mes-ston.⁴⁴⁵ Three of these songs do not appear anywhere else (except in the 2nd Dpa'-bo's version, which repeats all songs presented by Gtsang-smyon); the fourth, which focuses on *gaṇacakra*, had only been previously included by Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po.⁴⁴⁶ Gtsang-smyon also says that Mes-ston honored Mar-pa with three great offerings, which shows that he probably had access to a *mes lugs*, i.e. sources preserved in Mes-ston's familial or religious lineage. Mar-pa's disciple did, in fact, establish an institute where the tantras he inherited from his master were transmitted and studied.⁴⁴⁷

Within the framework of Mar-pa's life, several elements which appeared for the first time in the *Lho rong chos 'byung* have been greatly expanded by Gtsang-smyon. This is the case for Mdo-sde's death and entering another's body in India, and for Mi-la-ras-pa's prophetic dream of the four pillars. The *Lho rong chos 'byung*'s source for the first topos⁴⁴⁸ is not mentioned, and the origin of the second⁴⁴⁹ might possibly be the *Twelve Great Disciples*, one of the earliest biographies on Mi-la-ras-pa, which is attributed to Ngamrdzong and eleven other disciples of Mi-la-ras-pa. Quintman⁴⁵⁰ quotes a

⁴⁴² See Tsangnyön 1982, p. 73.

⁴⁴³ See the summary of Gtsang-smyon's life by Roberts 2007, p. 63.

⁴⁴⁴ GLNT, pp. 179–181.

⁴⁴⁵ Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 132, 134, 189 and 192.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132, KWNT, p. 107. It also appears in MK25, whose date has not yet been ascertained.

⁴⁴⁷ See *Lho rong*, pp. 70–71, Diwakar, vol. 1, p. 72.

⁴⁴⁸ *Lho rong*, p. 46. It should be noted that Mar-pa Mdo-sde's death was mentioned in earlier texts, by Rgyal-thang-pa for instance, but with no details.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴⁵⁰ Quintman 2014, p. 98.

song from that biography in which Mar-pa interprets the future of the lineage on the basis of visions he had while sleeping of his four main disciples under the guise of animals.⁴⁵¹

Now that the most obvious sources of Gtsang-smyon's work have been described, it is particularly interesting to note the passages he must have known, given the sources he used but chose to omit. Examples of these include Mar-pa's visionary experiences during *ganacakras* directed by Jñānagarbha and Śāntibhadra. The "drawback" of these highly esoteric experiences and realizations narrated by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa⁴⁵² and Don-mo-ri-pa is that, on the one hand, they shift the spiritual authority's center of gravity from Nāropā towards these two masters, and that on the other their deeply tantric content does not quite suit the broad audience Gtsang-smyon was trying to reach with his hagiographical compositions. This second argument is also valid for the description of Mar-pa's nine consorts, who came to life in Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po's biography and were mentioned in the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, but are only alluded to here. It might seem surprising that a "mad yogin," comfortable with wild behavior would willingly refrain in his writings from shedding any light on the most esoteric aspects of Mar-pa's life experiences as described by his predecessors. As Larsson points out, however,⁴⁵³ "as Tsangnyön started to teach and compose texts, his mad and provocative behavior gradually began to lose prominence in the biographies. His role changed from an unknown mad yogin to a famous siddha." Gtsang-smyon composed Mar-pa's biography towards the end of his life, when he probably no longer felt compelled to engage in wild yogic practice. Larsson, citing Kristin Blancke's unpublished article,⁴⁵⁴ also remarks that Gtsang-smyon "tended to make Milarepa less controversial and unusual than he was in previous texts,"⁴⁵⁵ so that his work—and message—could be as widely accepted as possible.

⁴⁵¹ Gtsang-smyon attributes the dream to Mi-la and its interpretation to Mar-pa (Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 181–188). However, the *Rain of Wisdom* compiled by Karma-pa Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje forty years later states that both the dream and its interpretation were Mar-pa's (*Rain of Wisdom*, p. 169). In this he is following the *Bu chen bcu gnyis*—the Twelve Great Disciples—which had been already widely used by his predecessor the 3rd Karma-pa Rang-byung-rdo-rje in his hagiography on Mi-la (See Quintman 2014, pp. 86–104 for a description of this work, and pp. 98–99 for a partial translation of the song of the four pillars).

⁴⁵² Mon-rtse-pa, pp. 90–91. See translation, p. 263.

⁴⁵³ Larsson 2012, p. 171.

⁴⁵⁴ Blancke, unpublished, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁵ Larsson 2012 p. 239.

Other episodes described by Ngam-rdzong and mentioned by Gtsang-smyon in songs but not explained in detail include Mar-pa's detention by a local ruler, from whom he obtains a fish that he offers at a *ganacakra* with Nāropā;⁴⁵⁶ and his hiding on a boat while two robbers are searching for him. It could be argued that these anecdotes do not add anything to the plot; the same goes for the visit that Mar-pa and Gnyos pay to 'Brog-mi when they go back to Tibet for the first time. However interesting these vignettes may be, they break the fluidity of the narrative.

Finally, we might underline two motifs strongly reinforced in Gtsang-smyon's version: Gnyos' role in the loss of Mar-pa's texts,⁴⁵⁷ and Mar-pa Mdo-sde's untimely death, which takes up a large part of the fourth chapter.⁴⁵⁸ Though it is based on earlier sources,⁴⁵⁹ Gtsang-smyon gives great drama to the subject of Mdo-sde's death by supplementing his narrative with plenty of proverbs and climactic descriptions. His poetic license is most obvious in the first part of the chapter, which runs for several pages without citing any songs—the songs, which are finally presented at the end of the chapter, appeared in Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po's biography in fragments and in the twenty-five songs of the *Mar pa bka' 'bum*, but greatly altered.⁴⁶⁰ While not unprecedented, the episode of Mdo-sde's death, with its emphasis on Mar-pa's human side, certainly fulfill Gtsang-smyon's goal of composing a lively and inspiring story.

With this text, Gtsang-smyon adds a roof to Mar-pa's biographical tradition: the building is complete, and is ready to accommodate generations of readers and teachers. Gtsang-smyon uses his storytelling skills to create a tale that is at once entertaining, inspiring, and remarkably faithful to its sources. There is not much that Gtsang-smyon actually invents in his biography of Mar-pa; heir to a long tradition, he is also the creator of a new opus that has had a great impact first on the Tibetan, and later on the Western readership. His influence can be ascribed to his writing skills, but also to his talent for making his work widely available through xylography.

⁴⁵⁶ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 92.

⁴⁵⁷ See below, p. 233, for a development of this point.

⁴⁵⁸ Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 156–181.

⁴⁵⁹ The interruption of Mar-pa's family line was already prophesized by Nāropā in Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's biography, and Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po's description of Mdo-sde's death cites circumstances similar to those presented by Gtsang-smyon. It should also be noted that the same story is told from a very different angle by Rwa Ye-shes-Seng-ge in his hagiography of Rwa lo-tsā-ba Rdo-rje-grags, who took pride in having "liberated" Mdo-sde and twelve other bodhisattvas. See Decler 1992, Ramble 2010 and Cuevas 2015a.

⁴⁶⁰ KWNT, pp. 114–116; MK25, pp. 470–473.

2.5. *Later developments: biographies written after the standard version*

Thus, Gtsang-smyon Heruka's biography of Mar-pa is considered "standard" by Tibetan and Westerners alike, and could be likened to a roof visible from afar. It is the best-known version and, as such, is included in many golden rosaries and collections.⁴⁶¹ Yet, surprisingly, biographies composed thereafter seem to have ignored it: as we shall see, most later texts either veil its influence, openly distance themselves from it and choose to follow Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's version of the beginning of Mar-pa's life, or even overtly criticize it. This incongruity is striking when we consider the central nature of Gtsang-smyon Heruka's work, but it most probably reveals the claimed independence of later authors. Furthermore, a composition that blindly and uncritically follows Gtsang-smyon's presentation would not be a particularly interesting study subject in the context of Mar-pa's life-writing, nor would it have much success in the community of readers, who, for the most part, are happy with Gtsang-smyon's version.

The biographies presented in the following section are of varying import. Some have been mentioned simply to show that Gtsang-smyon's influence was not overarching; indeed, many of the post-Gtsang-smyon rosaries or religious histories follow other versions, or treat Gtsang-smyon as just another source. This may indicate a difference between how a work is perceived by the general readership—in this case, Gtsang-smyon's work is considered to be the preeminent biography—and how that same work is seen by the more localized community of lineage holders and scholars who aim at furthering the biographical tradition and tend to diverge from, rather than follow, the major work that precedes them. These biographies, when they are simple rewordings and syntheses of previous versions, could be likened to plaster on the walls or new tiles on the roof. Other texts add new elements to the now long-established house. Such is the case, for example, of the biographies by Padma-dkar-po and Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba. These could be compared to additional rooms that have been adjoined to the main house to make it bigger. Finally, some texts adopt a critical approach, assessing previous material and comparing the existent, while coming to new conclusions. The biographies by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu, and 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab belong to this last category. They could be likened to a veranda that extends the edifice, or a beautiful garden that is like a green setting that frames the house in a larger context. It is to these biographies that round out the recently roofed house of Mar-pa's biographical tradition that we will now turn.

⁴⁶¹ Several editions of this biography as found in various collections are documented in the bibliography at the end of this volume under Gtsang-smyon.

2.5.1. Biography from a rosary by Rgod-tshang-ras-pa (1482–1559)

One of Gtsang-smyon Heruka's best-known and most important disciples was Rgod-tshang-ras-chen Sna-tshogs-rang-grol, the author of Ras-chung-pa's biography. He composed an autobiography which has been studied by Franz-Karl Ehrhard,⁴⁶² and his biographies and other compositions were summarized by Stefan Larsson in his study of Gtsang-smyon.⁴⁶³

Rgod-tshang-ras-pa was a prolific writer. He was part of “the school of Gtsang-smyon Heruka”⁴⁶⁴ and composed many biographies. Among these, a golden rosary of the Aural Transmission was recently discovered by Marta Sernesi in the NGMPP fund. It contains a 16-folio life story of Mar-pa written in *khyug yig*.⁴⁶⁵

This text is unique in that the author has managed to keep the traditional bipartite division of the Aural Transmission as presented by Mar-ston in the KSTC while blending it with other traditions and not getting lost in the process. Most authors who tried to bridge the two approaches of Mar-pa's life—in brief, Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's and the Aural Transmission's—while retaining the KSTC's structure in qualities and plot, lost track of either the parts or the plot at one point or another. A prime example is “Urgyan-pa's” version where Mar-pa's timeline and travel in Tibet, Nepal and India are very improbable. Here, Rgod-tshang-ras-pa has kept the two parts (the second is divided into seven subsections) and the general plot lines of the KSTC while adding a good deal of information from other sources. Gtsang-smyon is particularly influential, as seen in Gnyos' role in Mar-pa's loss of his texts, the song of shame to Gnyos, Mi-la's instrumental role in Mar-pa's last visit to India, etc, and so are the songs, which are not very present in the KSTC. There is also a very interesting *apparté* in pages 2–3 where Rgod-tshang-ras-pa refers to other sources as “Ngam-rdzong's tradition” and “some other,” which probably means Rngog Mdo-sde.

⁴⁶² Ehrhard 2010b.

⁴⁶³ Larsson 2012, pp. 255–261.

⁴⁶⁴ This expression was coined by Stefan Larsson (Larsson 2012, pp. 229–230) on the basis of Franz-Karl Ehrhard's proposition (Ehrhard 2013). Larsson says: “Franz-Karl Ehrhard has suggested that on the basis of the stylistic criteria of the Buddhist printed texts one may identify individual ‘schools’ or ‘workshops,’ and that these could then be named after the leading figures or religious communities with which the Buddhist artists and craftsmen affiliated themselves. One can thus speak of the ‘school of Tsangnyön’ or the ‘workshop of Tsangnyön,’ which consisted of Tsangnyön, his disciples, and other affiliated people.”

⁴⁶⁵ Rgod tshang ras chen: “rje mar pa lo tsā ba chen po'i rnam thar.” In: *Snyan brgyud yid bzhin nor bu* (?). NGMPP Reel no L941/5 (16 folios). Thanks to Marta Sernesi for a digital copy of the text and information on the collection.

This biography is therefore a fine example of post-Gtsang-smyon's composition: the legacy of this great author is kept, all the while preserving the influence of the other versions that Gtsang-smyon blended very efficiently in his work. It is more scholarly and less fluid than his predecessor's, yet extremely faithful to the early sources of Mar-pa's biographical tradition, thus speaking in favour of "the school of Gtsang-smyon."

2.5.2. Biography from a rosary by Kun-dga'-rin-chen (1475–1527) [1508]

The collection and its author

This condensed hagiography of Mar-pa belongs to the *Golden Rosary of the Precious Bka'-brgyud, Hagiographies of the Lineages of Successive Masters*⁴⁶⁶ composed by Kun-dga'-rin-chen in 1508.⁴⁶⁷ As its title indicates, this collection gathers the biographies of the first Indian masters of the Bka'-brgyud lineage (the gurus of the four lineage transmissions received by Tilopā) up to the Tibetan founder of the 'Bri-gung-'thil monastery and followed by all of the throne holders until Rin-chen chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan dpal-bzang-po (1449–1484), the author's predecessor. The 15th throne-holder, Rgyal-ba gnyis-pa Kun-dga'-rin-chen chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan dpal-bzang-po (1475–1527) put his name (*kun dga'i ming can*) at the end of most of the biographies from 'Jig-rten-mgon-po onwards, but the first ones, until Phag-mo-gru-pa, are not signed. It seems reasonable, however, to consider him to be the author of the *Hagiography of the Lord from Lho-brag, Rain of Nectar*,⁴⁶⁸ as its style matches that of the other biographies of the collection.

Kun-dga'-rin-chen⁴⁶⁹ was Gtsang-smyon Heruka's contemporary. They may have met at the court of Don-yod-rdo-rje, the Rin-spung-pa *sa skyong* (1462/3–1512), whom they both considered their disciple. This was the case with many Bka'-brgyud hierarchs, such as the 7th Karma-pa Chos-grags-rgya-mtsho (1454–1506), and the 4th Zhwa-dmar-pa Chos-grags-ye-shes (1453–1524), with whom the 'Bri-gung-'thil abbot also had close ties. Kun-dga'-rin-chen lived at a most favorable time for his lineage: through his political alliances and religious relationships (with the Stag-lung abbot for one), he made 'Jig-rten-mgon-po's teachings, which had been rather neglected by his predecessors, bloom again. This may explain why Kun-dga'-rin-chen was called a "Second Victorious One" (*rgyal ba gnyis pa*); half of his

⁴⁶⁶ *Bka' brgyud rin po che gser gyi phreng ba'i gdan rabs bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar.*

⁴⁶⁷ Kun-dga'-rin-chen: *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 1, pp. 2–361. See the author's signature p. 360.

⁴⁶⁸ "Rje btsun lho brag pa'i rnam thar bdud rtsi'i char rgyun." *Kun-dga'-rin-chen*, pp. 64–78.

⁴⁶⁹ See Sørensen & Hazod 2007, vol. 2, pp. 726–728.

gsung 'bum (four volumes) is exclusively devoted to the many *rnam thar* written in his honor.

Mar-pa's biography and its sources

The influence of Gtsang-smyon's work is not felt in the hagiography of Mar-pa by Kun-dga'-rin-chen, which is not surprising given that the two were almost contemporaries. As in the previous religious histories studied, this biography is a synthetic work that summarizes its sources. Like the other biographies of this collection, it begins with a tribute verse. Kun-dga'-rin-chen then relates Mar-pa's travels to India in eight pages (pp. 64–72), before cataloguing his masters and the transmissions he received. There is an explicit list of thirteen gurus; such lists also appear in the *Deb ther dmar po*⁴⁷⁰ and in Gtsang-smyon's text,⁴⁷¹ but the masters are different. The differences are most probably due to the fact that information about Mar-pa's having had thirteen masters appeared quite early (in the songs), but they were not nominally listed. To give them names, later authors had to rely on their own research.

After his review of Mar-pa's training, Kun-dga'-rin-chen relates the translator's final return to Tibet, his practice of entering another's body, and his death. He finally gives a brief presentation of Mar-pa's transmission by providing lists of translations, compositions, and disciples. Here again, the lists of disciples are unlike any presented thus far, which shows the author's independence from established sources.

This extensive editing of information concerning Mar-pa's life story makes it difficult to ascertain exact sources. As far as raw information is concerned (his parents' names, his date of death, the practice of entering another's body.), much of it seems to have been adapted from Rngog Mdosde's version (MKNT). Regarding the plot, there are many similarities with Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's text: they both start with a first five-year trip to India without Mar-pa's meeting Nāropā and offer several similar details. Both versions are abridged here but they can be recognized nonetheless. One notable absence is that of the Aural Transmission's version. It is more than likely that Kun-dga'-rin-chen knew of one version or another from the Aural Transmission, but deliberately chose not to take any of them into account, at least when developing the plot. Concerning the many lists, it is probable that the 'Bri-gung-'thil throne-holder used as much information as he could glean from all available sources.

⁴⁷⁰ *Deb ther dmar po*, p. 74.

⁴⁷¹ Gtsang-smyon, p. 222.

2.5.3. Biographies composed by Dpa'-bo II Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba (1504–1566)

2.5.3.1. The *Scholar's Feast* (1545–1565)

The *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, composed between 1545 and 1565 by the 2nd Dpa'-bo, Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, is a milestone of Tibetan historiography. It is widely used nowadays for its faithful rendition of epigraphic inscriptions dating from the Tibetan Empire. The text is also known as the *Lho brag chos 'byung*, as a reference to the Dpa'-bo incarnations' seat in Gro-bo-lung, Mar-pa's homeland. Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba was among the great Bka'-brgyud hierarchs of his time. He was a contemporary of the 8th Karma-pa Mi-bskyod rdo-rje (1507–1554) and a disciple of the 4th Zhwa-dmar Chos-kyi-grags-pa (1453–1524) and of Karma phrin-las-pa (1456–1539). Among his main disciples were the 9th Karma-pa Dbang-phyug-rdo-rje and the 5th Zhwa-dmar Dkon-mchog-yan-lag. He lived during a prosperous time for his lineage, and enjoyed the protection of the Rin-spungs-pa *sa skyong* Don-yod-rdo-rje (1462/3–1512) during his youth. He is celebrated for his erudition, of which this *Scholar's Feast* is a prime example.

There are many editions of the text, such as those listed in *Tibetan Histories*.⁴⁷² The one used here is the two-volume edition of the Mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang reproduced in 2003 by the Vajra Vidya Library in India. The short historical notice on Mar-pa⁴⁷³ inserted in the section describing the masters common to all Bka'-brgyud lineages is a summary of the much longer biography that Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba wrote in 1563. Therefore, this summary is translated in full and correspondences with the longer version have been indicated below, in order to provide at once a glance on the longer version and an easier access.

The Lo-tsā-ba Lord was born into the Mar-pa clan in Sbe-sar dkon-mchog-stod kyi bkra-shis-ling in the West of Lho-brag.⁴⁷⁴ His father was Dbang-phyug-'od-zer and his mother Rgyal-mo-mtsho. He was the third of their five sons.⁴⁷⁵ From the age of twelve, [775] he studied with 'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba at

⁴⁷² Martin 1997, no. 168.

⁴⁷³ *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, pp. 774–776.

⁴⁷⁴ Dpa'-bo II, p. 3

⁴⁷⁵ In the longer version, Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba does not retain this version of Mar-pa's mother's name, but proposes four others: Rgyal-mo-blo-gros, Rgyal-mo-'od-zer-mtsho, Sman-mo-khye-'dren and Skal-ldan-skyid. Among these, only Skal-ldan-skyid appears as such in previous biographies. Rgya-mo-'od-zer and Rgya-mo-'od-sde, modified by the 2nd Dpa'-bo as "Rgyal-mo," also appear.

Myu-gu-lung.⁴⁷⁶ At fifteen, he went to Nepal.⁴⁷⁷ He attended Spyi-ther-pa for three years and then left for India. At Lakṣetra in the West, he met Jñānagarbha and studied many *Kriyātantras*. During a *gaṇacakra*, he saw the magical display of four of Nāropā's disciples who had miraculous powers and faith. One of them, Painḍapā, introduced him to Nāropā,⁴⁷⁸ from whom [Mar-pa] received Hevajra with the key-instructions. As advised by Nāropā, he received Guhyasamāja from Jñānagarbha,⁴⁷⁹ Mahāmāya from Kukuripa,⁴⁸⁰ Mahāmudrā from Maitrīpā,⁴⁸¹ Catuḥpīṭha from Adorned with Bone Ornaments (*rus pa'i rgyan can*), etc.⁴⁸² In general, he spent time with thirteen gurus who could change appearances with certainty⁴⁸³ and others. He returned to Tibet where he met Mes, Rngog, Mtshur, Mgo-legs and others.⁴⁸⁴ He collected lots of gold, which he used to make offerings and sponsor worship [in India]. He was told that he should come one more time.⁴⁸⁵ While he was again in Tibet accomplishing the welfare of beings, he learned that Nāropā had entered yogic practice. At the *dākinīs'* request, he left for India.⁴⁸⁶ During one month he offered *gaṇacakras* and maṇḍalas to all of his masters and prayed with them; all predicted that he would meet [Nāropā]. In the end, Kasoripa declared that he would meet [Nāropā] in eight months.⁴⁸⁷ Each month, he had a visionary meeting. He finally met him directly⁴⁸⁸ and in accordance with Tilo's prophecy was led to Puṣpahari, where he completely received all key instructions.

⁴⁷⁶ Dpa'-bo II, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–11.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–17.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, detailed p. 64.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–33.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

[Nāropā] predicted that [Mar-pa's] disciples and their disciples would be excellent and he entrusted him with [the responsibility] of taming [disciples in] the Land of Snow.⁴⁸⁹ Seeing that [Nāropā] was leaving for Mkha'-spyod, [Mar-pa] beseeched him and he appeared in person in a thick forest of teak and taught the song that sums up the six doctrines.⁴⁹⁰ [Mar-pa] was assured that they were beyond meeting and parting. He also made thanksgiving offerings to his other masters, witnessed many miracles,⁴⁹¹ and then went back to Tibet. He brought a good number of disciples to spiritual maturity. Because of a mistaken interdependent connection and as predicted by the master, his best son lost his life.⁴⁹² To Rgnog, he gave the explanation of the tantra of Hevajra, etc., as well as the mixing and transference;⁴⁹³ to Mtshur-ston, Guhyasamāja and Pañcakrama; to Mes-tshon-po [776], Mahāmāya and Luminosity; and to Mi-la-ras-pa, he mainly taught Caṇḍalī and [gave] him all instructions. To Mgo-legs, he gave the fifteen cycles of instruction on mind and so on. He entrusted each of them with one of the Dharma transmissions, and brought an infinite number of fortunate beings to spiritual maturity and liberation. At 86,⁴⁹⁴ on the full moon of the 12th month, Jo-mo Bdag-med-ma melted into light and merged into the master's heart. With moonlight emitting from his *uṣṇīṣa*, he entered purity; what is known as "the Lady's skull" must be another wife's skull.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 103–113.

⁴⁹³ *bsre 'pho*. This refers to the six doctrines of Nāropā as transmitted by Mar-pa and the Rngog clan lineage. See the part on entering another's body (p. 202) for some references on this tradition.

⁴⁹⁴ Dpa'-bo II, p. 133.

⁴⁹⁵ This passage is illegible in Dpa'-bo II, p. 132, but is clear in the LGNT version, vol ya, p. 321: *deng sang yum bdag med ma'i dbu thod yin zer ba du ma yod pa rnams yum gzhan gyi dbu thod yin srid lal yum bdag med ma dngos ni sku lus ma bzbag pa yin no*. "There are nowadays many who say that there is a skull of Lady Bdag-med-ma. It must be the skull of another wife, as in reality Lady Bdag-med-ma did not leave a body behind." This is the only contentious remark in the whole passage on Mar-pa of the *Scholar's Feast*. Maybe Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba could no longer resist the temptation to argue when he reached the end of Mar-pa's life story!

The five pleasing sons, the six transmission sons and the four devoted sons were among his great disciples.⁴⁹⁶ He took a great many others under his protection. Three of them—Rngog-ston chen-po, La-stod rnal-'byor-ma, and Chibs-kha-ba lho-pa rta-gom—physically reached Mkha'-spyod.⁴⁹⁷

Both the condensed and the extensive texts follow the same progression, but it is obvious that they do not have the same scope. The *Feast* is a much more far-ranging religious history that progresses from India to China, even if its second part focuses on the Bka'-brgyud lineages, in which Mar-pa always plays a central role. The style is terse and generally devoid of critical remarks. In contrast, the hagiography is replete with details, many points are analyzed and compared, and all songs of Mar-pa available to Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba are present. It is worth noting that sixty years after Gtsang-smyon's passing, his influence in the biographical tradition was still mitigated: even though Dpa'-bo followed in some of his illustrious predecessor's footsteps, he nevertheless chose to make Mar-pa's travels in India start with Jñānagarbha, even if the meeting with Nāropā follows quickly thereafter.

2.5.3.2. *The Venerable Mar-pa's Hagiography, Expression of his Miraculous Deeds* [1563]

Different versions of the biography

This *rnam thar* was composed by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba in 1563 (*chu mo phag*), three years before he died. One of two very extensive biographies on Mar-pa, it is slightly shorter than Gtsang-smyon's opus. There are now several editions of the same text, but when I began studying it (in 2007), there was only a xylograph. I received it from Gene Smith, and it was probably the same text he studied in his *Green Books*.⁴⁹⁸ The text is 137 pages long, and given the state of decay of the first and last page, and the blackened, rounded edges of the other pages, it appears to have been left unprotected over many years. There are no margin inscriptions, except for the folio numbers. Modern numbers were added during digitalization, which is defective on some pages—the paper probably moved and some words are blurred and deformed—which adds to the difficulty of deciphering the letters. This formerly dire situation has been corrected, as two new versions are now

⁴⁹⁶ Dpa'-bo II, pp. 134–135; the listing there is slightly different (*mnyes pa'i bu bzhi, thod rgal gyi sras, bka' babs kyī bu lnga, mos gus can bzhi*).

⁴⁹⁷ This detail is not given in the longer version, and the last two of the three disciples are not mentioned.

⁴⁹⁸ W1KG9259, pp. 269–300.

available: an *dbu can* manuscript in volume *ya* of the *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* and a computerized version.⁴⁹⁹ The xylograph most probably represents the source version, as there are several errors in the manuscript text that are not present in the xylograph but which could have resulted from a misreading of it.⁵⁰⁰ At the end of the xylograph there is a printer's colophon with the names of the eight craftsmen who took part in the printing process, and of the place where the text was carved, Rnam-rgyal-rtse. No date is indicated. There is no colophon in the manuscript.

Sources

The text is called the *Venerable Mar-pa's Hagiography, Expression of his Miraculous Deeds*.⁵⁰¹ Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba says he composed it on the basis of his prayers to Mar-pa and of thirteen distinct hagiographies, at the request of many people. Among these, two are mentioned: the Sa-skyong called Nor-bu from the Gwa-zi clan of the great seat of Stag-lung,⁵⁰² and the benefactor of the precious Bka'-bryud teachings from the Sku-rab family called Sa-skyong G.yul-rgyal-bstan-pa.⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁹ Respectively LGNT, vol. 24 (*ya*), pp. 197–325, and Varanasi: Vajra Vidya Libray, 2010. I did not consult the second version.

⁵⁰⁰ Dpa'-bo II (xylograph), p. 91, LGNT, vol. 24 (ms), p. 282: this is an example of a double error of the manuscript that shows that it was copied on the xylograph: in the manuscript, two verses in a song have been added in the margin by a later hand; they were omitted by the first hand, who instead repeated two lines of verse twice. All four verses are correct in the xylograph and fill up exactly one line, with the same words recurring every second verse (which explains the error of the copyist who jumped two lines to go to the same word, and then copied twice the following two lines). There is another mistake in the manuscript colophon: the name of the second requester appears in full in the xylograph, but as the word "sa skyong" appears twice in the name, the copyist made a mistake which he corrected later by adding the missing words above the line (*sa skyong [ba chen po sku rab nas sa skyong] g.yul rgyal brtan pa*). This kind of copying mistake is called "haplography." See van Schaik 2007, p. 191, for the different kinds of errors "of the eye" and "of the ear" that are found in manuscripts. It shows that the manuscript was based on an earlier written text as these are mistakes "of the eye". It is of course possible that the manuscript was copied from another version than the xylograph, but the first error—the four verses on the same line—seems to confirm that the original was the xylograph.

⁵⁰¹ *Rje btsun mar pa'i rnam par thar pa grub pa'i ngo mtshar brjod pa*.

⁵⁰² Dpa'-bo II, pp. 136–137 (LGNT, vol. 24, p. 325): *stag lung thang pa chen po'i gwa zi'i gdung las sa skyong nor bu'i mtshan can*. In the 1550s and 60s, none of the throne holders of the two Stag-lung seats (Ya-thang and Ma-thang) had "Nor-bu" in his name, so the identification is difficult, as far as I can determine. See Sørensen 2007, pp. 747 and 754).

⁵⁰³ Dpa'-bo II, pp. 136–137: *bka' bryud rin po che'i bstan pa'i sbying bdag stobs kyiis sa*

Among the thirteen biographies that Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba says he consulted, some are clearly cited and are available today. This is the case for the *Deb ther dmar po* and *sngon po*, as well as the “two traditions from Ngam-rdzong” (*ngam rdzong lugs gnyis*, p. 4); the first may be the hagiography compiled by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, and the second, the one by Don-mo-ri-pa. Another important text is the *Lo rgyus the tshom sel byed* by Rngog Mdo-sde (1078–1154).

The identification of some of the other texts mentioned is provisional. The *Lineage Succession of the Bka'-brgyud from Mtshu-phu*⁵⁰⁴ may be the biography allegedly composed by the 4th Mtshur-phu regent, Go-shri Rgyal-tshab Grags-pa-don-grub (1547–1617). I could not consult this text, but some excerpts are quoted in a recent study of Mar-pa's biography undertaken by Mkhan-po Rgyal-mtshan-phun-tshogs of Dpal-spungs-shes-rab-gling Monastery in India; he gives this authorship.⁵⁰⁵ Along with the connection with Mtshur-phu, another indication that identifies the text cited by the 2nd Dpa'-bo as being the one quoted in this recently published biography of Mar-pa is that according to Dpa'-bo, the *Lineage Succession from Mtshu-phu* gives iron rat (*lcags byi*) as year of birth, and the same year is given for the text by Mkhan-po Rgyal-mtshan-phun-tshogs.⁵⁰⁶ One problem with that, however, is that the 2nd Dpa'-bo wrote this reference in 1563, when the young Rgyal-tshab was only sixteen and could hardly have composed an

skyong ba chen po sku rab nas sa skyong g.yul rgyal brtan pa [...]. This seems to refer to Sa-skyong G.yul-rgyal-bstan-pa'i-rgyal-mtshan who is also mentioned in one of the printing colophons of the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*; see *ibid.*, pp. 1333.23–1334.5. The part of the religious chronicle dealing with the Karma Kam-tshang lineage was xylographed at the latter's residence, Sku-rab-rnam-rgyal-khang-bzang. In the early 17th century, the Sku-rab family sided with the Gtsang ruler Phun-tshogs-rnam-rgyal and was close to the Karma Bka'-brgyud lineage. They may therefore have suffered when the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang took office. See Shamar 2012, p. 28, for a short reference.

⁵⁰⁴ *Mtshur phu ba'i bka' rgyud gdung rabs*.

⁵⁰⁵ The reference given for this text, Palpung, p. 176, is as follows: *rgyal tshab bzhi pa grags pa don grub (1547–1613) kyis mdzad pa'i mnga' bdag mar pa lo tsā ba chen po chos kyī blo gros kyī rnam par thar pa dpal phyag rgya chen po mchog tu mi 'gyur ba'i ye shes grub pa'i spyod yul rgya mtsho'i tshul la 'jug pa legs par bshad pa rin po che'i gru gzings*. It must be noted that the dates of the 4th Rgyal-tshab are not those of the TBRC (1550–1617), but those indicated in the *Rosary of Crystal Gems* (Diwakar, vol. 2, pp. 307–312). The text referred to by Mkhan-po Rgyal-mtshan-phun-tshogs must be a manuscript as no indication of publication is given. This is also the case with another version of Mar-pa's life, the one by Nye-gnas Ye-shes-rgyal-mtshan (see “U-rgyan-pa”), which I know to be a manuscript thanks to Charles Manson who sent me photographs of it.

⁵⁰⁶ Palpung, p. 176.

apparently lengthy biography of Mar-pa. Hopefully, further research about this biography on the basis of the original text will help clarify authorship.

Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba also refers to a biography composed by his guru, the 4th Zhwa-dmar Chos-grags-ye-shes (1453–1524). Although the complete works of the 4th Zhwa-dmar were published by the Krung-go'i bod-rig-pa dpe-skrun-khang (Beijing) in 2009, they do not contain a *rnam thar* proper of Mar-pa. There are several praises,⁵⁰⁷ none of which indicates the dates advanced by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, plus two interviews between the Zhwa-dmar-pa and one of his students. These contentious texts present many dates and are mainly concerned with the issue of Mar-pa's meeting with Nāropā.⁵⁰⁸ They could be the "biography" that the 2nd Dpa'-bo refers to, which is the opinion of Mkhan-po Rgyal-mtshan-phun-tshogs.⁵⁰⁹

Finally, the *Rnam thar rim bzhi pa* by Rngog Rin-chen-bzang-po (1231–1307)⁵¹⁰ is presently unavailable. Hence, among the thirteen sources referred to by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, five have been identified and studied, two have been identified with some reservations, and one is named but unavailable.

Besides these avowed loans, there are others, which are not explicitly mentioned but are obvious, such as the hagiography composed by Gtsang-smyon Heruka. An instance of that is that Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba repeats the same songs than Gtsang-smyon Heruka in nearly the same order. These include the Song of Shame to Gnyos and the various songs concerning Mdo-sde's death, though we have seen that they were the ones that Gtsang-smyon may have interpreted the most freely.

Most of the time, the 2nd Dpa'-bo merely alludes to diverging versions by speaking of "earlier hagiographies" (*rnam thar snga malsnga rabs*) or "later hagiographies" (*rnam thar phyi ma*). This makes their identification complicated, identification not simplified either by the fact that when he compares Mar-pa's dates of birth and death in the various biographies, Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba does not present them as they appeared in the originals. For example, he states that "in two early [texts], it is said that [he was born] six years later, in a fire horse year (1006) and that he lived 86 or 88 years."⁵¹¹ There are several old biographies, including Rngog Mdo-sde and Don-mo-ri-pa, that say he died at 88, for instance; but they only indicate

⁵⁰⁷ "Mnga' bdag lo tsā ba chen po'i bstod pa dad pa'i 'brug sgra sogs," vol. 4 (*nya*), pp. 161–165.

⁵⁰⁸ Both are studied in the part on Nāropā (pp. 224–225).

⁵⁰⁹ Palpung, p. 176.

⁵¹⁰ See above, p. 56, for more information about this elusive text.

⁵¹¹ Dpa'-bo II, p. 4: *snga rabs gnyis nang las drug gis phyi ba'i me rta pa gya bryad dam gya drug bzhus par 'chad*.

that he died in a bird year without mentioning that he was born in a horse year, and omit the element (it could just as well have been twelve years earlier or later). So it is difficult to confirm that these two texts are indeed the ones that Dpa'-bo refers to, even though other indications would seem to confirm this.

It should also be noted that biographies about other masters were used to complete the narrative. Rngog Chos-rdor's autobiography is mentioned,⁵¹² as is a song by Dge-bshes Grwa-pa mngon-shes (1012–1090).⁵¹³ Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba also borrowed some episodes from Gtsang-smyon's life of Mi-la-ras-pa without citing it, especially when relating events linked with Mar-pa that Gtsang-smyon only mentioned in Mi-la-ras-pa's life story to avoid repetition. Several songs from that text were also incorporated. It should be noted here that although Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba's complete works are not yet available to us, they do not seem to include a Mi-la-ras-pa hagiography, or any other for that matter, so it is only logical that details on Mar-pa that appear in Mi-la-ras-pa's life story have been added in Mar-pa's for the sake of exhaustivity. As a Lho-brag resident, the 2nd Dpa'-bo gave great importance to Mar-pa and even commissioned a statue of him for his Gro-bo-lung monastery.

In addition to textual sources, the 2nd Dpa'-bo used his ideal location at Mar-pa's seat in Lho-brag to provide details which are not found in other biographies. Concerning the place of birth, he says that "although it is well-known that he was born in Chu-khyer, what used to be called the 'nine Chu-khyer districts' has become 'Sbe-sar.'" ⁵¹⁴ As for the place where Mar-pa died, "his passing place does not appear in hagiographies, but [I] think it might be at the copper-cave in Dro-bo-lung [sic]." ⁵¹⁵ He also presents previously unpublished narratives and songs that were probably found in his monastery's library. ⁵¹⁶ For instance, during his second journey, Mar-pa is said to meet three *yoginīs* in East India; they engage in various dance movements which cause Mar-pa to enter a specific kind of meditative absorption and instruct him via four songs. Dpa'-bo II says for the first that "my text is not complete and I will include [the missing elements] later if I find

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3: *chu khyer du 'kbrungs par grags kyang sngon chu khyer ru dgu zhes pa la sbe sar 'dren pa'i dbang du byas pa'i.*

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133: *sku thim sa rnam thar rnams ni mi snang yang dro bo lung zangs phug yin pa snyam la.*

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–39.

them.⁵¹⁷ He then quotes the song of the second *yoginī*, that of the third, and another sung by all three at once. He adds that Mar-pa wrote them down three days after he heard them on a palm leaf in fear that he may forget them, and that he then translated them in Nālandā and transmitted them to Mar-pa Mgo-yags, who had invited him.⁵¹⁸ Then Dpa'-bo II adds a further song in Tibetan whose title is spelled in Sanskrit; it was sung by 25 *dākas* and 37 *yoginīs*, some of them identified by name.

A major advantage of this text is the scholarly approach that Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba brings to a traditional rendering of Mar-pa's life story. Alongside the usual litany of songs and visions, there are critical passages in which the 2nd Dpa'-bo proposes parallel versions of the songs, comments on doctrinal points, and offers historical remarks. Two examples are the discussion on the Aural Transmission classifications,⁵¹⁹ and the following passage, which points to three likely sources:

Though a late biography posits that [Mar-pa] received the transmission of the *Vajrāvalī* (*Rdo rje phreng ba*) empowerment that [Atiśa] was then conferring, given that this empowerment was compiled by Abhayadatta, Sgam-po-pa's contemporary, it could not have existed at the time. In two early [texts], however, there is mention of the *Ratnāvalī* (*Rin chen phreng ba*) empowerment, which is a *Kriyātantra* knowledge-entrustment also referred to as an empowerment and found nowadays in the *Hundred Sādhana Ocean*. [49] Furthermore, it would have been unusual for Jo-bo [Atiśa] to give empowerments of the higher tantras to a large public in Tibet.⁵²⁰

The late biography referred to here must be Gtsang-smyon Heruka's, where the *Vajrāvalī* empowerment, one of a set of three empowerments belonging to the *Niruttaratantras*,⁵²¹ is indeed indicated. Rngog Mdo-sde and the *Lho*

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33: 'di'i ma phyi ma tshang phyis rnyed na gzbug.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38 (LGNT, vol. ya, p. 244): 'di la'ang dbang rdo rje phreng ba gnung ba'i zhar 'dug pas zhus zer pa nram thar phyi rabs ba cig na snang yang dbang rdo rje phreng ba ni slob dpon a bhyas bsgrigs pa yin la de ni rje sgam po pa dang dus mtshungs pas 'di dus rdo rje phreng ba ma byung zhing snga rabs ma re gnyis na dbang rin chen phreng ba zer ba snang ba bya rgyud kyi rig btad la dbang gi ming du btags pa deng sang gi sgrub thabs brgya rtsa rgya misho lta bu zhig [49] yod na ma gtogs jo bos bod tu thun mong gi gdul bya la rgyud sde gong ma'i dbang mdzad pa mi 'dra'o.

⁵²¹ See BA, pp. 1046–1047, for information about this transmission.

rong chos 'byung—which we may assume to be the two “early texts”—mention the *Ratnāvalī*.⁵²²

Last but not least among Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba's influences are Mar-pa's songs. The author remarks several times that when faced with diverging versions he has based his own account on Mar-pa's songs, which he considers as important as the hagiographies. He is, in fact, the one who includes the greatest number of songs in his text.

We have seen that despite its late composition, this biography is particularly helpful when studying Mar-pa's biographical tradition. Even though it was not the first to present a somewhat critical approach by openly mentioning alternative versions—most religious histories engage in this kind of analysis—Dpa'-bo's keen eye for detail and pedagogic skills help bring some order to the diachronic evolution of Mar-pa's biographical tradition. He also gives us an informed glimpse into the historical and theoretical significations of certain aspects of Mar-pa's life. The new material he added and the care with which he transcribed the songs also provide us with useful tools for a critical analysis of Mar-pa's life writing. All in all, this biography can be considered a valuable addition to Mar-pa's life-building.

2.5.4. Religious history composed by Padma-dkar-po (1527–1592) [1575]

The collection and its author

This *Religious History, Sun that Makes the Lotus of the Teaching Blossom*⁵²³ was compiled by Padma dkar-po in 1575 at the request of Ngag-gi-dbang-phyug Gags-pa-rnam-rgyal, the governor of Gong-dkar District, and revised in 1580.⁵²⁴ It runs all the way from the Buddha to the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud predecessors of Padma dkar-po (who was recognized as the 4th Rgyal-dbang 'Brug-chen), and shows how Vajrayāna unfolded in India and in Tibet, with a focus on the first Bka'-brgyud masters. The section on Mar-pa is 28 folios long and appears in the second volume of the 24-volume *Complete Works* published by the Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang in 1973–74.⁵²⁵

Mar-pa's biography

Padma-dkar-po does not indicate Mar-pa's dates of birth and death, but presents many chronological references largely based on Mar-pa's songs. In

⁵²² MKNT, p. 171, and *Lho rong*, p. 34. More precisely, MKNT says in small letters: *der jo bo la dbang nyan tshong gnas su rin chen tsa kra zhus nas*.

⁵²³ *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i padma rgyas pa'i nyin byed*.

⁵²⁴ See Smith 2001, p. 83, and *Pad dkar gsung 'bum*, vol. 4, p. 12.

⁵²⁵ Pad-dkar, pp. 431–459.

sum, Mar-pa is said to have gone to India for the last time at the age of 51, during the year of the snake (1041).⁵²⁶ He meets Atiśa on the way, and when he reaches India, he is told that Nāropā had entered yogic practice the previous year. From these remarks, we may deduce that Padma-dkar-po believed that Mar-pa was born in the early 990s. This is confirmed by Kaṅ-thog Rig-'dzin,⁵²⁷ who said that according to Padma-dkar-po, Mar-pa was born in 991 (*lcags yod*). Mar-pa returned to Tibet at 53 and met Mi-la-ras-pa, 29 years his junior (which would place Mila's birth at around 1019), when he was 74, four years before the death of his son Darma Mdo-sde, who was 21 when he died. That would place the meeting in circa 1063. Mar-pa is reported to have died at 88, i.e. in 1078. Whatever we may think about these dates (which would place Mar-pa's early visit to 'Brog-mi at the turn of the millennium), they show that Padma-dkar-po's primary sources, even more important than the *rnam thars*, are the songs. This impression is backed by the fact that Padma-dkar-po stated several times that he based his work on the *mgur*, and indeed a large part of the narrative can be found therein.

The songs' central role explains the particular attention Padma-dkar-po paid to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's hagiography of Mar-pa, which was also largely based on the songs. Several stories originating from that source have been repeated, beginning with Mar-pa's visions with the *mudrās* of Śānti-bhadra and Jñānagarbha. Another parallel that can be drawn between the two is that Padma-dkar-po placed the prediction of the interruption of Mar-pa's family lineage during the first meeting between Nāropā and Mar-pa, while most other biographies indicate the last encounter.

Although he obviously knew Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's version of Mar-pa's life story, Padma-dkar-po did not follow it in his presentation of the first journey. Instead, he chose to align his narrative with those of Gtsang-smyon and the many authors who preceded him, having Mar-pa meet Nāropā first

⁵²⁶ Pad-dkar, p. 454, gives the following song extract: *tshe sum gnyis rgya gar yul du bskyal/ llo bzhi bcu'i bar du thos bsam byas/ ldus na ning gdug pa sbrul gyi lol/ cho 'phrul rta yi zla ba la/ mi kho bos lam la zhugs nas mchi*. An alternative reading of the first verse, found for example in Dpa'-bo II, p. 81, is *tshe sum cha rgya gar yul du bskyal*. In this case, Mar-pa would not have spent two-thirds of his life in India, but one-third. Given that he is meant to be 53 (12 + 40 years of study) at this point, this would represent either 17 or 34 years in India. As Padma-dkar-po says elsewhere that Mar-pa spent 19 + 6 + 1 = 26 years in India, both calculations are wrong. But it is quite unlikely—if we choose to believe that Mar-pa sang the exact words attributed to him—that Mar-pa estimated precisely the time he spent in India. The figure only gives an idea of the length of time spent there rather than an exact calculation.

⁵²⁷ TWNB, vol. 3, p. 640.

and only then receiving other gurus' teachings. Though there are differences between these two holders of the Aural Transmission, Padma-dkar-po follows Gtsang-smyon on many accounts, and most notably—like Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba—when describing Gnyos' destruction of the texts and Mdo-sde's death.

Another possible source may be Rngog Mdo-sde's version, as it is the only one besides that of Gtsang-smyon that mentions Atiśa and holds that Mar-pa met Nāropā at Vikramaśīla rather than Nālandā. Then again, perhaps Padma-dkar-po did not use this source but rather consulted the many colophons of texts preserved in the 'Brug-pa tradition (in the *'Brug pa chos mdzod chen mo*, for instance) that mention Vikramaśīla. This is also the tradition that claimed—as did Padma-dkar-po—that Nāropā had a monastery in Kashmir. The biography supposedly composed by the 4th Rgyal-tshab, who had a very specific version of how Mar-pa met Nāropā, may also have been a source. He states that Mar-pa first spent five years in India with Jñānagarbha and others, then went to Vikramaśīla in Nāropā's absence. He left to find him in the West, and finally spent time with him in his Phullahari monastery in Kashmir.

All in all, Padma-dkar-po's sources, besides the songs—which he does not paraphrase but uses as narration—appear to be the two streams of biographies of the Aural Transmission, which originate with Ngam-rdzong stonpa and Ras-chung-pa. This would make sense since Padma-dkar-po was the head of the 'Brug-pa lineage and a holder of these lineages which he did his best to preserve.⁵²⁸ Although he upheld these traditions, his biography of Mar-pa is quite original: he summarizes most episodes, does not repeat previous versions *verbatim* but undertakes an original work of composition and synthesis. He also departs from most earlier versions by focusing principally on India and shelving many of Mar-pa's experiences in Tibet. For Tibet he reports raw facts and juxtaposes all the lists of disciples he can get hold of, including some discovered in the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, thus demonstrating the diversity and relevance of his library.

Two episodes appear exclusively in this hagiography. The first is narrated at the end of Mar-pa's first journey to India:

Once it was drizzling there, and the master was protecting himself from the rain by staying near an overhanging wall. By the side of the temple railing, a woman was sweeping bird droppings. When that woman's broom fell down towards the ground, she peeked left and right, and, as there seemed to be

⁵²⁸ See Torricelli 2000 and Sernesi 2004 for, respectively, Padma-dkar-po's role in compiling the founding texts of the Aural Transmission and the specificity of that tradition.

no one, extended her arm from above and caught the broom. [Mar-pa] checked who it was and [saw] that it was Lord Maitrīpā's *mūdra*, Chu-shing-gi-nye-ma-can (Cluster of Banana Trees). Having understood that she was a *dākinī*, he immediately offered her a maṇḍala of gold and asked to be accepted as her disciple.⁵²⁹

The second is similar to the story narrated in other texts about Mar-pa's concern that Ākarasiddhi would eclipse his authority in the transmission of the *Guhyasamājatantra*: while teaching in Gro-bo-lung, Mar-pa decides to challenge one of 'Gos Lhas-brtsas's disciple, a certain Jo-bo Khyung-pa from Snga-sde-sgang, who teaches a commentary on the *Catuspīṭha*. Mar-pa claims that the one and only text on that tantra in India comes from Nāropā.⁵³⁰ According to Padma-dkar-po, the impostor recognizes his mistake and stops teaching, thus leaving Mar-pa, who is attended by throngs of *dākinīs*, the exclusive rights to that tantra.

Thus, despite its classical structure, the biography composed by Padma-dkar-po is quite original. The usual sources have been reorganized, new ones have been added, and the primary source of information—Mar-pa's songs—have been given pride of place.

2.5.5. Religious history composed by Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal (1571–1626) [1609]

The collection and its author

The 17th throne-holder of the Stag-lung Ya-thang Rdo-rje-gdan Monastery,⁵³¹ Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal, was one of the most famous masters of the Stag lung bka'-brgyud lineage. He was the son of one of the governors of the Ga-zi clan ruling in Stag-lung and of the daughter of the 16th 'Bri-gung throne-holder, from the Skyu-ra clan.⁵³² He enjoyed a powerful position and

⁵²⁹ Pad-dkar, p. 440: *der char zim pa zhig byung nas bla ma gyang sna breng nge zhig na char yibs byed cing bzbugs pas/ lha khang zhig gi bya 'dabs kyi kha na bud med cig bya brun 'phyag gi 'dug/ bud med de'i phyags ma shod du lhung bas phar cer tshur cer bltas nas mi med pa 'dra bas steng nas lag pa nar byas nas phyags ma bkangs song/ su yin bltas pas jo bo me tri pa'i mu dra yin/ chu shing gi snye ma can bya ba de 'dug/ de mkha' 'gro mar go nas/ de rang du gser gyi maṇḍala phul nas bdag rjes su gzung 'tshal zhus pas/...*

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁵³¹ As opposed to Ma-thang Ri-bo-che in Khams, founded by Stag-lung Sangs-rgyad-dbon-po (1251–1296) in 1272, after a schism within the Ga-zi clan that ruled in Stag lung.

⁵³² Sørensen & Hazod 2007, vol. 2, p. 747.

was famous for his learning and accomplishment. He composed his religious history, the *Ocean of Marvels, a History of the Wish-fulfilling Gem of the Lineage*,⁵³³ also known as *Stag lung chos 'byung*, in 1609. Following a short account of the beginnings of Buddhism in India, the text turns to the Tibetan Empire and to the Bka'-brgyud and then Stag-lung bka'-brgyud lineage masters. Even though Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal was a holder of the Ras-chung snyan-rgyud tradition—as indicated by the title of his work, referring to the first of the three wish-fulfilling gems,⁵³⁴ he presents his lineage in a conventional manner via Sgam-po-pa and Phag-mo-gru-pa. An autobiography of his early life is also presented.⁵³⁵ The edition is a modern book-form copy published in 1992 by the Bod-ljongs bod-yig dpe-rying dpe-skrunkhang, complemented with a preface, a biography of the author, and a detailed summary. The last twenty pages referred to in the table of contents, however, do not seem to have survived the printing process.

Mar-pa's biography

Mar-pa's hagiography⁵³⁶ is a summary of the *rnam thar* composed by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba. Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal follows the same structure and repeats the 2nd Dpa'-bo's personal additions, especially with regards to toponymical details and the encounters with the three *yoginīs* and Ācārya Nag-po lwa-ba-pa.⁵³⁷ However, he skips the meetings with Gnyos and Atiśa and omits the erudite remarks of his predecessor. Stories related to Mar-pa's life in Tibet are skimmed over, but the third journey narrating the quest and meeting with Nāropā is surprisingly detailed and takes up nearly a third of the text. This may be explained by the author's interest in the Aural Transmission.

The one exception to the author's loyalty to Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba is that he cites 1012-1097 as being Mar-pa's life dates: the exact dates proposed by the *Deb ther sngon po* and explicitly rejected by the 2nd Dpa'-bo. Since the rest of the narrative of Mar-pa's death was faithful to the latter, two explanations are possible: either the author, lost in the many options offered by his sources, chose the dates he was already familiar with, or the editors compensated for the lack of dates—or considered that the dates given were mistaken—by adding the more or less “orthodox” calculations of 'Gos-lo. Even if the second explanation is more appealing, it is problematic insofar as both

⁵³³ *Brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu'i rtogs pa brjod pa ngo mtshar rgya mtsho.*

⁵³⁴ On the three wish-fulfilling gems see Chapter 1, p. 37.

⁵³⁵ *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 555–585.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 131–145.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

versions now available (the book and manuscript)⁵³⁸ bear the same dates. Likely as it is that the book is based on the manuscript, which is itself based on a xylograph, it would mean that it were the xylograph editors who made the addition.

2.5.6. Comparative biography by Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1698–1755) [1742 (rev. 1746)]

The biography and its author

The Rnying-ma master Tshe-dbang-nor-bu from Kaḥ-thog Monastery in Khams played a major role in the rebirth of the Gzhan-stong doctrine in that region during the 18th and 19th centuries.⁵³⁹ Born in 1698, he lived at the same time as Si-tu Paṅ-chen, with whom he shared a passion for knowledge,⁵⁴⁰ and developed strong ties with the Bka'-brgyud lineage, which likely triggered his interest in the history of its early stages. He composed a *A Small Clarification of the Correct Exposition of Definitive Chronology: Hagiographic Seeds of a Few Holy Men – Mar-pa, Mi-la-ras-pa, Sgam-po-pa, Jo-bo Atiśa, etc.*,⁵⁴¹ whose aim was to clarify the dating of some of the masters belonging to the second wave of Buddhism in Tibet—Mar-pa, Mi-la-ras-pa, Ras-chung-pa, Sgam-po-pa, etc.—as well as the dates of their Indian gurus Pha-dam-pa-sangs-rgyas, Nāropā, and Atiśa.

I read two copies of the text, a poorly reproduced one in *dbu med*,⁵⁴² and a computerized version.⁵⁴³ The proliferation of copy errors in the latter, however, makes it necessary to be extremely cautious despite the ease of reading. Concerning Mar-pa's dating alone, three errors can be found with regard to the element of a year (*chu bya* instead *sa bya*, for 1069)⁵⁴⁴ or to

⁵³⁸ The preface of the 1972-edition (the manuscript copy of the xylograph) declares: "This history was carved upon xylographic blocks by one Ngag-dbang-bstan-mchog-bzang-po of Sngags-'phel Dgon. The carving was rather badly done and the few copies that exist in India are often illegible because of the roughness of the blocks. The only solution to ensure a legible reproduction was to recopy the entire text preserving the orthographical peculiarities and mistakes. Khams-sprul Rin-po-che himself carefully checked the original Central Tibetan print against the new copy."

⁵³⁹ See Stearns 1999, pp. 74–76.

⁵⁴⁰ See Richardson 1998, pp. 379–382.

⁵⁴¹ "Mar mi dwags po jo bo yab sras sogs dam pa 'ga' zhid gi rnam thar sa bon dus kyi nges pa brjod pa dang ldan myug gsal." In: TWNB, vol. 3, pp. 640–656 (Mar-pa: pp. 640–648).

⁵⁴² W23176, vol. 1, pp. 669–705.

⁵⁴³ *Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin tshe dbang nor bu'i bka' 'bum*, 2006. Three book-format volumes. The present text is in the third volume.

⁵⁴⁴ 1069 is the year of Mar-pa's death according to "the lineage of Sgam-po-pa, uncle

vowel inversions (*byi* “rat” for *bya* “bird,” and vice-versa)! There are also many misreadings of *sa* and *pa*, through which Painḍapā becomes Sendapa, as we have seen in other texts.⁵⁴⁵ This inversion—quite understandable when one knows how similar the two letters are in *dbu med*—leads to the conclusion that this kind of mistake must have occurred quite frequently and explains the often disagreeing orthographies found in several versions of the same text.

Sources

In the section on Mar-pa’s dating—an important topic given the diversity of proposals—Tshe-dbang-nor-bu relies mainly on the work of Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, who was the first to compare the various sources he had at his disposal. Kaḥ-thog-pa did not have access to all of the sources consulted by his predecessor, as he repeats some information directly without verifying it, but noting that further analysis is required.⁵⁴⁶ He also provides fresh data, as when he mentions the *’Brug pa pu re sha ma ri’i gdan dus* or the *Re* [sic] *mig gsal ba*, which could not be identified. By accepting the same date of birth that Dpa’-bo II suggested (*lcags byi*, the year 1000, which is a novel average of several options) but advancing the date of death by four years (*lcags bya*, 1081, instead of *shing glang*, 1085), he followed other sources, most of which do indeed mention a bird year.

Tshe-dbang-nor-bu indicates in his conclusion of the section on Mar-pa that, “although nowadays it seems to be difficult to determine through Mar-pa’s hagiographies how he traveled to India, when he was born, and so on, here I checked as many ancient texts and narratives of the learned and accomplished ones as were available, with the intention of helping those who may in the future undertake research on these hagiographies.”⁵⁴⁷ Tshe-dbang-nor-bu also mentions “the transmission of the ancient Rngog,” which

and nephew [found in] the notes of the oral tradition of the six direct disciples, which is known to be a blend of the [traditions] of Atiṣa and Mi-la-ras-pa.” TWNB, p. 640: *mar pa’i dngos slob drug gi gsung rgyun zin bris kyi don rje sgam po khu dbon brgyud pa nas jo bo btsun pas bsdeb par grags pa*. This sentence, as with the one mentioned earlier in Padma-dkar-po’s *Gsan yig*, recognizes the composite character of Sgam-po-pa’s *gsung ’bum* (see above, pp. 85–86, n. 234).

⁵⁴⁵ *Lho rong*, p. 31, for example.

⁵⁴⁶ See for example TWNB, vol. 3, p. 640: *rje gtsug lag phreng bas gzigs pa’i rngog lugs rnam thar rim bzhi de dang gcig gam slar brtag par ’os so*.

⁵⁴⁷ TWNB, vol. 3, p. 648: *deng sang mar pa’i rnam thar rnam rgya dkar* [sic] *phebs tshul ’khrungs lo sogs dpyad dka’ bar snang bas ’dir sngon gyi dpe snying dang mkhas dang grub pas byas pa’i lo rgyus ji snyed bltas nas phyis rnam thar don gnyer can srid tshe phan pa’i bsam pas [...]*. Many thanks to Tshe-dbang-nor-bu helping me with my research!

is a very reliable source for him, as well as the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, the hagiographies of Atiśa and Mar-pa-do-pa, and the *Blossoming of Lotuses* by Padma-dkar-po, from which he borrows several essentials. Apart from these sources, he generally tries to weigh the various versions, referring to the songs when confronted with discrepancies. He uses the same process as Padma-dkar-po, doing his best to confirm every assertion with an extract from one of Mar-pa's songs.

Finally, as might be expected from an author with a historiographical approach, each story is an opportunity for rectifications and analyses of the various versions of Mar-pa's life story. Kaḥ-thog-pa clearly makes use of the biographies available to him, but without pledging allegiance to any particular one. On the contrary, he strives to cross-check data to his best ability in order to make sense of the multitude of existing versions.

2.5.7. *Rosary of Crystal Gems*, religious history composed by 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab and Si-tu 08 Chos-kyi-'byung-gnas (1700–1774) [1775]

The collection and its authors

This long opus, the *Hagiographies of the Precious Karma Kam-tshang Lineage: Rosary of Omnipresent Wish-fulfilling Crystal Gems, Hagiographies of the Jewels of the Karma Kam-tshang Lineage*, in short the *Rosary of Crystal Gems*,⁵⁴⁸ can be divided into three parts, of which only one was composed by Si-tu Pañchen. He was only able to compose the biographies ranging from the 1st Karma-pa to one of the disciples of the 5th, Mi-nyag Rtog-ldan Graggs-parin-chen (14th century), before death interrupted him. His work was taken up by his disciple and editor, 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab, who wrote two parts: the *Supplement (kha skong)* for the masters before the 1st Karma-pa, and the *Rosary* itself for the masters who followed him.

There are various versions of the *Rosary of Crystal Gems*. As explained by Irmgard Mengele within the framework of her research on the 10th Karma-pa, Chos-dbyings-rdo-rje (1604–1674),⁵⁴⁹ the Dpal-spungs printing blocks of the text's two volumes were altered at some point, probably for political reasons, and the life stories of the 10th Karma-pa and his disciple the 6th Rgyal-tshab Nor-bu-bzang-po (1659–1698) were expurgated from post-1972 editions. According to the present Zhwa-dmar Rin-po-che, the short biography of the 10th Karma-pa composed by the 7th Zhwa-dmar-pa was

⁵⁴⁸ *Karma kam tshang bryud pa'i rin po che'i rnam thar rab 'byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba.*

⁵⁴⁹ Mengele 2007. For her full-length study of the 10th Karma-pa see Mengele 2012.

inserted into the text in place of the longer version by 'Be-lo.⁵⁵⁰ However, this does not impact our research on Mar-pa's biography, as it does not belong to the main volume, but to the *Supplement* that was added by 'Be-lo after Si-tu's death. The *Supplement*, which ranges from Vajradhara to Sgam-po-pa, including the Indian masters of the four transmission lineages, was not part of the 1972 edition published by D. Gyaltzan and Kesang Legshay (W23435) but it does appear in volumes 11 and 12 of the *Collected Works* of Chos-kyi-'byung-gnas published by the Palpung Sungrab Nyamso Khang (W26630) in 1990. There are also two computerized versions published in 2004 by the Vajra Vidya Library and in 2010 by Diwakar Publications. None of these collections include the unexpurgated version of the 10th Karma-pa's life.⁵⁵¹ I refer to the Diwakar version, which was the one available to me at the time of writing. 'Be-lo states that he finished the text, which had been requested by Si-tu's long-time friend Tshe-dbang-nor-bu, on the 13th day of the miracle month of the male wood sheep year, i.e. in February 1775, about a year after his master's demise. The text's erudition—in the section on Mar-pa, for example, the author quotes Buddhaguptanātha, Tāranātha's guru, and many others—shows that 'Be-lo probably used Si-tu's notes to complete his work, although he was himself renowned for his scholarship.

Si-tu Paṅ-chen was one of the pillars of the Kam-tshang bka'-brgyud lineage, in which he played a major role after the sudden passing of the 12th Karma-pa (1703–1732) and the 8th Zhwa-dmar-pa (1695–1732). He was famous for his vast knowledge in all ten fields of traditional sciences (grammar, astrology, medicine, history, and so on) and was at the center of East Tibet's intellectual dynamism for half a century. He had an enduring influence on future generations and his work and activity marked the beginning of a brilliant cultural renaissance in 19th-century Khams.

Mar-pa's biography

Mar-pa's biography in the *Rosary of Crystal Gems*⁵⁵² is modeled after Padma-dkar-po's version, which is explicitly cited. For instance, it adopts Pad-dkar's description of Mar-pa's first arrival in India: Mar-pa goes to Vikramaśīla where he meets Prajñāsiṃha who leads him to Nāropā. It also places Nāropā's prediction of the interruption of Mar-pa's family lineage in the first

⁵⁵⁰ Shamar 2012, pp. 207–208.

⁵⁵¹ The third volume of the Vajra Vidya Library edition has not been released. I am not aware whether the unexpurgated version of the Karma-pa's life is now available.

⁵⁵² Diwakar, vol. 1, pp. 59–73; Vajra Vidya, vol. 1, pp. 73–89; *Gsung 'bum* 1990, vol. 11, pp. 55–69.

journey. As his predecessor, 'Be-lo relates most of the stories about Mar-pa's experiences with the *mudrās* of Jñānagarbha, Śāntibhadra, and especially Maitrīpā. This last episode had previously been mentioned in the 4th Rgyal-dbang 'Brug-pa's version alone.

Another major influence is that of Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu. In fact, 'Be-lo seems to follow Padma-dkar-po's text but Kaḥ-thog-pa's spirit, and he integrates most of the Rnying-ma polymath's conclusions. For example, he denounces the wide condemnation of Gnyos by referring to a statue that Kaḥ-thog-pa saw when he went to the Gnyos seat, thus countering Padma-dkar-po who accepted the thesis of Mar-pa's text destruction out of jealousy. He also repeats Kaḥ-thog-pa's view of Śāntibhadra's identity,⁵⁵³ though he asserts that Śāntibhadra was the guru of both Mar-pa and 'Gos. His dating of Mar-pa's death seems to be an involuntary fusion of both sources: 'Be-lo says that Mar-pa died at 82, the 15th day of the first month of the iron-bird year (1081), thus following Kaḥ-thog-pa.⁵⁵⁴ A page later however, he repeats that Mar-pa died on the 15th day of the first month of the bird year, but at 88, as mentioned by Padma-dkar-po.⁵⁵⁵

Following the lead of his two predecessors, the author also uses logic and cross-checking to refute some of the narratives that circulated within Mar-pa's biographical tradition. Gnyos has already been mentioned, but we might also note the following passage about the death of Mar-pa's son Darma Mdo-sde, in which 'Be-lo implicitly refers to Gtsang-smyon's version:⁵⁵⁶

As for Dar-ma-mdo-sde, there are stories telling how, because of the great Rwa-lo's magic, he fell from his horse and died while Mar-pa was staying [in retreat]. There are also stories about how Mi-la-ras-pa brought him back, leading his horse by the bridle. However, certain authentic [sources] have wondered how Rwa-lo's power could have arisen from a previous defective connection [that Mar-pa established] when receiving Nāropā's empowerment. The Lord Sgrol-mgon [Tāranātha] also considered the logic of this story to be tenuous. When Dar-

⁵⁵³ See above, pp. 80–81, n. 227.

⁵⁵⁴ Diwakar, p. 69: *dgung lo brygad cu rtsa gnyis pa lcags mo bya'i mchu zla'i nya la rnam par smin pa'i sku lus bor te dag pa ye shes sgyu ma'i skur gshegs pa yin zhes kyang grags mod.* 'Be-lo clearly states in the beginning of the biography that he follows Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu for the date; Diwakar, p. 60: *kaḥ thog pa chen pos lcags byir 'khrungs par bzbed.*

⁵⁵⁵ Pad-dkar, p. 458.

⁵⁵⁶ Diwakar, pp. 70–71.

ma-mdo-sde died, Mar-pa and Bdag-med-ma had already passed away, and Mi-la-ras-pa had gone into retreat some time before and was not around. Therefore, this seems to be a complete invention. Even if one accepts that they were contemporaries, it is said that Rwa-lo was much younger than Mar-pa: indeed Sgam-po-pa had studied yoga with the one from Zangs-dkar⁵⁵⁷ at the same time as Rwa-lo, but it is said that Dar-ma-mdo-sde was born when Mar-pa was 55.

This is an interesting remark insofar as Mdo-sde's "liberation" by Rwa Lotsā-ba is not part of Mar-pa's biographical tradition—it appeared in the hagiography of Rwa-lo composed by his disciple Rwa Ye-shes-Seng-ge.⁵⁵⁸ This shows that 'Be-lo (Si-tu) intended to review the points of contention circulating at his time and to offer his conclusions based on the sources he considered authentic. He was not satisfied with retracing Mar-pa's life story as so many did before him. Instead, he relied on sources that were as old and trustworthy as possible, so as to preclude future controversies. His other references included "Rngog Mdo-sde's story"⁵⁵⁹ and "unmodified, very old versions of [Atiśa] Jo-bo's hagiography."⁵⁶⁰

2.6. Conclusion

It is with this 18th-century *Rosary of Crystal Gems* that I conclude my study of Mar-pa's life-writing. Several other biographies were composed thereafter,⁵⁶¹ and there will surely be many more to come, but they tend to be simple rewordings of existing material, and particularly of Gtsan-smyon Heru-

⁵⁵⁷ This refers to Zangs-dkar Lo-tsā-ba 'Phags-pa-shes-rab (11th–12th century). He is mentioned in the BA (p. 354) as a student of Rngog Legs-pa'i-shes-rab.

⁵⁵⁸ See Decler 1992 and Ramble 2010 on the topic of Rwa-lo's killing of Mdo-sde and Cuevas 2015a for a translation of Rwa-lo's biography. For a broader view of the topic of "liberation" and the interpretation of violence in the Buddhist tantras, see Dalton 2011 and Wedemeyer 2012.

⁵⁵⁹ Diwakar, p. 71: *rngog mdo sde'i lo rgyus*.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67: *jo bo'i rnam thar dpe rnying ma bcos pa rnams*.

⁵⁶¹ See for example Brag-dkar-rta-so Sprul-sku Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug (1775–1837): *Dpal ldan gzhung 'brug pa bka' bryud gser phreng*, composed in 1820; Bstan-'dzin Padma'i-rgyal-mtshan (4th Che-tshang, 1770–1828): *'Bri gung gdan rabs: Nges don bstan pa'i snying po mngon po 'bri gung pa chen po'i gdan rabs chos kyi byung tshul gser phreng ba*; Sgrub-sprul Phrin-las-rgya-mtsho (19th century): *Gdams ngag bka' rgya can lnga yi bla ma bryud pa'i rnam thar dad gsum chu gter 'phel byed ngo mtshar zla ba'i me long*, composed in 1845.

ka's well-known version.⁵⁶² 'Be-lo's work seems to put just the right finishing touch to Mar-pa's life-building, which had already been under construction for six centuries.

We saw that the building began with Mar-pa's songs, the long-abiding first traces of the time he spent in Tibet and India. These songs are the bricks or stones from which many of the foundation and wall biographies were constructed. Next comes a set of six early biographies which relied on the songs to a greater or lesser extent and constituted a solid foundational layer upon which all later biographies built. Among these six, three are particularly important and are deemed major foundations: they were composed by second- and third-generation disciples of Mar-pa: Ngam-rdzong ston-pa (Mar-pa Mgo-yag and Mi-la-ras-pa's disciple), Rngog Mdo-sde (Rngog Chos-rdor's son), and a few decades later, Mar-ston Tshul-khri-mi-'byung-nas (Khyung-tshang-pa's disciple), who put into writing a biography that had probably already been available in Aural Transmission circles. These three feature most elements describing Mar-pa's life, with often lengthy descriptions and rather detailed episodes. The three "minor foundations"—the texts by Sgam-po-pa, Bla-ma Zhang and the *Mdo-chen Rosary*—are still foundations because they appeared quite early and are mostly original, but they were more reduced in scope and less influential on the later tradition.

No matter how massive all of these foundations were, they did not hinder further development. On the contrary, they constituted a solid base upon which all later works could be built. First, during the 13th century, a ground floor made up of a handful of biographies was laid. These longer, more mature and syncretic texts brought together much of the available data and transformed it into full-fledged hagiographies, in which Mar-pa was born, lived an exceptionally rich and adventuresome life, and died. In brief, these biographies portrayed Mar-pa as a living figure. Among them,

⁵⁶² One exception is a comparative study of Mar-pa's biographies which has been undertaken by Mkhan-po Rgyal-mtshan-phun-tshogs from Dpal-spungs-shes-rab-gling Monastery in Northern India (Palpung). Mar-pa's biography (pp. 30–100) is basically a summary of Gtsang-smyon's rendering, but it is complemented by notes on the diverging versions found in fifteen major biographies, pp. 175–223. Additional information taken from Mi-la-ras-pa's life and from the *Rain of Wisdom (Bka' brgyud mgur mtsho)* is also provided. I received this book while I was completing the present work and mainly used it to check the various versions, and for information about the one biography I was not able to obtain, i.e. the one composed by the fourth regent of Mtshur-phu, Grags-pa-don-grub (1550–1617), an unpublished manuscript kept in the Dpal-spungs library. The book by Mkhan-po Rgyal-mtshan-phun-tshogs is also remarkable for its many color reproductions of paintings of the Karma Bka'-brgyud lineage masters, especially the Situ incarnations.

the rosaries by Don-mo-ri-pa, Rgyal-thang-pa, and “U-rgyan-pa” are particularly noteworthy.

The process continued, and in the 14th and particularly 15th centuries, walls were constructed. More or less ambitious, some of them expanded on available material and some summarized and synthesized it. The former, such as the hagiography by Mkha’-spyod-dbang-po, are like load-bearing walls that integrated many new elements and in turn became instrumental for the development of later texts. Shorter texts are like dividing walls, not particularly innovative in their story-telling approach, they contribute to readers’ knowledge through organizing material that has become sizable and complex. Like walls, these biographies also redefined the space of Mar-pa’s life, which by this period had become quite predictable, with the same information repeated everywhere, and original voices only heard from afar.

In the beginning of the 16th century, Gtsang-smyon’s masterpiece was published and became a great success thanks to Gtsang-smyon’s literary skills and the development of xylography which allowed his and his disciples’ communication skills to shine. His hagiography of Mar-pa is like the roof that tops Mar-pa’s house: the building is now complete, ready to be visited by generations of readers who still today can identify with their forefather who went to India and risked his life to meet Nāropā. This new standard, faithful to its sources, provides a vital and seamless story with concrete details that paint Mar-pa as poignantly human.

Finally, the last phase of evolution is marked by the many biographies that were published after Gtsang-smyon’s *chef d’oeuvre*. There are additional rooms that bring new information on Mar-pa’s life narrative—the 2nd Dpa’-bo’s text for instance—and a veranda and garden that adopt a critical approach assessing the tradition on which they built and offering new perspectives on it—works by Kaḥ-thogTshe-dbang-nor-bu or ’Be-lo Tse-dbang-kun-khyab. They all provide precious information and offer new angles from which we can more accurately view older material.

The present deconstruction of Mar-pa’s biographical building aims at fulfilling two purposes: to constitute a case study that shows how such traditions are built, and to offer valuable knowledge of Mar-pa’s life. As for the former, I hope that my diachronic study of Mar-pa’s life story demonstrates both evolution and conservation, and may perhaps constitute an example for the study of other corpuses. The present research was undertaken with the help of the earlier studies by Peter Alan Roberts (on Ras-chung-pa) and Andrew Quintman (on Mi-la-ras-pa), but from the perspective of a slightly different angle. Roberts presented the life stories of Mi-la-ras-pa and Ras-chung-pa chapter by chapter, and compared conflicting versions. He began by presenting his sources, but only as a means to an end. Quintman was as interested as I am in the building of the tradition, but he approached it from

a narrative vantage point, studying the various levels of incarnation of Mi-laras-pa's life from a literary, rather than chronological, perspective. As my particular interest has been the building of the tradition itself, I naturally focused on the earliest elements. Biography after biography, sometimes easily and sometimes after many laborious readings, I ordered them chronologically and tried to imagine myself in the position of their authors. What did they know when they wrote or compiled their texts? What sources did they use? How did they work? I have done my best to answer these questions in the above study.

As interesting as all this may be, I feel that we might go further still. We have seen which elements were available first, we have identified the three main sources of Mar-pa's life story: how about using this knowledge to try and draw some conclusions? Does this study lead us to the second goal? Does it inform our knowledge of Mar-pa's life?

Not so sure. As Kaḥ-thog Si-tu remarked, "Nowadays it seems to be difficult to determine from Mar-pa's hagiographies how he traveled to India, when he was born and so on." Yes, the earliest traces of Mar-pa's biographies have been identified, but the questions that remain are as unanswerable today as they were in the 12th or 17th century. No matter how close we are to Mar-pa's period, the songs themselves tend to contradict each other, and the first three narratives give independent and diverging story lines. It is as impossible today as it was yesterday to determine whether Mar-pa first met Jñānagarbha or Nāropā. Without historical documents (a passport of sorts would be useful!), or another account of the same story from someone else's perspective, how can we begin to check their validity? These quandaries are well-known to the historian and will not be solved here; we lack the time and, more importantly, the certainty that such an enterprise could even be possible.

That said, there are certain elements of Mar-pa's life that deserve our attention and can be studied. A few recurring points stood out because they helped me judge a biography's place within the evolution of the narrative, or because they were bones of contention among biographers of both early and later literature. It is to these little shiny stones that we will now turn, with a change of focus. I will no longer look at the tradition for itself, but try to understand what it is telling us: where do the biographies mirror each other? What can the contentious voices tell us about Mar-pa and about themselves? Can we learn something about Mar-pa through them? Perhaps future scholars will use the above-studied biographies to find new perspectives. The points studied in the following section are certainly not exhaustive, but they called attention to themselves in the course of my research.

3. The Evolution of a Few Key Points in Mar-pa's Biographies

When the evolution of Mar-pa's biographies throughout the centuries is examined, some recurring points appear to be representative of Mar-pa, both as a character and of the way his story was told. This is why specific aspects of Mar-pa's life story will be studied in this second part. The songs, for example, are present in most biographies and constitute an important element in their construction. Traces of the author's enunciation—signposts pointing to the circumstances of a text's composition—are often found in older biographies and have sometimes survived in later versions. They offer the reader a different angle from which specificities of the biographies can be distinguished. Several recurring motifs—Mar-pa's status as an incarnation, the practice of entering another's body, his relationship with Nāropā and Gnyos—are pivotal points of Mar-pa's life story. The last two in particular have often been a subject of debate in Mar-pa's biographical tradition and exegesis, and therefore call for specific treatment. These representative aspects of Mar-pa's life as it has been told over the centuries are the object of the second part of this book.

3.1. *Marks of the spoken word in the biographies*

3.1.1. Mar-pa's songs

The literary style of the mgur and how Mar-pa used them

To the best of my knowledge, Mar-pa was the first master of the later spread of the doctrine in Tibet to sing *mgur*. He did not build on virgin soil, but on the long history of two cultures, Tibetan and Indian, that he succeeded in joining.

The history of the various musical styles in Tibet—*mgur* being one of them—is presented by Terry Ellingson in his 1979 PhD thesis, “The Mandala of Sound.”⁵⁶³ Ellingson shows that in texts dating from the royal period, the word “*mgur*” referred to songs sung by the king and nobility, usually for purposes of politics or propaganda, conveying success, victory, or joy.⁵⁶⁴ They lay a textual emphasis on personal experiences and the overcoming of obstacles. The word does not seem to have been linked with any Indian song tradition at the time. In the Indian Buddhist world, on the other hand, a tradition of vernacular expression in Apabhraṃśa called *dohā*⁵⁶⁵ or *caryā-*

⁵⁶³ Ellingson 1979, pp. 243–244.

⁵⁶⁴ Jackson 1996, p. 370.

⁵⁶⁵ Many studies have focused on this topic. See for example Guenther 1969 and 1993, Kvaerne 1977, Templeman 1994, Kapstein 2003, Jackson 2004 and Schaeffer 2005.

*gīti*⁵⁶⁶ had developed. These were songs of religious insight whose main focus was to express the realization of their author; they were generally devoid of any biographical data. In the same way that Indian Buddhist texts seem to exist in the pure realm of the spirit, *dohās* generally express an absolute which goes beyond time and space, even though they may be rooted in examples drawn from daily life.

In the 11th century, Mar-pa the Tibetan went to India, where he learnt Indian languages and culture. In India, Nepal, and Tibet, he is said to have sung songs, often in the framework of *ganācakra*, in which he joined the Tibetan tradition of singing about episodes from one's life with the Indian tradition of songs of realization. Thus, by "drawing thematic inspiration from the Apabhraṃśa songs of the Indian Buddhist tantric masters, and imagistic and metrical resources from indigenous bardic and popular verses, [he] created an entirely distinctive family of verseforms."⁵⁶⁷ This synthesis has been examined by Matthew Kapstein in his article about the "Indian Literary Identity in Tibet." Kapstein uses Mar-pa's song about his dream meeting with Saraha to challenge the idea that the *mgur* of the first Bka'-brgyud-pas were exclusively modeled on the Indian *dohās* by showing the differences in style between them:⁵⁶⁸

It has often been said that the yogic songs of the Kagyü masters, beginning in the 11th century, were modeled upon the *dohās* of the *mahāsiddhas*, especially Saraha. But in comparing the extant Indian Buddhist *dohā* corpus with Mar-pa's poem, though it contains a section that resembles the *dohās* of Saraha,

Braitstein 2004, p. 131, gives the etymology of the term *dohā* as meaning "couplets" (two-line stanzas) and "to milk," in the sense of "milking the primordial awareness of one's mind" (as explained in Schaeffer 2000, p. 267). She questions the generally accepted definition of *dohā* as being the name of a meter, as Indian *dohā* meters vary and it is not clear what that common meter would have been. The definition of *dohā* as the name of a meter seems to be based on Shahidullah 1928.

⁵⁶⁶ Jackson 2004, p. 10, says that *caryāgīti* and *vajragīti* "differ generically from *dohās* because of their different context and function." According to him, *dohās* are primarily spiritual aphorisms expressed in the form of rhyming couplets, *caryāgīti* are stand-alone performance songs, and *vajragīti* are songs used in the context of *ganācākras*. Braitstein 2004, pp. 132–137, notes that *caryāgīti* generally have a *rāga*, or melody, attached to them, which indicates that they were meant to be sung during *ganācakra*. According to her, the term *vajragīti* refers to the content of the song rather than to its form, i.e. to "songs that express something about the ultimate nature of reality." In Indian Buddhist culture "vajra" refers to something that is "pure, impossible to stain or alter, clear, unbreakable, and precious."

⁵⁶⁷ Kapstein and Töndup 1993, p. 1290.

⁵⁶⁸ Kapstein 2003, p. 774.

it is striking in its overall difference. For Saraha's songs are skeletally bare when it comes to their establishing a context or setting for their own recitation or composition, while Mar-pa encases his poem within a double narrative frame that provided both. [...] To construct or to situate the self in narration in this way is entirely characteristic of Tibetan oratory, and literary evidence of this stance can be found even in ancient historical chronicles from Dunhuang. Thus, whatever the influence of the Buddhist Apabhraṃśa *dohā* literature, we may argue that Marpa's voice remains an assertively Tibetan one.

In Ronald Davidson's words, this utilization of an Indian cultural feature to build a specifically Tibetan work is representative of "the place of late Indian esoteric Buddhism as a focal point for the cultural reintegration of the remnants of Tibetan civilization into the larger Asian universe."⁵⁶⁹ Marpa, who was among the first translators of the later spread of the Dharma, was also the first to sing such songs, although Ellingson has shown that Tibetan *mgur* using the Indian style of singing already existed during the first spread of the doctrine. Ellingson specifically mentions Tibetan songs by Padmasaṃbhava—who was an Indian, so this should not surprise us—and, more interestingly, by Vairocana the translator. However, it is difficult to assess "whether these songs attributed to 8th-century authors were simply later songs added to the traditional accounts by later editors, or whether they represent a genuinely earlier style which was a radical departure from secular *mgur* traditions, perhaps due to Indian Buddhist influence."⁵⁷⁰ To remain on the safe side, we can assume that Mar-pa was the first in the second spread of the doctrine to use this style of expression. He was followed by his most famous disciple, Mi-la-ras-pa, who is still regarded today as the greatest poet of Tibet, and this kind of *mgur* later became a major feature of the Bka'-brgyud lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.⁵⁷¹ This much is acknowledged by

⁵⁶⁹ Davidson 2005, p. 2.

⁵⁷⁰ Ellingson 1979, p. 231.

⁵⁷¹ There exist several translations of the songs of Mi-la-ras-pa: Cutillo 1995, Chang 1999. Sernesi 2004 proposes a re-translation of some songs translated by Cutillo, from the collection assembled by Lha-btsun Rin-chen-rnam-rgyal (1473–1557), entitled *Rje btsun mi la ras pa'i rdo rje'i mgur drug sogs gsung rgyun thor bu 'ga'*. The translation of Chang is that of the *Mgur 'bum* compiled by Gtsang-smyon Heruka. See Smith 2001, pp. 70–73, for the different editions of the *Rnam thar* and *Mgur 'bum* of Mi-la-ras-pa by Gtsang-smyon Heruka, and Smith 2001, pp. 76–77, for Lha-btsun-pa's collection. For a translation of the songs of many Karma Bka'-brgyud-pa masters see Nālandā Translation Committee (1999).

Gtsang-smyon Heruka in his *Opening the Eyes of Faith: Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance [Regarding] the Outline of Songs*,⁵⁷² a text about songs in which Gtsang-smyon situates Tibetan Buddhist songs within a larger Buddhist song tradition, describing the origins of songs, how one should listen to them, and what effect they should have on their audience.⁵⁷³

Mar-pa's songs

Mar-pa is said to have received the transmission of Indian *dohās* from Maitrīpā. Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas was the first to state that Mar-pa heard "*dohā*, etc., from Maitrīpā's mouth" before his final return to Tibet.⁵⁷⁴ "U-rgyan-pa" specifies that Maitrīpā gave Mar-pa "the *Nāma Saṅgīti*, the *dohā* of the *dākinīs* and others, instructions which introduce to superior vision, Mahāmudrā, and instructions on non-dual union."⁵⁷⁵ Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po and Gtsang-smyon also mention the transmission of *dohās* before a song of gratitude from Mar-pa to Maitrīpā, during the first journey.⁵⁷⁶ This, however, seems to be the transmission of specific *dohās*, probably the *Dohākośa* of Saraha rather than a poetic manual on the way to sing *dohās*. As Mar-pa sang "songs of realization" long before he reportedly received the *dohā* transmission at the end of the last journey according to some sources, it is likely that he learned this style of expression on his own, by fusing his native traditions with those he observed in India.

The formal style of Mar-pa's songs can be divided into three main aspects: subject matter, meter, and melody pattern. As far as subject matter is concerned, half of Mar-pa's songs can be considered "biographical," while the other half is more "theoretical," i.e. the songs are a presentation of his own teachings as well as of those he received from his masters.⁵⁷⁷ Of course,

⁵⁷² *Mgur kyi dkar chags ma rig mun sel dad pa'i mig 'byed*.

⁵⁷³ This text, written in 1503, was printed together with Gtsang-smyon's life story and song collection in 1508 and was likely meant to serve a similar purpose as *Comforting the Minds of the Fortunate Ones (Skal bzang yid kyi ngal gso)*, the introduction to the *Rain of Wisdom (Bka' brgyud mgur mtsho)*, an anthology of yogins' songs from the Bka'-brgyud lineage originally compiled by the 8th Karma-pa, Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje (1507–1554), and translated into English in 1999 by the Nālandā Translation Committee under the title *Rain of Wisdom*. See Quintman & Larsson 2015 for a study and translation.

⁵⁷⁴ KSTC-1, p. 191. This appears at the beginning of section 2.7. which describes the qualities associated with *samādhi*.

⁵⁷⁵ "U-rgyan-pa," p. 142, l. 4: 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa 'aml mkha' 'gro mgur la sogs pa 'aml phyag rgya chen po cher mthong ngo sprod kyi gdams pa 'aml gnyis med gzung 'jug gi gdams ngag thams cad rdzogs par byas.

⁵⁷⁶ KWNT, p. 20, l. 6: *mdo ba'i don gnang ba rnams...*; Tsangnyön 1982, p. 28.

⁵⁷⁷ This was calculated on the basis of the songs found in the biography by Gtsang-

the two aspects are often entwined, but this is in keeping with what Mar-pa did, that is to say synthesizing personal Tibetan-style songs and Indian songs of realization. The difference between the two styles is clear when we examine six songs quoted in the biography by Gtsang-smyon and attributed to Mar-pa's masters—Nāropā, Maitrīpā, etc. They all focus exclusively on their teaching, except the one in which Nāropā prophesies the end of Mar-pa's family lineage and the flourishing of his Dharma lineage. When Mar-pa quotes his masters in his songs (instructions from Saraha or Maitrīpā, for example), it is also exclusively religion-oriented.

In metric terms, Mar-pa's verses alternate between seven- and nine-syllable lines. According to Rolf Stein,⁵⁷⁸ in the *Rain of Wisdom* this length is characteristic of songs from Mar-pa to Sgam-po-pa, i.e. songs which precede the introduction in 13th-century Tibet of classical Indian poetry as codified by Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḍarśa*, which is characterised by longer verses. The short prosody of Mar-pa's verses is also found in popular Tibetan poetry, for example in the Ge-sar epic,⁵⁷⁹ in marriage songs,⁵⁸⁰ and in the repertoires of wandering bards.

Some of Mar-pa's songs present an indication of melody pattern, a feature found in both the Indian and Tibetan traditions. Ellingson discussed both styles of melody, respectively *svarasvasti* and *dbyangs*, in his thesis;⁵⁸¹ it is likely that melodic indications found in Mar-pa's songs derive from both traditions. Hubert Decler,⁵⁸² for instance, has drawn parallels between the names of melody patterns found in the Ge-sar epic (as mentioned by Mireille Helffer),⁵⁸³ the tradition of Indian rāga (which were different tones used in *caryāgītī*), and some of Mar-pa's songs which have similar musical indications.⁵⁸⁴

smyon Heruka: there are fifteen "biographical" songs, two prophecies, fourteen "theoretical" songs, and three of homage. In this version there are also four songs which may not have originated with Mar-pa (the song to Gnyos and the three songs of Mar-pa to Mdo-sde and Bdag-med-ma at the death of their son); they combine biographical and theoretical indications. The biography composed by Dpa'-bo II repeats these songs and adds several others, especially songs of instruction from *ḍākinīs* in India. The MK25 also adds seven other songs, mainly theoretical.

⁵⁷⁸ Stein 1959, pp. 502–503.

⁵⁷⁹ See Jackson 1996 and Helffer 1979.

⁵⁸⁰ See Aziz 1985.

⁵⁸¹ Ellingson 1979, pp. 183–186 and 211–219.

⁵⁸² Decler 1992, p. 22, n. 13.

⁵⁸³ Helffer 1979, pp. 92–93.

⁵⁸⁴ The tones mentioned by Gtsang-smyon Heruka are the following: Tsangnyön 1982,

The songs with a melody are the ones that Gtsang-smyon called the “eight great songs” (*mgur chen brgyad*).⁵⁸⁵ An antecedent for this classification might be found in Rngog-2, which also mentions a group of “eight songs;” Rngog (Chos-rdor?) quotes the beginning of one, which does indeed figure among the eight selected by Gtsang-smyon.⁵⁸⁶ Gtsang-smyon did not invent the name of the melodies. Some were provided by Mkha’-spyod-dbang-po, who wrote one century before Gtsang-smyon,⁵⁸⁷ and a song collection called the “Twenty-Five Great Songs of Mar-pa”⁵⁸⁸ also indicates the melodies for a group of “nine songs of meditation which [establish] the level of his realization” (*rtogs tshad glu’i bsam gtan dgu*). According to this text, each of these nine songs, whose names are given in brief, has a specific melody. Some of the songs mentioned can be identified, and among these, some melodies correspond to Gtsang-smyon’s indications; but the identification of others remains uncertain and the melodies do not always match.⁵⁸⁹ It may be the case that this anthology figured among Gtsang-smyon’s sources, and that he clarified or changed parts that he found to be unclear. According to the anthology, Rngog (*bla ma gzhung pa chen po*) and others wrote the

p. 34, “in a voice like the drone of the tamboura;” p. 43, “in the melody of the outstretched wings of the soaring Garuda;” p. 102, “of a bee buzzing in the distance;” p. 108, “of the whistling song of the Dharmapala;” p. 123, “of sparkling water;” p. 136, “that overpowers phenomena and transforms the outlook of the dākas;” p. 142, “of the dākinis’ wail;” and p. 184, “of the regal voice.” See chart, pp. 296–299, for the names in Tibetan and the presence of these eight “great songs” in other biographies.

⁵⁸⁵ The great songs appear with a darker background in the chart.

⁵⁸⁶ MPSB, vol. 1, p. 21: *rje mtshan ldan gyi bla ma rin po chel ces pa la sogs mgur brgyad na yod pa de blangs pas bla ma shin tu mnyes skad do*. The song starting with these words is the one translated in Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 34–36 (see chart, p. 296, for correspondences). It is addressed to Nārōpa and the context is the same in the two versions.

⁵⁸⁷ KWNT, p. 29: “the drone of the tamboura,” p. 53: “the outstretched wing of the soaring Garuda,” p. 81: “sparkling water.”

⁵⁸⁸ MK25, pp. 451–452.

⁵⁸⁹ The nine songs listed in MK25, p. 461, are the following (the melody is indicated after the comma; when the corresponding song can be identified in MK25, the page number is indicated): (1) *Bla ma la rtogs pa phul ba’i ’gur, rings ta ’bu ra’i khong ’gyur*, p. 435. (2) *Chos phyir dka’ ba spyad pa’i ’gur, mya ngan dran byed*, p. 466 (?). (3) *mched grogs la byon skyes su phul ba’i ’gur, dris pa dad lan gyi dbyangs*. (4) *bkra shis byon skyems kyi ’gur, seng ge nga ro bsgrags pa’i dbyangs*, p. 442. (5) *bying ba sel ba la mtshan ltas dran pa’i ’gur, chu lcags gi zil pa*, p. 445. (6) *mithor ba bsdu ba la rig pa chos dang bsre ba’i ’gur, sems kyi lcags kyu*. (7) *’bras bu zad sar skyol ba la chos nyid lta ba’i ’gur, mkha’ ’gro smre sngags*. (8) *mdzad spyod rdzu ’phrul ngo mtshar gyi ’gur, chos skyongs gi spyugs glu*, p. 460. (9) *sems gnad du bsnun pa la snying po don gyi man ngag = dho ba rdo rje ’gur, lta ba khyung chen gyi gshog rgyangs*, p. 454. To match with Gtsang-smyon’s version, see chart, pp. 296–299.

twenty-five songs on various places, like the back of a statue or on the handle of a parasol. The author says they were sung during empowerments, consecration ceremonies (*rab gnas*) and *ganacakras*. As mentioned earlier, the 'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo, the 151-volume collection where this anthology appears, was compiled under the direction of the 17th 'Briguing abbot Kun-dga'-rin-chen (1474–1527), and is therefore approximately contemporaneous with Gtsang-smyon's text. Despite this date of compilation, it is quite likely that the songs were assembled much earlier: given that the biography (Rngog Mdo-sde's) and many of the texts that are included in the same volume belong to the Rngog clan tradition, the song anthology may also be part of their family heirloom.

This anthology is a rare case of Mar-pa's songs appearing as such, outside of biographies. There is another 40-page collection, but the songs included are excerpts from Gtsang-smyon's biography and so do not represent an independent tradition.⁵⁹⁰ The situation is the same with the *Rain of Wisdom*. All but one of Mar-pa's songs included in that great collection of the songs of the Kam-tshang Bka'-brgyud lineage masters are based on Gtsang-smyon's biography of Mar-pa. The exception is the famous song of the four pillars, which describes Mar-pa's foremost four disciples, which is the same as the one found in MK25.⁵⁹¹ As seen during our discussion of Gtsang-smyon's sources, this song was not originally part of Mar-pa's biographical tradition; it appeared in one of the earliest biographies of Mi-la-ras-pa,⁵⁹² which explains why it is included in the section of Mi-la-ras-pa's songs in the *Rain of Wisdom*, even though it was actually expressed by Mar-pa.

To conclude this general presentation of Mar-pa's songs, I would like to call attention to a fundamental difference between them and those composed by his famous disciple Mi-la-ras-pa. In the latter case, even the earliest biographies generally contained songs sections in which songs are distinct stories that depict episodes of the poet's life. As Andrew Quintman pointed out,⁵⁹³ the songs were compiled in *mgur 'bum* from the time of Gtsang-smyon Heruka,⁵⁹⁴ but they formed a discrete part of Mi-la-ras-pa's biogra-

⁵⁹⁰ According to Sernesi 2011b, p. 201, this was printed in 1552 by Lha-btsun Rin-chen-rnam-rgyal as an abridgment of Gtsang-smyon's *Life of Marpa*, and was called *Sgra bsgyur mar pa lo tstsha'i mgur 'bum bzhugs*. It was first mentioned by Gene Smith (2001, p. 77), who referred to a copy in Tibet House, New Delhi. There are three copies in the NGMPP: Reel L 194/7, E 2518/2, L 969/4 (part 4).

⁵⁹¹ MK25, pp. 479–481. See *Rain of Wisdom*, pp. 169–171.

⁵⁹² See above, p. 142, n. 451, for references.

⁵⁹³ See Quintman 2014, p. 59 ff.

⁵⁹⁴ There are two great collections of songs by Mi-la-ras-pa, compiled by Gtsang-smyon Heruka (*Rje btsun mi la ras pa rnam thar rgyas par phye pa mgur 'bum*) and his disciple

phy from the beginning of the tradition. The reason why Mar-pa's songs never really took on a life of their own is that most do not relate specific episodes of the translator's life but are general summaries of his various journeys to India. They therefore do not exist independently of his life's writing. This may be due to his poetic style: Mi-la-ras-pa was more lyrical in that he sang on the spot about his various experiences and told tales about his life, but did not summarize his life in song the way Mar-pa did. Mar-pa was more pragmatic; he did not sing on random occasions but during tantric gatherings or at the request of disciples who wanted to hear about his journeys.⁵⁹⁵

The songs in the biographies

Following this general depiction of Mar-pa's songs, I will describe in brief how the various biographies mostly do, and sometimes do not, use songs in their narrations; the evolution of that utilization; and its justification.

The use of Mar-pa's songs when narrating his life story naturally varies from one text to the next, but there appears to be a coherent general evolution. In the beginning of the tradition, some authors clearly used the songs to structure their narrations while others did not. This seems to have been a personal choice and a question of access to sources. Once the tradition matured and authors had several sources at their disposal, they all tended to base portions of their synthetic narratives on Mar-pa's songs. These biographies often quoted the songs themselves at length and also made use of the data therein. A third group adopted a more source-critical approach, discussing the songs to justify certain points in the story. For these biographers, songs represented Mar-pa's distinctive voice and were, as such, primary sources of knowledge that had to be clearly acknowledged.

The first group is made up of the "foundations" of Mar-pa's life writing: the biographies written in the 12th century. Among these, Ngam-rdzong ston-pa extensively used Mar-pa songs when building his narrative. In large sections of text, the events related are exactly those found in certain of Mar-pa's songs, and five songs are named even though they are not quoted *in extenso*.⁵⁹⁶ In this case, it could be said that Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's source was the songs, even if additional information was also used.

Lha-btsun Rin-chen-rnam-rgyal (*Rje bisun mi la ras pa'i rdo rje mgur drug sogs gsung rgyun tho bu 'ga*). For published translations, see above, p. 175, n. 571.

⁵⁹⁵ This difference between the two first Tibetan Bka'-brgyud masters and how Mar-pa's style structured the way his life was narrated was explored in a talk delivered in Oxford, September 2012. See Ducher Forthcoming (?).

⁵⁹⁶ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 89, *ngo mtshar can gyi mthong brtags rnam mgur*: all the elements from this song are presented in the narration (for the song see Tsangnyön 1982, p. 53).

Rngog-2 also relies greatly on songs. The text mentions three songs which can be identified: the first of the eight great ones;⁵⁹⁷ the “song of the three longings, the three apprehensions, the three happinesses and so on;”⁵⁹⁸ and a short one to Mar-pa's family stating that he mastered the subtle energies and could therefore beget a son if he chose to do so.⁵⁹⁹ Rngog-2 quotes one song *in extenso*,⁶⁰⁰ and much of the overall narrative derives from information found in songs.

Another author who uses Mar-pa's *mgur*, though to a lesser extent, is Bla-ma Zhang. He refers to the song in which Mar-pa tells Klog-skya ston-pa his dream vision of Saraha,⁶⁰¹ and quotes several parts of songs, attributing names to some of them. These extracts correspond to the “three apprehensions song” also referred to in Rngog-2:⁶⁰²

Then, when the great Lama Mar-pa Lo-tsā-ba thought of returning to Tibet from Bengal in the East, he sang this song of apprehension:

Mon-rtse-pa, p. 97, *lam mgur ring mo*: all data from the song in the narration (Tsangnyön 1982, p. 102). Mon-rtse-pa, p. 98, *mtshan ma bshad pa'i mgur* (sung for Painḍapā): part 1 (biographical) in the narration, but not parts 2 and 3 (more theoretical) (Tsangnyön 1982, p. 123). Mon-rtse-pa, p. 99, *dpal ri khrod pa dang mjal ba'i rmis ltas mgur* (mentioned twice, given to Mgo-yag at Klog-skya's place): Saraha's song, not really used in the narration (Tsangnyön 1982, p. 43). Mon-rtse-pa, p. 99, *dpal nā ro pa dang mjal lugs dang gdams ngag zhus lugs la sogs pa mgur du bzhes*: uncertainty as to which song this refers to insofar as three songs (of which two figure among the eight great ones) relate the quest and encounter with Nāropā during Mar-pa's last journey. Only one of the three, sung for Painḍapā and entitled *bla ma dang mjal tshul ngo mtshar ltas brgyad kyi mgur* by Gtsang-smyon (Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 108–111, Gtsang-smyon, p. 120) include all events related in prose by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, pp. 92–95. A shorter song (Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 119–121) is addressed to the yogins of the Ramadoli charnel grounds. The last one, entitled *mdzad spyod rdzu 'phrul yon tan ngo mtshar can gyi mgur* by Gtsang-smyon (Tsangnyön 1982, p. 137; Gtsang-smyon, p. 149) is addressed to Mgo-legs.

⁵⁹⁷ MPSB, p. 21.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26. This is also referred to in Rgyal-thang-pa, p. 174, and Dpa'-bo II, p. 32.

⁶⁰⁰ MPSB, pp. 24–25.

⁶⁰¹ ZKB, p. 140: *La stod kyi dgyer phur klog skya ston pa zhib gis sna blangs* [read: *drangs*] *nas chos zhus pa'i lo rgyus mgur na zhib*.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 143. The way the song is formulated would seem to indicate that it corresponds to the song translated in Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 102–106 (see chart, p. 297, for correspondences in other biographies). This is one of the great songs, called “Long song of the journey” (*lam glu chen mo*), by Gtsang-smyon.

Other than the Ganges,
 There are one hundred and eighty rivers.
 In front of these, I quiver even more than mercury!
 Then, when he reached the heart of Tibet, there was this song:
 Other than Nāro and Maitri,
 There are one hundred and eighty masters.
 I miss them even more than my one and only mother! [...]
 And this song of wonder:
 Other than Hevajra and Catuspītha,
 I know one hundred and eighty tantras!
 Ema! How marvelous, what a wonderful teaching! [...]

Rngog Mdo-sde's version (MKNT) and its summary, Rngog-1, do not rely much on songs, even though Saraha's song is mentioned.⁶⁰³ The Aural Transmission version is even more striking in that regard, as the songs are completely disregarded. This is the only biography that mentions only two journeys (as opposed to Mar-pa's "three journeys," repeatedly mentioned in the songs), and it ignores Mar-pa's first encounter with the Dharma at the feet of 'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba, a *passage obligé* of several *mgur*. Sgam-po-pa does not rely much on songs either, but given the brevity of his account, this is hardly surprising.

During the second phase of Mar-pa's biographical building, some authors quote Mar-pa's songs at length. The first to do so is "U-rgyan-pa,"⁶⁰⁴ foreshadowing later authors like Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje,⁶⁰⁵ Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po,⁶⁰⁶ Gtsang-smyon,⁶⁰⁷ and Dpa'-bo II.⁶⁰⁸ These biographies are generally the longest and most detailed.

Others do not quote Mar-pa's songs to the same extent but still use them widely. This is the case in the *Rwa lung gser phreng*, where two songs are quoted. Rgyal-thang-pa, for his part, has a particular use of verse. He incorporates two types of versified passages: eulogies of his creation in which he narrates Mar-pa's life, and songs that he attributes to Mar-pa, but which are nowhere else to be found.⁶⁰⁹ While their authenticity cannot be disproved, it

⁶⁰³ MKNT, p. 170.

⁶⁰⁴ Twelve songs cited *in extenso*, plus numerous other shorter versified passages.

⁶⁰⁵ Same as "U-rgyan-pa."

⁶⁰⁶ Twenty-four long songs.

⁶⁰⁷ Forty-six songs.

⁶⁰⁸ Forty-nine songs.

⁶⁰⁹ GLNT, p. 147: *zhe bcad drag po skyes te mgur ma 'di yang gsungs sol bla ma rnam la phyag 'tshal lol /dam pa rnam la skyabs su mchil /nga dal 'byor mi lus thob dus 'dir/ /dam*

is more likely that they express Rgyal-thang-pa's artistic creativity. This example highlights the functions that songs serve in most biographies: they bring more life and intensity to the story.

Another function of songs is to lend credit to the biography's authenticity. Very often, authors quote a song—which *in fine* means that they repeat in verse what has just been described in prose—to show that what they say is not their invention, but is backed by Mar-pa's words. In the earliest life stories, this was only suggested, but the process became more explicit as time went by. Thus, several authors openly declared that they had chosen one version over another on the basis of descriptions Mar-pa gave in his songs. There is, for example, a song where Mar-pa tells his disciples the tale of his first journey to India, the masters he met there, and where he met them.⁶¹⁰ Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba specifically mentions it to justify his presentation of the anteriority of the meeting with Jñānagarbha, and he accuses others—clearly referring to Gtsang-smyon Heruka—of having inverted the order.⁶¹¹ It was probably on the basis of that same song that Ngam-rdzong ston-pa presented the story of Mar-pa's first journey to India the way he did, even though in this case the link is not clearly acknowledged. Padma-dkar-po relies even more heavily on the songs, preferring them to the narration and by using them to draw conclusions about the chronology of Mar-pa's life. He also quotes several extracts of songs where Mar-pa mentions periods of time before presenting his conclusions, which he declares to be “in agreement with the Venerable's own songs.”⁶¹²

This use of songs to substantiate the narrative is at its zenith in Gtsang-smyon Heruka's version. The Madman from Gtsang seems to have gone so far as to invent songs to justify or enliven his stories. The “song of shame” that Mar-pa addresses to Gnyos, for instance, was almost certainly inserted to support Gtsang-smyon's account of Gnyos' jealousy towards Mar-pa. The

pa'i lha chos mi byed ril / ldam pa'i lha chos byed dus 'dir/ lrgya gar gnas su mi 'gro ril / lrgya gar gnas su phyin nas dang / lmkhas grub kyi bla ma gcig mi byed ril / lmkhas grub kyi bla ma byas nas kyang / /bod yul 'di dkar por mi btongs ril / l'khyed 'dir 'tshogs kyiis drung du zhe bcad 'bull / ldpang du bla ma dkon mchog bzhugs/ ces pa'i zhe bcad skyes tel / rgya gar du byon par thag bcad dol

⁶¹⁰ See translation in the introduction (pp. 19–20), correspondences in Appendix 5 (p. 297) and Ducher Forthcoming (?) for details about this song and the different ways it was used by several authors.

⁶¹¹ Dpa'-bo II, p. 23: [...] *ces sogs dang 'di mtshungs sam snyam zhing/ 'di'i yang go rim dngos ltar na rje nā ro pā 'jal phyi ba ltar snang zhing la lar go rim brjes 'dug pa ni rang bzo yin par snang!*

⁶¹² Pad-dkar, p. 455: *des na rje btsun rang gi mgur dang bstun na lnga bcu rtsa gcig pa la byon!* [...].

authenticity of several songs that appear nowhere prior to Gtsang-smyon's version is also an open question;⁶¹³ his manipulation of Gnyos' song is so blatant that it sheds doubt upon the authenticity of other unique songs. In this respect, Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po's innovations are less dubious as he does not manipulate his sources so obviously. Even though Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po is the first to mention certain songs found in his work, it is likely that he derived them from other texts that have not yet surfaced or from the oral tradition.

This question of authenticity raises another question that is particularly relevant to our knowledge of Mar-pa's life: are the songs authentic, that is to say, did Mar-pa really sing them? Do they make it possible to know anything about his life? Clearly, for Tibetans, the songs really reflect Mar-pa's life, which is why most authors mention them. For example, Padma-dkar-po does not hesitate to contradict all previous versions in order to accommodate the progression of Mar-pa's journeys as presented in his songs. Here, as modern commentators, we find ourselves walking on eggshells: as mentioned in the introduction, biographies—and songs for that matter—cannot be taken at face value; they are anything but historical documents. To avoid this quandary, the question might be phrased differently: even though the songs do not tell us much about Mar-pa's life *per se*, have they existed from the beginning of the tradition, and is it conceivable that they appeared during his lifetime? That is, did he actually sing them? On the basis of my study of Mar-pa's biographies and of their evolution in time, I can safely state that songs existed from the onset. Ngam-rdzong ston-pa clearly mentions them, and, as was shown above, he was not alone. Some of the songs are almost unanimously recognized in the tradition, and have deeply structured everything we know about Mar-pa. Saraha's song and the one for Painḍapā at the Rin-chen-tshul Vihāra, for example, are almost ubiquitous; it is no wonder than they remain the Tibetan community's most cherished songs.⁶¹⁴ It seems therefore reasonable to imagine that most of the songs circulated among Mar-pa's disciples in the decades following his death. It is impossible to know whether he truly was the author of all songs attributed to him, or

⁶¹³ See chart, pp. 296–299. Several songs appear only in Gtsang-smyon and Dpa'-bo II, and the latter is likely to have included these songs because Gtsang-smyon's used them. Of these, some may have existed before in texts that are not currently available (particularly in a tradition descending from Mes-ston, who is often the one who requests these songs but from whom no biography has surfaced thus far), but some may very well have been invented.

⁶¹⁴ Mkhan-po Chos-grags-bstan-'phel (private interview, January 2011) singled out these two when questioned about the manner in which songs were traditionally used. He stated that they are generally sung during group *ganacakra* or great empowerments.

whether their form in biographies reflects an oral truth, but most can certainly not be discounted as later inventions. They are referred to and quoted from the beginning; most authors consider them reliable and use them as prime sources, treating them with utmost respect. Following in their footsteps, we can therefore assume that they represent the most intimate accounts of Mar-pa's life.

3.1.2. Quotative verbs marking the author's presence in the biography

General remarks

Elements that can be particularly helpful in revealing the context of a biography are remnants of the spoken language appearing in the written text. Examples are quotative verbs such as *skad*, which means "it is said," or *gsung*, which means the same but with an additional honorific sense: "[the master] said." They are the marks of the author's intervention and, as such, can call attention to specific constituents of the biography. Many such verbs can be found in Mar-pa's life-stories, particularly the early ones, and studying some of these oral traces can be helpful when comparing different works, as they provide indications about the circumstances of composition.⁶¹⁵

Of course, all of the biographies on Mar-pa include numerous marks of reported speech between characters, or verbs indicating that one of the characters has said or is saying something, even though that character is not necessarily named. There are also traces of outer narration where the speaker is obvious, for example when the author indicates one of his sources, specifying that "so-and-so said such-and-such." These are not my current focus.

⁶¹⁵ A similar interest was formulated by Ulrike Roesler (Roesler 2008, pp. 405–406), who compared the use of the verb *skad* in various biographies of Po-to-ba: "Finally, an observation with regard to the style of the early reports might be useful. Both Lha 'Bri sgang pa and Mchims Nam mkha' grags use the verb *skad* "it is said / it is reported" after each section of their report. The verb *skad* indicates that the information comes from an unnamed source which is presented as an oral one. It could refer to a person from whom the author has heard the respective information, but it could also point to a longer line of transmission, where the oral source is located several generations earlier. When Lha 'Bri sgang pa uses *skad*, it is not completely out of place to imagine his teacher Dol pa Rin po che as the source of information. He was a direct disciple of Po to ba and must have reported sayings of his teacher. In the case of Mchims Nam mkha' grags, who lived nearly two hundred years later than Po to ba, the *skad* may be a relic taken over from earlier sources. It is interesting to observe what happens to this *skad* in later biographies. Las chen quotes it in several instances without altering anything. In other cases he omits the *skad*. And in one instance he replaces it with a reference to a written source: while Mchims Nam mkha' grags says that 'it is said (*skad*) that Po to ba studied for five years with his first teacher Sba sgom,' Las chen says that 'his *rnam thar* states that he studied for five years with Sba sgom.'"

What interests me here is not what individuals say—whether from within the story or as narrators—but the fact that certain quotative verbs reveal the presence of the author of a given text, and thereby can highlight important aspects of it. In the case of Sgam-po-pa’s version, for example, verbs of speech such as *gsung* show that the speaker is not the actual author, but that he took dictation. In most other cases, they allude to events belonging to the author’s time rather than to Mar-pa’s. Studying these quotative verbs in some of the most important biographies allows us to make use of these marks.

Before turning to concrete examples, it helps to be aware of the analytical framework and its limitations. As we have seen, Mar-pa’s biographies can be classified into two categories: biographies found in golden rosaries that are often more “hagiographic” in scope, and religious histories meant to be more historical and critical, and aspiring, to a greater or lesser extent, to some degree of objectivity. Such narratives generally appeared later and have a more controlled style; their quotative verbs are therefore less significant. In the *rnam thar*, on the other hand, the author’s personal input is more evident since these texts do not aim at producing an objective biographical account, but at relating an inspiring life story. Such marks naturally attract the reader’s attention to the passages that surround them, inasmuch as they refer to the author’s circumstances while relating events that took place in the past.

For the interpretation of these verbs to be of any value, it is important to note a few points: First, the same *skad* is sometimes repeated from one biography to another, which shows that it is not necessarily a mark of the spoken word. Nevertheless, these repetitions do serve to highlight the links between different biographies, just as lexical or thematic parallels do, and so provide the interested reader with data that help map out a genealogy of Mar-pa’s biographical tradition.

Second, the repetition of these words in affiliated biographies is not systematic, no more so than it is in the same biography. This shows that the procedure is random and not necessarily significant for the author. That being said, verbs such as *skad* and the like often highlight particular points of the biography which are new or unique. Studying them can draw attention to these points, allowing us to gather information on both Mar-pa and the biography which describes him.

Evolution of the use of speech marks in the biographies of Mar-pa

Among the texts gathered in this study, the first biographies are particularly representative of the subject under study. In these texts, the quotative verbs—mostly *skad* and *gsung*—often call the attention to aspects of Mar-pa’s life which are evolving in their treatment, and generally indicate that the story

related is something which “is told,” with no further indication on who exactly is telling it. This process is widespread in the biographies composed by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, Rngog Mdo-sde, Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas, Don-mo-ri-pa, “U-rgyan-pa” and in the *Rwa-lung Rosary*. This last text is particularly significant as all the *skad* contained therein seem to recount stories which circulated at the time of the author and most are specific to this version. The author may even interrupt his narration with, “I heard the story that...,”⁶¹⁶ thus confirming the hypothesis of oral stories existing alongside written biographies. Another source of inspiration can be other masters, as is the case again in the *Rwa-lung Rosary*, which quotes the words of Ba-ri Lo-tsā-ba by using the words *zer skad*.⁶¹⁷

Some centuries later, Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba also often indicated that “it is said” that something happened in Mar-pa's life; this use is almost anachronistic, however, in that most of Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba's sources were earlier biographies, not oral narratives. In general, later authors such as Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po or Gtsang-smyon Heruka remove these verbs of speech from their texts, as their goal is to present a free-flowing story of an inspiring life. There are a few exceptions, which are probably remnants of the sources used.

The hagiography composed by Gtsang-smyon Heruka in particular exemplifies the author's intention to compile a coherent and independent work. Admittedly related to authentic sources, as is shown in the colophon, its goal is to describe Mar-pa's life as if it was taking place in the present, rather than to underline what different people may say about it. In order to achieve his, Gtsang-smyon made editorial choices, which he did not always clearly indicate, one of them being the deletion of all traces of the spoken word. Another device he used in his biography of Mi-la-ras-pa was to have Ras-chung-pa narrate his master's story, thus making the plot unfold very naturally.⁶¹⁸

Even though Rgyal-thang-pa wrote his biography relatively early on, he also seems to have aimed at authoring an autonomous composition. This can be deduced from the form he adopted—i.e. root verses summarizing Mar-pa's life followed by commentaries reiterating much of the information found in other biographies—as well as by a rather literary style. Traces of

⁶¹⁶ *Rwa-lung Rosary*, p. 159: *de ltar rgya gar du lan gcig bod du lan bdun po de las ma gtogs pa grong 'jug mdzad pa'i lo rgyus kho bos mthos so.*

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153: *phyis bla ma ba ri lo tsa bas rgya gar gyi yul du byon nas gdam ngag zab mo btsal bas/ gsang sngags kyi gdams pa chig rgyud las med pa tsho ka dpe byung skad/ pandita dang/ grub thob dang/ ku su lu pa thams cad na rel gdam ngag zab mo thams cad mar pa lo tsas bod du khyer nas med do zer skad/*

⁶¹⁸ See Quintman 2014, p. 137.

orality have therefore disappeared from his work, which is marked by the frequent usage of grammatical particles typical of the written language.

Concrete examples

It is in the first biographies that the use of the verbs *skad* and *gsung* is the most prevalent, and therefore the most helpful as indication of the circumstances in which the text was composed.

Gsung, “the master said:” an indication of a pseudepigraph

The verb *gsung* is used to indicate that someone important said something. Within the corpus of biographies, this can be found in two significant instances: in Mar-pa’s biography from Sgam-po-pa’s *gsung ’bum* and in the Aural Transmission biography (KSTC), which therefore can be considered pseudepigraphical. The former was most likely taught by Sgam-po-pa and penned by one of his disciples, identified as Khyung-tshang-pa Ye-shes-blama (1115–1176) in the manuscript version of the *gsung ’bum*.⁶¹⁹ The latter’s author is identified as Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-’byung-gnas and the scribe is not clear. A concrete example in Sgam-po-pa’s biography is as follows.⁶²⁰

[The master] **said** that [Mar-pa] met [Nāropā] at Vikramaśīla. He **said** that afterwards he listened to the teachings of Nāropā, Maitrīpā and so on.

*bi kra ma shī lar sprad pa yin gsung/ de nas nā ro pa dang mai tri
pa la sgos pa la chos gsan gsung.*

Here is another example from Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-’byung-gnas’s teachings on Mar-pa’s life:⁶²¹

Having returned to Phullahari, [Ākarasiddhi] **told** master Mar-pa: “I came back so as not to make you unhappy!” [The master] **said** that [Ākarasiddhi] went to Oḍḍiyāna, and that afterwards master Mar-pa could find his sleep.

*pu la ha rir byon nas/ bla ma mar pa la ngas khyod ma dga’ ba
ma byas par yod do gsung nas/ u rgyan du gshegs pa yin gsung/ bla
ma mar pas de nas gnyid khugs pa yin gsung ngo.*

⁶¹⁹ See the part on Sgam-po-pa for details (pp. 86–88). The identification of Khyung-tshang-pa as the scribe was suggested by Kragh 2013, n. 74, p. 387.

⁶²⁰ Sgam-po-pa, p. 28. Other instances of the verb *gsung* used in the same way are found: pp. 28 (x 3), 29, 30 (x 2) and 31 (x 2).

⁶²¹ KSTC, p. 163. Other instances of the verb *gsung* used in the same way are found: pp. 150, 153, 163, 164, 165, 169, 180, 181 and 192.

It is interesting to note in this example the difference between the first *gsung* and the other two. In the former, that verb indicates that someone important says something; this person belongs to the narration and is understood from context to be Ākarasiddhi, a Kashmiri student of Nāropā's who went to Tibet and made Mar-pa anxious that his own teaching there would become redundant if he was preceded by such a scholar. The last two *gsung*, however, do not refer to a character in the narration, but to the person who wrote the text;⁶²² they indicate that he did not write it of his own accord but followed someone else's dictation. In this particular case, the verb has been conserved in a later version, "U-rgyan-pa's," thus showing a clear filiation between the two texts:⁶²³

Having returned to Phullahari, [Ākarasiddhi] **said**: "Mar-pa! I have not made you unhappy!" [The master] **said** that after [Ākarasiddhi] had gone to Oḍḍiyāna, Mar-pa could then find his sleep.

*pu la ha rir byon nas/ mar pa khyod mi dga' ba ma byas par yod
dol/ lgsung nas/ u rgyan du gshogs nas thal/ mar pa de nas gnyid
khug pa yin gsung.*

The KSTC also contains many *gsungs* followed by the adjunct *lo*. Sometimes, the meaning is the same as just described,⁶²⁴ so that in these cases the adjunct *lo* does not seem to be particularly significant:⁶²⁵

[Cryptic verse of Nāropā] [The master] **said** that Lord Mar-pa heard these words but did not understand their meaning.

de rje btsun mar pas tshig zin pa las don me shes gsung lo.

The similarity in meaning is confirmed by the fact that "U-rgyan-pa" copied the phrase but wrote *skad* instead of *gsung lo*.⁶²⁶ In many other cases, however, the phrase *gsung lo* is used to comment the preceding passages in verse, usually declarations by Nāropā or Mar-pa on specific points of doctrine.⁶²⁷

⁶²² The second *gsung* is actually quite unclear: is it Ākarasiddhi who says he is going to Oḍḍiyāna? Is it Mar-ston relating it? It is the way that "U-rgyan-pa" reformulated the sentence by removing the second *gsung* that made me translate the passage this way.

⁶²³ "U-rgyan-pa," p. 121.

⁶²⁴ KSTC, pp. 152, 164, 185 and 191,

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 163–164.

⁶²⁶ See "U-rgyan-pa," p. 122: *don ma shes skad*.

⁶²⁷ KSTC: *gsung lo*, pp. 181, 183, 186, 196, 200 and 201.

These commentaries are absent from the summaries of the KSTC (KSTC.sum.1, 2 and 3), which shows that later compilers clearly differentiated between the biography itself and Mar-ston's comments on it. For example:⁶²⁸

[Nāropā's verse heard from the sky] [The master] **commented** that to search for the guru one needs what is called "the horse of uninterrupted devotion." If one does not stimulate it with the whip of perseverance—if one is trapped in the hunter's net of dualistic notions like "to find" or "not to find," is one not roaming in saṃsāra?

*bla ma tshol ba la dad gus rgyun chad med pa'i rta bya ba gcig
dgos/ de la brtson 'grus kyi lcags kyi ma skul nal rnyed mi rnyed la
sogs pa de bzung 'dzin gyi ri dwags rngon pa'i rgyar tshud nal
'khor bar mi 'khyam mam gsung lo.*

In some cases it is difficult to determine whether the *gsung* indicates a pseud-epigraph or whether Mar-pa is intended as an oral source:⁶²⁹

While Bla-ma Mar-pa had gone alone for a month to a land where various languages [were spoken], [the master/Mar-pa?] **said** that one morning at dawn he had this dream: surrounded by two women...

*bla ma mar pa gcig pus skad rigs mi 'dra ba'i sa phyogs su zla ba
gcig lon tsa nal nam tho rangs kha 'di rmi lam du byung gsung
stel bud med gnyis kyi mtha' rten nas...*

In this case, it would seem that Mar-pa himself is speaking, and that this narrative was therefore written down by one of his direct disciples, with Mar-ston being only a distant re-teller of the story. While it is clear that the story existed previous to its having been recorded in the late 12th century, it is unlikely in this case that the verb *gsung* refers to Mar-pa and was kept as such in the narration for a few generations, even if the dream must have been related by him in the first place, since he was the one who experienced it.

In Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's biography of Mar-pa, on the other hand, several honorific quotative verbs point to Mar-pa as a narrator. For example:⁶³⁰

⁶²⁸ KSTC, p. 181.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁶³⁰ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 85.

In spite of this, it is **said** (Mar-pa said?) that he contracted a disease due to which his skin became like that of a snake.

*de lus la byugs nas phyin pas kyang sbrul gyi lpags bzhin nad yams
1 zhus skad.*

The term *zhus skad* can be considered an honorific form close to a *gsung*. It seems unlikely that this verb or other *gsungs* in this text indicate an outer narrator (such as Ngam-rdzong ston-pa dictating to a secretary, or Mi-la-raspa to Ngam-rdzong). Although the term may simply indicate “it is said,” another possibility is that it refers to Mar-pa, who personally narrated his journeys to his disciples. Several other instances of the verb *gsung* point to the same conclusion:⁶³¹

He then left towards the east of India and **said** that he was led by *dākinīs*.

*de nas rgya gar shar phyogs su phyin pas mkha' 'gro mas lam sna
drangs bya ba yang gsung.*

In this case, it would seem that the subject of *gsung* could only be Mar-pa, as he alone witnessed this “fact.” The passage is not found in any songs, and Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba repeated it almost verbatim, *gsung* included.⁶³² The same goes for the following example:

It is **said** [by Mar-pa?] that at that time he intoned the Long Song of the Journey and that all of the brahmins and others shed tears.

*de'i dus su lam mgur ring mo zhes bya ba bzhes pas/ bram ze la
sogs pa thams cad kyī mchi ma shor skad dol*

Here, the verb *skad* does not refer to an internal dialogue, nor to a story circulating in Tibet (the anecdote takes place in India). Although it is unusual that the phrase is not in the honorific mode, it may refer to Mar-pa's words. This hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that the same sentence is repeated without the addition of the *skad* in most of the later biographies, beginning with Don-mo-ri-pa's. More simply, it may merely be a *dicitur*, of which several examples follow.

⁶³¹ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 97; see also p. 91.

⁶³² Dpa'-bo II, p. 68.

Skad, “it is said:” an indication of an oral source

In the biography by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, there are several *skad* used in the context of anecdotes taking place in Tibet, unconnected to songs. For example:⁶³³

It is **said** that he thought with regret that had he conferred initiations and granted instructions in the first place, they would [now] assemble under his authority.

*dang po ngas dbang skur gdams ngag stan na nga'i dbang du 'du'
ba yin pa la snyam pa'i 'gyod pa yin skad do.*

Here the quotative verb *skad* indicates that this story circulated orally in circles where Ngam-rdzong spent time. This rare vignette relates an episode where Mar-pa went to see 'Brog-mi with Gnyos at the end of their first journey. The senior translator is said to have regretted not having been more generous towards Mar-pa. The word *skad* actually draws attention to this sentence in Ngam-rdzong's work. As it was only repeated, with the *skad*, in Don-mo-ri-pa's version, it also points to the direct relationship between the two texts.⁶³⁴

It is **said** that he thought with regret that they would have assembled under his authority.

de'i dbang du 'du ba yin snyam nas 'gyod pa yin skad.

Another early biography in which the verb *skad* is freely used is Rngog Mdo-sde's.⁶³⁵ These verbs of speech highlight the text's antiquity and show that Mdo-sde's main sources are oral accounts. They seem to confirm that the author was indeed Mdo-sde who, as an early biographer, could not have had much written material at his disposal. Some of these *skad* call the reader's attention to important details. Here is one noteworthy example:⁶³⁶

To write very briefly about that period: when [Mar-pa] was departing from Rtsang, at Mkhar-gong-dkar-po erected in Nyang-stod, he met the unique deity, Jo-bo Rje [Atiśa], who was going to Dbus, and recognized him. It is **said** that the Jo-bo himself told [Mar-pa] that he had first been blessed by a disciple of Lord Nāropā, Guru Ldom-bhi-ba, and that he had

⁶³³ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 89. There are also instances of *skad* on p. 97 and on p. 100 (3 x).

⁶³⁴ DRNT, p. 147.

⁶³⁵ MKNT, *skad* on pp. 168, 169, 171, 172 (2 x), 173, 175, 180 (2 x) and 181.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

later become Lord Nāropā's direct disciple. He was that handsome man who had introduced himself as a paṇḍita of royal caste and who had sometimes come before Lord Nāropā in order to receive instructions. Both rejoiced.

*dus der shin tu myur ba'i brtsams te rtsang nas yar byon pa'i dus
sul nyang stod bzhengs kyis (= kyi) mkhar khong dkar po bya bar
jo bo rje lha cig dbus su byon pa dang mjal te der ngo shes par
byung nas/ jo bo nyid dang po bla ma ldom bhi ba bya ba rje na
ro pa'i slob ma cig gIs byin gyis rlabs nas/ phyis rje na ro ba'i slob
dngos su gyur pa'i zhes gsungs skad dol sngar rje na ro ba'i spyan
sngar rgyal rigs kyi pan di ta yin zer ba'i gzugs bzang ba cig skabs
skabs su gdam ngag zhur 'ong ba de yin bar 'dug ste gnyis ka dgyes.*

This took place as Atiśa was arriving in central Tibet and Mar-pa was leaving for India. Mdo-sde may have derived the information from Nag-'tsho Lo-tsā-ba's account, as the latter was in Atiśa's entourage, or from oral accounts of the meeting by other disciples of Atiśa or Mar-pa. This meeting is an important event whose significance is emphasized by the *skad*.⁶³⁷ It is, however, absent from most biographies and was only repeated by Gtsang-smyon Heruka.

Versions of Mar-pa's life written a bit later also retain significant remnants of the spoken word. This is the case for the version by Bla-ma Zhang, whose main sources were oral accounts and the biographies by Sgam-po-pa and Rngog Mdo-sde. Zhang states:⁶³⁸

There are stories on how, for example, Rngog gave up [his riches] three times in order to receive [Mar-pa's] teaching.

*de nas bla ma rngog gis chos zhus nas spong dag lan gsum mdzad
pa la sog pa'i lo rgyus yod do.*

This account is not found in either of the Rngogs' biographies, but Sgam-po-pa's version includes it.⁶³⁹ Zhang also declares:⁶⁴⁰

It is **said** that the disciples gathered, closed all windows and openings of the house, and [Mar-pa] entered into the corpse of a pigeon and almost flew.

⁶³⁷ See the part on Nāropā (p. 209 ff.) for more details on the subject and the texts which corroborate the meeting.

⁶³⁸ ZKB, p. 144.

⁶³⁹ Sgam-po-pa, pp. 29–30.

⁶⁴⁰ ZKB, p. 145.

*slob ma tsho bsags nas khyim kyi skar khung dang bug pa rnams
bkag ste phug ron gyi ro la thugs bcug nas 'phur la khad mdzad
skad do.*

A similar narrative also appears in Sgam-po-pa's biography, without the *skad*.⁶⁴¹ Even though the same event is related in Rngog Mdo-sde's biography, it is clear that Zhang relied on Sgam-po-pa rather than on Rngog, as the two versions differ.⁶⁴² We might therefore deduce that Zhang heard an oral account of Sgam-po-pa's version, indicated by the *skad*, but used a written version of Rngog's narrative. These few traces do not allow us to draw definitive conclusions, but they do provide examples of how such details can reveal significant information about the relationships between various texts, and about how the author worked to draft his own version. Another example that instantiates Zhang's source is the following:⁶⁴³

Mar-pa said that he sometimes heard [Nāropā] and sometimes saw him directly.

bla ma mar pas la la thos/ la la ni dngos su gzigs pa yin gsungs.

The agentive particle inserted after “Mar-pa” may indicate that Zhang is quoting Mar-pa's words, as translated here. This would suggest that he used songs where Mar-pa related his wondrous visions of Nāropā, or narratives attributed to him.

There are many such examples, but only some of those found in the most important *rnam thar* of Mar-pa have been documented here as a tool to help identify the relationships between various biographies. If a word which, as such, had no significance in Mar-pa's life, was repeated in a later version, this generally implies that the later version was beholden to a former one, which is why I began taking note of all occurrences of such verbs. More broadly, these words are indications that the accounts in which they appeared were still in a process of formation, and that they synthesized several sources. The fact that later, more mature versions (e.g. Rgyal-thang-pa, Gtsang-smyon, Byang-chub-bzang-po) omitted these verbs shows that they relied less openly on sources that are now so far removed that they have

⁶⁴¹ Sgam-po-pa, p. 31: *de nas* [31] *dus cig na slob ma rnams bsags nas khyim cig tu bug pa dang/ skar khung bkag nas/ phug ron ro la rnam shes bcug nas 'phur la khad mdzad pa yin.*

⁶⁴² MKNT, p. 186: *dus cig tsa na phug ron ro cig lal/ lcags phur kyi zungs kyis brtod nas de la grong jug mdzad pas/ phug ron na mkha' la pu ru ru byed pa la 'di skad gsung/* Note that the *skad gsung* at the end of this sentence does not refer to external speech. It indicates that Mar-pa commented each of his practices of entering another's body.

⁶⁴³ ZKB, p. 143.

nearly been lost in time. During this later period, relating a biography was less about saying what one knew than about expressing as convincingly as possible how and why certain events occurred. Studying such verbs of speech helps us identify these various narrative styles.

3.2. Evolution of the characters

3.2.1. The central character: Mar-pa

3.2.1.1. Mar-pa as an emanation

Text	Incarnation
Ngam-rdzong ston-pa	Ḍombiheruka
Rngog Mdo-sde	Samantabhadrā → Ḍombiheruka / [Brahmin Bhadrāpā]
Rngog-2	∅
KSTC	∅ [Brahmin Bhadrīka]
Sgam-po-pa	<i>sprul pa lta bu</i>
Bla-ma Zhang	∅
<i>Mdo-chen Rosary</i>	∅
<i>Rwa-lung Rosary</i>	Ḍombiheruka
Rngog-1	∅
Don-mo-ri-pa	Ḍombiheruka / Avalokiteśvara
Rgyal-thang-pa	Brahmin Bhadrīka / Avalokiteśvara
“U-rgyan-pa”	Vajradhara → Vajrapāṇi → Hevajra → Mar-pa
<i>Deb ther dmar po</i>	∅
Mkha’-spyod-dbang-po	Bodhisattva Ratnamati (Blo-gros-rin-chen)
<i>Opening Eyes</i>	Bodhisattva Samantabhadrā
<i>Lho rong chos ’byung</i>	∅
Kun-dga’-dpal’byor	∅
Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje	∅
<i>Deb ther sngon po</i>	∅
Gtsang-smyon Heruka	Samantabhadrā → Ḍombiheruka → Mar-pa
Kun-dga’-rin-chen	∅
Byang-chub-bzang-po	Ḍombiheruka
Dpa’-bo II	Ḍombiheruka
Padma-dkar-po	Samantabhadrā / Ḍombiheruka
<i>Stag lung chos ’byung</i>	∅
Tshe-dbang-nor-bu	∅
<i>Rosary of Crystal Gems</i>	Samantabhadrā / Ḍombiheruka

Table of the relationship between various texts that describe Mar-pa as being (or not) an emanation of a previous master or bodhisattva. Texts are listed in chronological order of appearance.

Sgam-po-pa presents the simplest form of identification in his biography. By simply stating that Mar-pa was “like an emanation” (*sprul pa lta bu*), he acknowledges his realization without going into specific associations. Likewise, Sgam-po-pa also declares that Mi-la-ras-pa was an “emanated person” (*sprul pa'i gang zag*). This declaration is, of course, in accordance with his time, since the Tibetan institution of the *sprul sku* had not yet formally begun and it was not necessary to justify a practitioner’s qualities by asserting that he was the incarnation of someone else. In the 12th century, the Karma-pa was the first master to announce his reincarnation, and is generally considered to be at the origin of the lineages of incarnation which then became traditional in Tibet. This explains the development in the hagiographies, and to a lesser degree in the religious histories, of associations between certain masters and accomplished beings of the past.

In his thesis, Quintman presents the evolution of the status of Mi-la-ras-pa as an emanation, and the singularity of Gtsang-smyon Heruka’s text within this framework.⁶⁴⁴ Gtsang-smyon Heruka openly challenges most of his sources, which associate Mi-la-ras-pa with Mañjuśrīmitra, among others. Quintman,⁶⁴⁵ in the footsteps of Gene Smith,⁶⁴⁶ explains this narrative choice by the fact that Gtsang-smyon’s aim, both in his lifestyle and his writings, was to champion the yogic beginnings of the Bka’-brgyud lineage, whose early masters attained the state of Buddhahood in one lifetime due to their meditative practice. In so doing, he was taking a stand against the stronghold that the hereditary religious nobility had on the political and spiritual life of his time. To promote this ideal, what better example than someone who was not an emanation, but had progressed all the way from being an ordinary person to becoming a Buddha in his very lifetime?

Visible in the composition of Mi-la-ras-pa’s biography, this tension is not part of Mar-pa’s biographical tradition. As shown in the table above, no specific evolution in any direction can be observed in the identification of Mar-pa with tutelary figures from the past. On the contrary, the association of Mar-pa with Ḍombīheruka appears in the biography composed by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and was followed in most later works. Ngam-rdzong ston-pa justifies this parallel by the sayings of Yon-tan’bar, whose clan name is spelled differently in various texts (’Ching/La chings/Mchims).⁶⁴⁷ This 11th-century translator worked on many sūtras and tantras preserved in the *Bka’*

⁶⁴⁴ Quintman 2014, pp. 142–151.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 149–150.

⁶⁴⁶ Smith 2001, p. 60.

⁶⁴⁷ Mon-rtse-pa, pp. 101–102.

'gyur and *Bstan 'gyur*,⁶⁴⁸ but unfortunately no personal texts are available to verify this assertion about Mar-pa. The *Deb ther sngon po*⁶⁴⁹ mentions a master of this name (Ston-pa Yon-tan-'bar) who was a student of 'Brom-ston-pa (1005–1064), Atiśa's disciple and founder of the Rwa-sgreng monastery. According to Mar-pa's biographies, Yon-tan-'bar was protected during his journey to India by a *dākinī* who asked him if he knew his brother, Ḍombiheruka, who was in Tibet and went by the name of Mar-pa Lo-tśā-ba. Upon his return to Tibet, Yon-tan-'bar tried to meet Mar-pa, but he arrived too late. This story is reiterated in several biographies, particularly in the accounts of Don-mo-ri-pa and Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba; most others maintain the identification without justifying it.

Ḍombiheruka was a great 10th-century Indian siddha who belonged to a group of eight *mahāsiddhas*, a classification also known in India.⁶⁵⁰ He was also one of the eighty-four *mahāsiddhas* who became very famous in Tibet.⁶⁵¹ According to tradition, Ḍombiheruka was a king who was dethroned because he had an affair with an outcaste minstrel girl (*dom*). He is mostly known for his writings on Hevajra—Mar-pa's personal deity, and this link between Ḍombiheruka, Hevajra, and Mar-pa may justify the identification.

Rngog Mdo-sde⁶⁵² retains this identification of Mar-pa with Ḍombiheruka, but maintains that the incarnation line began with the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, who manifested as Ḍombiheruka and then as Mar-pa. The identification with Samantabhadra is less widespread than that with Ḍombi-

⁶⁴⁸ One can cite the *Caturyoginīsamputatantra* and the *Herukābhyudaya* (translated with Advayavajra) for the *Bka' 'gyur*, and the *Vajrāmytamahātantrarājaṭikā*, the *Kālacakra-maṇḍalavidhī Caturyoginīsamputatantra*, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāravṛtikīrtikalā*, and the *Dharmavinīścaya-nāma-prakarāṇa*, two sūtra-level commentaries composed by Ratnakīrti, for the *Bstan 'gyur*.

⁶⁴⁹ BA, p. 264.

⁶⁵⁰ An example of this is the tridimensional copper mandala from East India dating from the 12th century reproduced in Linrothe 2006, p. 190 and exhibited in the Rubin Museum of Art, New York. Hevajra and his consort Nairātmā are represented in the bud of the lotus, and on the petals are the eight *mahāsiddhas*, including Ḍombiheruka, Lūipa, Kukkuripa, Śavaripa, etc. According to Jeff Watt (<<http://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=2106>>, accessed on 03/04/2013), this grouping into eight siddhas often depicted as dwelling in the eight charnel grounds in Tibetan paintings, is primarily a Sa-skya and Bka'-brgyud tradition; it is not based on proper textual sources and is not definitive. Sometimes the eight are not identifiable, and sometimes they vary.

⁶⁵¹ See Kapstein 2001 for a description of the various Indian and Tibetan texts presenting that grouping. The two most famous sources are those by Abhayadatta and Vajrasana; the first was translated, for example, in Abhayadatta 1988.

⁶⁵² MKNT, p. 167.

heruka, and in early works was taken up only in *Opening Eyes*, Rlangs-lha-zigs Ras-pa's religious history.⁶⁵³ Later, Gtsang-smyon Heruka followed Mdo-sde's lead, as did the Bka'-brgyud scholars Pad-ma-dkar-po and 'Be-lo in the *Rosary of Crystal Gems*.⁶⁵⁴ This double association can be explained by the parallel between the group of eight *mahābodhisattvas* surrounding the Buddha Śākyamuni and the group of eight *mahāsiddhas* surrounding Vajradhara.

Another widespread association, that of Mar-pa as "Dharmarāja of noble lineage," is of a different nature. It is first seen in the biography by Rngog Mdo-sde, in the context of Mar-pa's search for Nāropā during his last journey to India. Before setting out on his solitary quest, he visits all of his masters and friends, among whom figure Kasoripa and Riripa, two of Nāropā's disciples. Mar-pa spends a month with them in prayer, and in the end Riripa remembers one of their past lives, thus establishing a new identity for Mar-pa and a pre-existing link with Nāropā and himself. It is this link from the past which, according to Riripa, ensures that "the fruit"—Mar-pa's meeting with Nāropā—will materialize. Rngog Mdo-sde, whose rendition of this episode is probably the source for later biographies, writes:⁶⁵⁵

In a previous life, Lord Nāropā was the Ācārya Bhadrāpā (*bzang po zhabs*) and Marpa was Dharmarāja of noble lineage. [Nāropā] was the master at that time and took as witnesses both the ruler and the Brahmin Kalyāṇa and Bhadra that he would accept [Dharmarāja as a disciple] in all later lives. Now the latter two were Riripa and Kasoripa, who knew this through their heightened perception. They predicted that on all accounts [Mar-pa] would see [Nāropā's] face. Then, [Mar-pa] offered *gaṇacakras* to Riripa for a month. [Riripa] said:

In a previous life, the Brahmin Bhadrāpā
Was supplicated by Dharmarāja of noble lineage
In the presence of the witnesses Kalyāṇa and Bhadra:
This fruit will come, there will be a meeting.

Thus, according to Rngog Mdo-sde's description, Mar-pa was a certain "Dharmarāja of noble lineage" (*rigs ldan chos kyi ra dza/rgyal po*), and Nāropā was Bhadrāpā (*bzang zhabs*). This identification is shuffled in the KSTC, as Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas reverses the roles: according

⁶⁵³ *Opening Eyes*, p. 62.

⁶⁵⁴ Tsangnyön 1982, p. 4; Pad-dkar, p. 459; Diwakar, vol. 1, p. 69.

⁶⁵⁵ MKNT, pp. 176–177: *sngon tshe bram ze bzang zhabs la/ rigs ldan chos kyi rgyal po yis/ lgsol tiab dge bzang dpang btsugs pa'i/ l'bras bu 'di 'ong mi mjal med/*

to him, Mar-pa was Bhadrīka (*bzang ldan*) and Nāropā was “Dharmarāja of low lineage”:⁶⁵⁶

In a previous life, the Brahmin Bhadrīka,
 Supplicated Dharmarāja of low lineage
 In the presence of the witnesses Kalyāna and Bhadrā:
 This fruit will come, there will be a meeting.

This inversion is explained by the fact that the grammatical particles are inverted in the two verses which are the basis for the ensuing comments. An indication that it is not a later scribal error is that one or the other of the two versions is later maintained by all biographers who quote these verses of prediction, with the identification varying accordingly.⁶⁵⁷

Rgyal-thang-pa⁶⁵⁸ follow the KSTC version but handles the identification of Mar-pa with Bhadrīka in a different way insofar as he mentions it in his second praise without going into the details of Riripa's prediction. He is the only one who lifts this identification to such prominence by removing it from the quest and presenting it at the beginning of the text.

Other associations, such as that of “U-rgyan-pa” who identifies Mar-pa with Hevajra, or that of Don-mo-ri-pa and Rgyal-thang-pa who connect Mar-pa to Avalokiteśvara, are most likely devotional associations of Mar-pa with his *yi dam* or with Avalokiteśvara, the special deity of Tibet. They are not justified in the biographies.

The reason why Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po identifies Mar-pa with the bodhisattva Ratnamati is not clearly stated, but it is most probably symbolic. This bodhisattva is considered to be the incarnation of Vajradhara who brought the Mahāmudrā teachings down to the human world, in particular to his disciple Saraha. The teachings were then transmitted to Nāgārjuna, Śavaripa, and Maitrīpā, before reaching Mar-pa. Acknowledging Mar-pa as Ratnamati's incarnation is thus tantamount to saying that his realization of Mahāmudrā—the centerpiece of the Kar-ma bka'-brgyud transmission held by Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po—is undeniably authentic.

⁶⁵⁶ KSTC-1, pp. 178–179; KSTC-2, p. 151. KSTC has *rigs ngan* “low lineage” instead of *rigs ldan* “noble lineage” in both versions: *sngon tshē bram ze bzang ldan gyis/ rigs ngan chos kyī rgyal po lal/ ldge bzang dpang btsugs gsol btab pa'i/ l'bras bu 'dir 'ongs mi mjal med/*

⁶⁵⁷ For example, “U-rgyan-pa,” p. 131, follows the KSTC exactly, but Gtang-smyon, p. 90, mixes the two versions: *sngon tshē bram ze bzang ldan lal/ rigs ldan chos kyī rgyal po gyis/ ldge bzang dpang btsugs gsol btab pa'i/ l'bras bu 'dir 'ong mi mjal med/*

⁶⁵⁸ GLNT, pp. 143–144: *sprul pa'i bla ma mar ston chos kyī rjel/ lsku tshē snga ma bram ze bzang ldan dul/ sbye ba bzhes nas chos kyī bdag po mdzad/ lskyes mchog rang dbang thob la gus phyag 'tshāl/*

3.2.1.2. The practice of entering another's body (*grong 'jug*)

	No. of events mentioned	<i>raksasa</i> (in India)	yak / mowing	yak / ulcer	' <i>bri</i> / source	sparrow (<i>chil pa</i>) / village	pigeon (<i>phug ron</i>) / shrine	pigeon / house	deer / hunter	white yak	lamb / patron
Ngam-rdzong ston-pa	4	x	x			x	x				
Rngog Mdo-sde					x			x	x		x
Rngog-2			?				?				
KSTC					x			x	x		x
Sgam-po-pa	2			x				x			
Bla-ma Zhang				x				x			
<i>Mdo-chen Rosary</i>			?					?			
<i>Rwa-lung Rosary</i>	7+1	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x
Rngog-1					x			?	x		x
Don-mo-ri-pa	7+1	x	x		x	x	x		x		x
Rgyal-thang-pa		x			x			x	x		
“U-rgyan-pa”					x			x	x		x
Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po					x			x	x	x	x
<i>Deb ther sngon po</i>	4										
Gtsang-smyon Heruka					x			x	x		x
Kun-dga'-rin-chen					x		x		x		x

⁶⁵⁹ Sometimes, no detail whatsoever is given about the episode of entering another's body, and the author only states that Mar-pa entered the body of a yak or of a pigeon. When it is not possible to ascertain what the episode in question is, I put a question mark instead of an x.

⁶⁶⁰ Tsangnyön 1982, p. 155: the way Gtsang-smyon explains this episode is quite different from that of the other biographies that mention it. For Gtsang-smyon, a yak died near the site of a feast; Mar-pa transferred his consciousness into it and brought the yak's corpse up to the courtyard. According to other sources, it was an old '*bri* that had died near a steep-sided source that Mar-pa brought back to the door of his house. A parallel can be established between the two versions on the basis of the verse that Mar-pa recites in both cases after entering and leaving the animal's body. The first two lines differ, but the last two are quite similar. See for example MKNT, p. 186: *ro snyoms lcag gis yongs skul nas! 'bri mo 'jigs pa'i 'phrang las bsgrall*, to be compared with Gtsang-smyon, p. 168: *ro snyoms lcag gis yongs bskul nas! g.yag rgan 'jigs pa'i 'phrang las bsgrall*.

	No. of events mentioned	<i>rāksāsa</i> (in India)	yak / mowing	yak / ulcer	' <i>bri</i> / source	sparrow (<i>chil pa</i>) / village	pigeon (<i>phug ron</i>) / shrine	pigeon / house	deer / hunter	white yak	lamb / patron
BCZP		x	x		x		x ⁶⁶¹	x	x		x
Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba		x	x		x	x ⁶⁶²	x	x	x	x	x
Padma-dkar-po											
<i>Rosary of Crystal Gems</i>		x								x	

Another nexus of my study of Mar-pa's biographies was his practice of entering another's body which, as can be seen in the table above, is nearly always mentioned. It figures among the most stable elements in the biographies, making it easy to chart the influence of early texts on later ones. This ubiquity and simplicity (which episodes have or have not been mentioned) is a useful clue in my quest for the filiation of the various texts. I have therefore documented what I found to be important when I was trying to understand this practice as it pertains to Mar-pa's biographies.

The practice of entering another's body as part of the "six" doctrines

Entering another's body is generally presented as being one of the "six doctrines of Nāropā" (*nā ro chos drug*, often called "the six yogas"). Nāropā actually list seven practices in his song for Mar-pa summarizing the "six" doctrines:⁶⁶³ inner heat (*caṇḍālī*, *gtum mo*); the illusory body (**māyākāya/māyādeha*, *sgyu lus*); lucid dreaming (*svapna*, *rmi lam*); luminosity (*prabhāsvara*, *'od gsal*); the intermediate state (*antarābhava*, *bar do*); transference (*utkrānti*, *'pho ba*); and entering another's body (*parapurapraveśa*; *grong 'jug*).⁶⁶⁴ The

⁶⁶¹ The BCZP says on p. 95 that Mar-pa entered the body of a pigeon (*phug ron*) twice. The first time is mentioned on p. 92 (Mar-pa entered a pigeon that had died from exhaustion after having been pursued by a hawk), the second must be the episode of the pigeon that a monk hit with a stone while protecting the altar during a teaching. This was described by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, p. 101, but no details are provided.

⁶⁶² This episode of entering the body of a sparrow during an empowerment of Catuḥ-piṭha is extremely condensed in the version of Dpa'-bo II (p. 98), but recognizable.

⁶⁶³ See the song and its comments on this subject in Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 94–97.

⁶⁶⁴ The six doctrines have been studied by Ulrich Kragh (Kragh 2011 and 2015), Glenn Mullin (Mullin 1996, 1997 and 2006), Fabrizio Toricelli (Toricelli 1996, 1997a and 1998) and others.

flexible numbering shows that this group was not strictly defined in the beginning of the tradition and that the expression “six doctrines” had not been fixed when Mar-pa received these instructions in India.

In his *Encyclopedia of Knowledge*, Kong-sprul mentions several groupings that were developed by early masters of the tradition to describe these practices belonging to the perfection phase of the *Niruttaratantras*.⁶⁶⁵ For example, he mentions 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, ’Bri-sgom Ras-pa’s ten doctrines of Nāropā, etc. One widespread classification in the biographies of Mar-pa is the so-called system of “mixing and transference” (*bsre ’pho*). Kong-sprul says that this presentation was developed in the Rngog-pa tradition,⁶⁶⁶ and it is therefore sometimes called the “six doctrines of the Rngog” (*rngog pa’i chos drug*).⁶⁶⁷ Generally, however, and as Kong-strul states somewhere else,⁶⁶⁸ this system is more specifically linked to the *Hevajatantra*.

As Taranatha explains in the introduction of his *Manual of Instruction on the Hevajatantra in the Mar-pa Tradition*, the terms “mixing” and “transference” can apply to all instructions on the perfection phase, but the term “mixing and transference” together applies to the instructions on Hevajra.⁶⁶⁹ One way to explain this set according to the Rngog-pa tradition is presented early on in a text from the *Mar pa bka’ ’bum*⁶⁷⁰ where these practices are linked to the three intermediate states (*bar do*): life, the dream-state and becoming (from death until rebirth).⁶⁷¹ “Mixing” involves methods which lead to Buddhahood through training, and “transference” refers to those which

⁶⁶⁵ *Shes bya mdzod*, vol. 3, pp. 326–328, tr. Harding 2007, pp. 149–152. Mei 2009, pp. 30–31 also states in her thesis on *’pho ba* that the six doctrines did not exist as such at the beginning of the tradition, when Mar-pa imported them into Tibet.

⁶⁶⁶ Harding 2007, p. 149.

⁶⁶⁷ This name was used by Sna-tshogs-rang-grol Rgod-tshang ras-pa (1482–1559) in his *Bde mchog spyi bshad*, p. 17.

⁶⁶⁸ *Shes bya mdzod*, vol. 3, p. 239, tr. Guarisco and McLeod 2008, pp. 162–163.

⁶⁶⁹ “Dgyes pa rdo rje mar lugs kyi khrid yig ’khrul med nges gsang.” In: *Bka’ brgyud sngags mdzod*. Vol. 2, p. 110: *spyir mdzad pa’i gdams ngag rdzogs rim thams cad la/ bsre ba dang ’pho ba’i brda chad re mdzad mod kyang/ gdams ngag ’di la ni khyad par du yang dgyes pa rdo rje’i ’khrid bsre ’pho zhes grags so.*

⁶⁷⁰ “Zhal gdams bka’ bzhi lo rgyus dang bcas pa bsre ’pho lag len du dril ba zab pa.” In: *Mar pa bka’ ’bum*, vol. *cha*, pp. 59.3–88.4.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62: *bsre ba rnam ni bsgoms nas sangs rgya ba’i thabs yin/ ’pho ba ni ma bsgoms par sangs rgya ba’i thabs yin/ de la dang po bsre ba’i man ngag bya ba de yin/ de la skye shi bar do la bskyed rdzogs gnyis kyi mang ngag dang bsre/ rmi lam bar do la rmi lam dang bsam gtan bsre/ srid pa bar do la ’od gsal dang bsre ba’ol*

bring it about without training. The latter include transference and entering another's body; these two are sometimes considered as one and sometimes as two, which explains the division into six or seven doctrines.⁶⁷²

Entering another's body in India and Tibet

The practice of entering another's body has been poorly studied until now, though several articles posted by Dan Martin on his blog provide excellent entry points.⁶⁷³ The practice existed in India, in Buddhist and non-Buddhist circles, as well as in other countries.⁶⁷⁴ One of the examples mentioned by Dan Martin appears in the biographies of Śaṅkara, the well-known 8th-century Indian philosopher who developed the system of Advaita Vedānta.⁶⁷⁵ This monk is said to have entered into the body of a woman in order to win an important debate on the art of love. According to Péter-Dániel Szántó, who studied several Sanskrit manuscripts of Buddhist tantras, the Sanskrit name for entering another's body is *parapurapraveśa*, "entering another's city/body." It is found in several tantras such as the *Red Yamari Tantra*,⁶⁷⁶ the *Abhidhānottaratantra*, and the *Buddhakaṭāpantra*, and

⁶⁷² The *Mar pa bka' 'bum* includes several texts commenting this type of practice, two of which are attributed to Mar-pa: the "man ngag tshigs su bcad pa brgyad pa," vol. ca, pp. 408.4–409.3, commented by Sgam-po-pa in his *gsung 'bum*; and the "bsre ba'i man ngag gi bskor," vol. cha, pp. 261.3–272.4. The text quoted above stems from Rngog Chosrdor's lineage and addresses the same subject. Padma-dkar-po devotes two volumes of his *gsung 'bum* (22 and 23) to commentaries on the mixing and transference practices but his acceptance of the term is not that of the Rngog tradition. See Kemp 2015 for some details on the subject. Casey Kemp's forthcoming thesis might shed more light on the matter.

⁶⁷³ Martin 2007a, b, c and d: four articles on *grong 'jug* on his blog: <<http://tibetologic.blogspot.com>>.

⁶⁷⁴ See for example the article referred to in Martin 2007b: Eskildsen 2006, pp. 395–397 explains that Daoist internal alchemists from the T'ang Dynasty up until the 15th century were, under some circumstances, encouraged to practice something called "Changing your Dwelling" (*jiushe*).

⁶⁷⁵ Martin 2007b.

⁶⁷⁶ See Kuranishi 2004. Kenichi Kuranishi shows in this article that the *Raktayamāritantra* (*Gshin rje gshed dmar po'i rgyud*) was modeled upon the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* (*Gshin rje gshed nag po'i rgyud*), to which a chapter on entering another's body was added (the 19th and last chapter). In the *Raktayamāritantra* manuscript, the name of the chapter is *parampuraparaveśapātala*, which should be amended to *parapuraparaveśapātala*, "chapter on entering another's city (=body)." (Ms. from the private coll. of Asha Kāji Bajrācārya E 26157 = NGMPP E 1323/2 and D 37/11, f. 35a+b). The practice is described in about ten verses. Thanks to Kenichi Kuranishi for sending me his article and pointing out the specifics about entering another's body.

it is also written *parakāyapraveśa* in the *Vajradākatantra*.⁶⁷⁷ The literal translation of the term is “entering another’s city.” The Sanskrit word *pura* generally means “city,” but it can also refer to the “body,” as demonstrated by the use of the term in the *Bhagavadgītā*, which describes the body as a “city with nine gates.”⁶⁷⁸ This correspondence is also recognized by Ulrich Kragh:⁶⁷⁹

The Tibetan term *grong ’jug* is short for *grong khyer la ’jug pa*. The longer form is attested in *Bka’ dpe che chung* contained in ’Jam-mgon kong-sprul Blo-gros mtha’-yas, *Gdams ngag mdzod*,⁶⁸⁰ where the instruction is spelled out as meaning “the instruction of body entering” (*grong khyer la ’jug pa’i man ngag*). The words *grong* and *grong khyer* here seem to reflect the Sanskrit word *pura*, which has the dual meanings ‘town’ as well as ‘body’, which is probably intended in the latter sense, although the Tibetan translation corresponds to the former meaning.

As regards Mar-pa, Ngam-rdzong ston-pa mentions that he received instructions on this practice from Spyi-ther-pa during his first stay in Nepal,

⁶⁷⁷ Szántó (private communication, May 2013). These references come from his unpublished editions of Sanskrit manuscripts: The *Abhidhānottaratantra* (*Mngon par brjod pa’i rgyud bla ma*), ch. 29 [= 32 in another numeration] (Ms. from the private coll. of Mānabajra Bajrācārya E 29260 = NGMPP E 1517/7, f. 119b) has: *parapurapraveśanam catu[r]dvāraṃ ca labhate | vicared asau mahāyogī nānārūpadharo bhavet ||* “Moreover, he shall obtain [the power of] entering another’s city (= body) [through?] the four gateways (?); this great yogin shall roam [the world] and obtain various kinds of forms [which, presumably, he can change according to his will].” The *Buddhakaṭālantra* (*Sangs rgyas thod pa’i rgyud*), ch. 1 (Ms. Cambridge University Library, Or. 158, f. 3a) has a list of powers that one may attain in that system: *svarūpaparivarttanāś caiva parapurapraveśādikaṃ ||* “... moreover, changing one’s appearance, entering another’s city (=body) etc.”

The only occurrence for the term *parakāyapraveśa* is in the *Vajradākatantra* (*Rdo rje mkha’ gro’i rgyud*), ch. 21 (Ms. Tokyo University Library 343, f. 51a & Ms. Asiatic Society, Calcutta no. 3825, f. 58b). It describes the procedure after copying a passage for *utkrānti* (*pho ba*) from the Catuspīṭha: *atha parakāyapraveśanamkathayāmi samāsataḥ |* “Next I shall briefly teach [the method for] entering another’s body.”

⁶⁷⁸ 5.13: *sarvakarmāṇi manasā samnyasyāste sukham vaśī | navadvāre pure dehī naiva kurvan na kārayan ||* Thanks to Péter-Dániel Szántó for this reference and his very generous explanations.

⁶⁷⁹ Kragh 2011, p. 133.

⁶⁸⁰ “Zab lam phyag rgya chen po dang nā ro chos drug gi gzhung gces par btus pa nges don rin po che’i mdzod.” Vol. 7, p. 102.

during the transmission of Catuṣpīṭha.⁶⁸¹ This information is based on the “song of the journey.”⁶⁸² Most other biographies do not specify when he received it, even though they quote the song (Gtsang-smyon and Dpa'-bo II elude the specific verse on transference and entering another's body). According to Gtsang-smyon Heruka, Nāropā told Mar-pa at the end of his second journey that he would need to come back once more in order to receive instructions on entering another's body, the Aural Transmission, and others.⁶⁸³ Once in Tibet, Mar-pa had a dream in which a woman told him that he had received mahāmudrā and the six doctrines which bring about Buddhahood through training, but that he did not have the special instructions on transference and entering another's body which result in Buddhahood with little effort. This conforms with the story of Mar-pa's *Four Scrolls of Aural Instructions*, which contains teachings on transference said to have been received by Mar pa during his third journey⁶⁸⁴ and to that of the *Wish-Fulfilling Gem[-like] Instructions on Mind*, which deal with the practice of both transference and entering another's body that Mar-pa also received when Nāropā was in the practice.⁶⁸⁵ Thus, according to these collections and their historical background, Mar-pa obtained instructions on entering another's body during his third journey; as Mar-pa Mdo-sde had died, Mar-pa gave them to his other disciples.

It is generally considered that the transmission of entering another's body did not continue in a formal manner in Tibet. As Gtsang-smyon Heruka points out,⁶⁸⁶ “the teachings on entering another's body which bring Buddhahood without training were not destined to spread in Tibet.” Gtsang-

⁶⁸¹ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 84.

⁶⁸² The verse in question describes Mar-pa's first stay in Nepal and the instructions he received there. Here is the version found in the *Mar pa'i mgur 'bum* (MK25): *lo gsum bal po'i thil du bsdad/ lpha byin brlabs can gyi bal po lal/ rgyud gnyan par grags pa'i gdan bzhi mnyan/ l'pho ba grong 'jug gi gdam ngag thob/ (Mar pa'i gsung 'bum, vol. ka, pp. 464–465).*

⁶⁸³ Tsangnyön 1982, p. 66; Gtsang-smyon, p. 74.

⁶⁸⁴ “Rje btsun lho brag pa'i khyad par gyi gdams pa snyan gyi shog dril bzhi'i lo rgyus gzhung lhan thabs dang bcas pa.” In: *Gdams ngag mdzod*, vol. 8, pp. 203–233. The history of these four scrolls which, among others, contain instructions on transference by Nāropā, has been studied in Mei 2009, pp. 29–40.

⁶⁸⁵ “Sems khrid yid bzhin nor bu.” In: *Gdams ngag mdzod*, vol. 8, pp. 408–428. This collection contains a history (*lo rgyus*) and two doctrinal texts coming from Tilopā: the *Wish-Fulfilling Gem[-like] Instructions on Mind (sems khrid yid bzhin nor bu)* and the *Actual transference, Entering Another's Body (l'pho ba don gyi grong 'jug)*.

⁶⁸⁶ Tsangnyön 1982, p. 171; Gtsang-smyon, p. 189: *ma bsgoms par 'tshang rgya ba grong 'jug gi chos bod du dar ba'i skal ba med pa la brten nas.*

Gtsang-smyon explains the decline of the transmission by the death of Mar-pa Mdo-sde, to whom Mar-pa had entrusted it. Mdo-sde's death and the downfall of Mar-pa's familial lineage are in turn linked to Mar-pa's having erroneously prostrated to the Hevajra maṇḍala Nāropā had manifested rather than to Nāropā himself. The prediction that Mar-pa's family lineage would not endure already appears in Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's biography related to the same story.

However, according to 'Be-lo in the *Rosary of Crystal Gems* (which claims to be based on Tāranātha's viewpoint), the link between Mdo-sde's death and Mar-pa's error cannot be established.⁶⁸⁷ It is true that most biographies do not emphasize Mdo-sde's death the way Gtsang-smyon does, and as far as entering another's body is concerned, we have seen that Kong-sprul includes in the *Gdams ngag mdzod* instructions pertaining to this practice that Mar-pa gave to Mi-la-ras-pa and that were later concealed by Sgam-po-pa and retrieved by Dung-mtsho Ras-pa in the early 14th century.⁶⁸⁸ It seems therefore more likely that the practice did, in fact, continue in Tibet, even though Gtsang-smyon is right in saying that it never spread on a large scale. Given that the technique was known in several countries, it must have gone on in Tibet even if it was not considered a formal "entering another's body transmission." This much is acknowledged by Dpa'-bo II who observes in his biography on Mar-pa, that "due to this defective link, even though many in Tibet were capable of entering another's body, the actual [transmission of] entering another's body did not take place."⁶⁸⁹ He then goes on to name several individuals known to have entered another body, notably the Yogin Chos-g.yung (a disciple of Sgam-po-pa),⁶⁹⁰ the siddha Karma Pakshi (1204–1283),⁶⁹¹ Yang-dgon-pa (1213–1258), Sangs-rgyas-mnyan-pa (15th century),

⁶⁸⁷ See Diwakar, pp. 70–71, and the above translation on pp. 167–168.

⁶⁸⁸ See BA, pp. 717–720, for the account of the way this Bka'-brgyud treasure-revealer found the two instructions hidden by Sgam-po-pa. The second of the two deals with the practice of entering another's body, and the two come in a single-lineage from Tilopā, Nāropā, Mar-pa and Mi-la-ras-pa. See Mei 2009, pp. 40–47, for a study of that collection.

⁶⁸⁹ Dpa'-bo II, p. 113 (LGNT, vol. *ya*, p. 303): *rten 'brel 'di ma 'grigs bod du grong 'jug nus pa mang po byung yang dngos su grong 'jug byas ma byung ste.*

⁶⁹⁰ This case has also been documented in Yamamoto 2012, pp. 62–63: 'Ol-kha-ba (1103–1199), also known as Grol-sgom or Chos-g.yung, received training from Sgam-po-pa, Ras-chung-pa and Ba-ri Lo-tsā-ba and was Bla-ma Zhang's teacher. He is reported to have entered the body of a dead goose while in a competition of yogic attainment with Rgwa Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal (another of Zhang's masters). See also BA, p. 469.

⁶⁹¹ See BA, pp. 488–489.

and 'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba, Mar-pa's first master. Dan Martin⁶⁹² also mentions the 3rd Stong-'khor Sprul-sku, Rgyal-ba-rgya-mtsho, who entered into the body of a recently deceased nineteen-year old man, and then became the fourth master of the incarnate lineage. This story is backed by the autobiography of the fifth Dalai Bla-ma's, who met this master. These examples and the explanation by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba indicate that some masters were indeed able to practice entering another's body despite the lack of an actual lineage of transmission of the practice.

Mar-pa's practice of entering another's body as described in his biographies

The practice of entering another's body is central in the biographies of Mar-pa. Nearly all of them mention his mastery of the subtle body which makes it possible for him to enter another's body, and most give examples. The manifest exception to this rule is the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, which, despite its detailed account of Mar-pa's life, does not even mention his ability to enter another's body, though it does describe how Mar-pa Mdo-sde entered the body of a pigeon, flew to India, and transferred his consciousness into the corpse of a recently-deceased child. Other religious histories are also quite laconic on the subject: one example is the *Lho rong chos 'byung*'s source, the chronicle of Rlangs-lha-gzigs Ras-pa entitled *Opening Eyes*; another is 'Gos-lo's *Blue Annals* which only briefly mention that Mar-pa manifested this ability four times. In general, religious histories give fewer details on subjects that are not directly related to transmission and lineage. The *Deb ther dmar po*, for example, despite its brevity, lists several groupings of disciples, but does not allude to Mar-pa's skill in entering another's body.

On the other hand, golden rosaries and full-length biographies mostly describe this capacity in detail, and it is a regular component of the last part of Mar-pa's life story: after his journeys to India and near the end of his life, Mar-pa entered the bodies of dead animals several times. Descriptions of these episodes generally fill the last sub-section on Mar-pa's life. In biographies of the Aural Transmission for example, this last part is called the "quality of entering another's body thanks to the strength of meditative absorption" (*ting nge 'dzin gyi rtsal gyis grong 'jug mdzad pa'i yon tan*). Here, several examples of entering another's body are given, and each is followed by a verse of instruction that Mar-pa recites upon repossessing his body.

These verses of instruction show that descriptions of entering another's body tie in perfectly with the hagiographies' *raison d'être*: Mar-pa demonstrates his ability to enter another's body in order to inspire faith in his disciples. This educational objective is clear, for example, in the biography at

⁶⁹² Martin 2007d. See the references online.

tributed to Sgam-po-pa, where the only extraordinary capacities that the author attributes to Mar-pa are his heightened perception and his ability to enter another's body. There are also anecdotes where the dead animal is quite big and Mar-pa enters into its corpse in order to keep it from blocking the way. This was the case with the *rākṣasa* in Bodhgayā, and also back home in Tibet with a yak and a 'bri. This second function of entering another's body is quite surprising in light of the serious and sacred descriptions of Nāropā's essential instructions. Often, these episodes even sound quite comical. This may just be a modern reader's impression, but could not one imagine a more awe-inspiring scenario than a small sparrow taking a few hops towards the air before falling exhausted to the ground? In any case, the very down-to-earth atmosphere of these sequences lends a good deal of vitality to Mar-pa's life story. In these vignettes, we can easily imagine him as the lord of his farm, combining his force of character with his meditative capacities, just like the "hidden yogi" he was said to be. The episode in which he moves a yak is thus quite telling of the lively and amusing function fulfilled by the last part of Mar-pa's life.⁶⁹³

One day, the master and his son led a yak to the bottom of a valley that was always green in order to gather some hay. When they reached the meadow, the yak died and they had nothing [for carrying back the grass]. The son thought that if nothing could carry the hay, it was pointless to cut it. The father told him to make hay and that he would bring something to carry it. When the son had cut a bag-full, Mar-pa said:

"Fool! Carry on scything until you have one yak's load!"

He then mowed a big bag-full, one yak's load. The father said: "I will faint and that yak will rise up and come. When that happens, load it!"

They say that after a while the dead yak suddenly rose. [The son] loaded it and walked in front of it. As the load was unsteady, he balanced it with a stone and carried on. They went back down, reached home, and the yak died. [101] Late at night, the lord Mar-pa came back sweating. He told his son that he had done well to balance the load, but that adding that stone had exhausted him.

To conclude this presentation of entering another's body and Mar-pa's ability to put it into practice, it could be said that even though it may not appear as the most interesting part of the biography—it is quite repetitive,

⁶⁹³ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 100.

the details are prosaic and it does not provide any “historical” data—it proved to be a useful tool for comparing texts and understanding their sources. In the above chart, it should be clear that families of biographies can be easily determined on the basis of which episodes are described or omitted. In other cases (Mar-pa's date of death, his parents' names, the order of appearance of the meetings with Nāropā, etc.), text groups are less clear-cut, but with entering another's body, we can almost tell at a glance which source or sources a text has called into play. As this was my main focus, I found this part of the biographies to be uncommonly helpful.

3.2.2. Two secondary characters of importance

3.2.2.1. Nāropā

Text in which details about journeys to India are mentioned	Meeting Nāropā first	Meeting Jñānagarbha first
Ngam-rdzong ston-pa		x
Don-mo-ri-pa		x
Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po		x
<i>Lho rong chos 'byung</i>		x
Kun-dga'-rin-chen		x
Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje		x
<i>Mdo-chen Rosary</i>		x
<i>Rwa-lung Rosary</i>		x
Dpa'-bo II		x
<i>Stag lung chos 'byung</i>		x
Sgam-po-pa	x	
Bla-ma Zhang	x	
Rngog Mdo-sde	x	
“U-rgyan-pa”	x	
KSTC	x	
Rngog-1	x	
Rngog-2	x	
Rgyal-thang-pa	x	
<i>Deb ther sngon po</i>	x	
Gtsang-smyon Heruka	x	
BCZP	x	
Padma-dkar-po	x	
Tshe-dbang-nor-bu	x	
<i>Rosary of Crystal Gems</i>	x	

The different versions of Mar-pa's journeys to India: first journey

Numerous differences can be found in the biographies relating the life of Mar-pa, and numerous motifs can reveal the influences or origins of one account over another. A few of these topics were reviewed when we studied each biography individually. The most significant is the order of Mar-pa's meetings with his masters, and Nāropā in particular. The great paṇḍita was one of the leading lights of 11th-century Buddhist India; for Tibetans, he and Atiśa represented the apex of Indian Buddhism. If we believe the account of the meeting with Nāropā composed by Nag-'tsho Lo-tśā-ba,⁶⁹⁴ who describes a man adulated by crowds of disciples, Nāropā was also extremely popular among his fellow countrymen. It is therefore only natural that he is mentioned in all of Mar-pa's biographies and in most accounts associated with Mar-pa. However, since his role is not uniformly described, it seems important to examine the various ways his relationship with Mar-pa is depicted, the evolution of his role in the biographies, and, finally, the debates on the subject.

The most significant discrepancy that comes to light when classifying the biographies into large families is the description of the first encounter between Mar-pa and Nāropā. As the chart above indicates, there are two broad movements, with a few variations. The first group is less well-known, as Gtsang-smyon Heruka belongs to the second. However, whether in terms of quantity (number of biographies) or of quality (length of the text, reputation and importance of its author), there is nothing especially minor about this first movement. This group follows the first available account of Mar-pa's life: the biography by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa in which Mar-pa first spends three years of acclimatization in Nepal, then leaves Gnyos and heads towards the west of India, where he meets Jñānagarbha. He spends five years in India before returning to Tibet to gather the funds necessary for another trip to India. At that point, Paiṇḍapā, a disciple of Nāropā's that Mar-pa met at Jñānagarbha's place, introduces him to Nāropā at Phullahari. A minor variation, introduced in the *Mdo-chen Rosary* and adopted by the *Rwa-lung Rosary*, is to add a first one-year stay in Nepal after leaving 'Brog-mi. Next, Mar-pa goes back to collect provisions in Tibet, where he meets Lo-skyā, before spending another three years in Nepal, five years in India, and going back again to Tibet for more supplies. Then, finally, he meets Nāropā for the first time. This is likely the source of "U-rgyan-pa's" confused presentation, which seems to synthesize this approach with Mar-ston's and ends up with highly unlikely wanderings between Tibet, Nepal, and India. A second variation proposed by Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba and followed by the *Stag lung*

⁶⁹⁴ Translated in Davidson 2005, p. 145.

chos 'byung chooses not to split the first journey into two periods of five and seven years with the return to Tibet. According to this account, Mar-pa meets Painḍapā at Jñānagarbha's place, and Painḍapā introduces him to Nāropā through the intermediary of Prajñāsimha, without Mar-pa's returning to Tibet to stock up on provisions. This modification may be an attempt by the 2nd Dpa'-bo to accommodate the two versions by integrating the one favored by Gtsang-smyon into the one by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, which he chose to follow.

The second group is rooted in the two other authoritative biographies, those by Rngog Mdo-sde and Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas. In this version of the story, Mar-pa spends time with Painḍapā in Nepal, and Painḍapā introduces him to Nāropā. Three trends can be discerned. The first, which could be dubbed the "minimalist version," is followed by Sgam-po-pa and Bla-ma Zhang and is exclusively centered on Nāropā, effectively eclipsing Mar-pa's other masters. The second, which was initially Mdo-sde's, adopts a less linear presentation: after the initial trip to Nepal, Mar-pa returns to Tibet before Painḍapā introduces him to Nāropā. This may indicate a relationship between Mdo-sde's text and the *Mdo-chen Rosary*, or a common source. The third group, headed by Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas and consecrated by Gtsang-smyon Heruka, is the most famous: Mar-pa meets Painḍapā in Nepal, and Painḍapā and Prajñāsimha introduce him to Nāropā. He then spends twelve years crisscrossing India and meeting other masters.

There are a good many dissenting voices concerning both the two men's meeting place and Nāropā's monastery. Most biographies state that Mar-pa met Nāropā in Magadha (Central India). Some say it was Vikramaśīla, others say Nālandā. Many colophons and some biographies also mention an alternative monastery in Kashmir, for instance Padma-dkar-po,⁶⁹⁵ who uses Mar-pa's declaration in a song that he "went to Kashmir towards the north/ in the glorious Puṣpahari hermitage"⁶⁹⁶ where he met Nāropā to justify his assertion. However, this song has not been found anywhere else. The *Rosary of Crystal Gems* states that Nāropā owned a monastery in Kashmir which had been offered to him by a king.⁶⁹⁷ The most far-fetched version in this regard

⁶⁹⁵ Pad-dkar, p. 436 (in the part on Mar-pa): *de nas dbus dang kha cher byon/ khyad par tu puṣpa ha riv gzhugs nas [...]*.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 436: *sa byang phyogs kha che'i yul du phyin/ ldpal puṣpa ha ri'i dgon pa der/*

⁶⁹⁷ Diwakar, vol. 1, p. 57 (in the part on Nāropā): *shar phyogs bhangala'i rgyal po zbig gis pho brang me tog gi khyim ljong me tog rgyas pa'i tshal zhes pa phul ba'i dgon pa de la ri bo gser gling zhes bya stel/ rje mar pas nā ro pa mjal ba'i gnas de dang/ kha che rgyal po gur gum gyi zhing gi ljongs dang nye bar dpal me tog mdangs 'phrog pa'i gtsug lag khang bzhengs te phul nas de dag tu'ang bzhugs so.*

is that of the 4th Rgyal-tshab, who states that Mar-pa went to Vikramaśīla but was told that Nāropā was in Kashmir. He therefore crossed the Ganges again and met the siddha in his monastery, Puṣpahari, in Kashmir.⁶⁹⁸ Franz-Karl Ehrhard⁶⁹⁹ also mentions the Kashmiri monastery in the context of the journeys of the 'Brug-pa yogin Rang-rig Ras-pa (d. 1683) to Oḍḍiyāna, and Giuseppe Tucci⁷⁰⁰ points out that Stag-tshang Ras-pa (1574–1651), another 'Brug-pa dignitary, also traveled there. Many colophons actually state that Mar-pa did some translating in Kashmir, and in the biographical introduction of the *Fifteen Mkhar-kha-ma scrolls on the six doctrines*,⁷⁰¹ Nāropā is said to be living in Oḍḍiyāna. It may be possible that Nāropā did indeed own two monasteries, one in Magadha and one in Kashmir, and that Mar-pa met him at both places. In Sarah Harding's study of the life of Niguma, whom she portrays as Nāropā's sister, it is clear that Nāropā did not come from Bengal, but from Kashmir. Here is what she says, based on some of the same rosaries cited above in the context of Mar-pa's life:⁷⁰²

The earliest biographies of Nāropa, such as that of Gampopa and Lama Zhang, do not name a specific birthplace other than simply “the west.” All accounts of Nāropa include the story of a ḍākinī appearing to him and telling him to “go east” to find his guru Tilopa, which really only makes sense if he is somewhere in the west. In *The life Story of the Supreme Learned Nāro Pañchen*, which claims to have compared five different biographies, Sangye Bum (88) [= *Rwa-lung Rosary*] gives Nāropa's birthplace as the “land of Moslems” (*kha che'i yul*) which is almost universally interpreted to mean Kashmir. [...] In case this is not clear, Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339) specifies “ka smi ra” [...] in his version of the life story in the *Kagyū Golden Rosary* [vol. 4, f. 26a2 of his *Gsung 'bum*]. Kachö Wangpo is even more specific, saying: “In the east of India, the town of Jammu ('Dzam bu) in Srinagar (*Sri na ga ra*), a district of Bha ga la.” [...] Bangala is identified as an early Tibetan

⁶⁹⁸ Palpung, pp. 186–187.

⁶⁹⁹ Ehrhard 2002, p. 156, n. 12.

⁷⁰⁰ Tucci 1940, p. 69.

⁷⁰¹ “Chos drug mkhar kha ma'i shog dril bco lnga pa,” *Phyag chen rgya gzhung*, p. 108: *nga mkha' 'gro ma rnams kyis dar gyi mdo li la bteq nas u rgyan gyi gnas su zbus pa yin tel der khyod kyis mi brdol/sgnon gyi las 'phro med rtsa na btisal nas rnyad par dka' bar gda'ol thugs kyis nying khu puṣpa ha ri'i nā ro pa las rnyed pa'o*. See Ducher 2016 for a detailed study of this collection.

⁷⁰² Harding 2010, pp. 258–259, n. 13.

name for Zahor (usually located in northwest India). [...] The biography by Lhatsun Rinchen Namgyal (1473-1557) [...] translated by Herbert Guenther in *The Life and Teaching of Naropa* [...] and Dorje Dze-ö's biography of Naropa, translated [...] in the *Great Kagyu Masters* [= Don-mo-ri-pa], has the same information. It seems that it is only because of the inexplicable identification of the Tibetan translation "Bha ga la" as "Bengal" in these two translations [...] that Nāropā has been widely viewed in the Western world as a Bengali.

According to his early biographies, it seems clear that Nāropā came from northwest India, although he did not spend his spiritual life there. Locating Puṣpahari in Kashmir may also be an example of a later transposition of a sacred site from India to the Himalayan landscape, which had become something of a habit in Tibet.⁷⁰³

Last journey: Nāropā and the practice (caryā)

These differences in the presentation of the first journey fade away in the descriptions of the last one, where the biographies unanimously state⁷⁰⁴ that Nāropā was no longer available for disciples at large, as he had "entered the practice" (*spyod pa la 'jug pa/gshegs pa*).⁷⁰⁵ This term refers to a specific type of practice of the *Mahāyoga*- and *Yoginītantras*,⁷⁰⁶ which is called *caryā* or

⁷⁰³ Ehrhard 2002, p. 22, n. 12, mentions the relocation of Pulahari and Nalanda to Kashmir. In Tibet, many tantric sacred sites were transposed, first to Central Tibet, and then to Khams. See for example Rtsa-ri, which later became Rtsa-'dra, Kong-sprul's retreat centre.

⁷⁰⁴ All early works state that Nāropā "entered the practice." See e.g. Mon-rtse-pa, p. 93; MKNT, p. 172; KSTC-1, p. 172; Sgam-po-pa, pp. 28–29; Zhang, p. 141; "U-rgyan-pa," p. 127; DRNT, p. 149; GLNT, p. 180. The exception to the rule are the *Mdo-chen Rosary* and the Rwa-lung one, where the quest is simply not mentioned. Here, when Mar-pa returns to India (pp. 147–148), he spends six years and seven months with Nāropā, but there are no explanations as to how he spent them. There is only a song referring to the quest.

⁷⁰⁵ The form of tantric practice described here in brief is discussed in some detail in several translations and studies. See for example Kongtrül 2010, pp. 165–211, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal 2011, pp. 586–598, Larsson 2012, pp. 198–226, and Wedemeyer 2013, pp. 133–169. It must be noted that Nāropā's practice is always called *spyod pa la gshegs pa* in Mar-pa's biographies.

⁷⁰⁶ These terms refer to tantras of the highest class (*niruttara*). In Tibetan, these are called father tantras (*pha rgyud*, i.e. mahāyoga) and mother tantras (*ma rgyud*, i.e. yoginītantras). As Dalton 2005 points out, however, systematic tantric doxography was very much the doing of Tibetans; even though it existed in India (where the terms *Mahāyoga-*

vrata in Sanskrit.⁷⁰⁷ Most tantras of the highest class devote a chapter to this kind of undertaking, and many descriptions of Nāropā's practice during Mar-pa's last trip to India accord with the *caryā* as described in the *Hevajratantra*. Stefan Larsson sums up the import of this tantra in his work about Gtsang-smyon Heruka in order to explain the madman's behaviour. Hevajra was the chosen deity (*yi dam*) of Nāropā and Gtsang-smyon, and so it is only logical that the description of their behaviour was consistent with the prescribed practice of the *Hevajratantra*.⁷⁰⁸

In [the *caryā* chapter of the *Hevajratantra*] it is stated that when a yogin attains perfection in his Hevajra practice he should wear earrings, a cirlet on his head, bracelets on his wrists, a girdle round his waist, rings around his ankles, and bangles round his arms. Moreover he should wear a bone-necklace and dress in a tiger-skin, and his food should be the five nectars. In addition to wearing these rather spectacular ornaments and garments, the yogin should arrange his piled-up hair as a crest and secure shards of skulls to the crest. He should besmear his body with ashes, wear as sacred thread of hair, and carry a tantric staff (*khatvāṅga*), a small hand-drum (*damaru*), and a skull-cup (*kapāla*).

It is also stated that it is auspicious to meditate at night beneath a lonely tree, or in a charnel ground, or in the dwelling of a *mātrikā*, or in the unpopulated wilderness. When it comes to behavior the tantra encourages the yogin to find himself a consort, sing and dance, and “abandon desire and folly, fear and anger, and any sense of shame.”

and *Yoginītantras* originated), it was only in Tibet and from about the 12th century onward that the four-class system was developed.

⁷⁰⁷ Wedemeyer 2013 devotes one chapter to the practice of Indian tantric Buddhism, focusing particularly on the term *caryā*. He calls this a “term of art” (p. 134), i.e. “a word or phrase having a special meaning in a particular field, different from or more precise than its customary meaning.” He argues that “*caryāvratā* is (1) a highly specific term of art in the literature of the Buddhist *Mahāyoga*- and *Yoginītantras*, signifying a very precise undertaking, (2) that close attention to the semiology of the rite reveals a very clear ritual intent that is evident throughout the Buddhist literature, and (3) that the sources explicitly (if at times obliquely) stress that this rite is appropriate only in quite specific and elite ritual contexts with very specific prerequisites.”

⁷⁰⁸ Larsson 2012, p. 213. This description is based on the first part, sixth chapter of the *Hevajratantra*, as translated in Snellgrove 1959, pp. 63–66. Wedemeyer 2013, pp. 139–143, synthesizes in several charts the various aspects of this tantric practice according to the different tantras where it is present.

The treatment of Nāropā's behavior in Mar-pa's biographies varies from one text to another, but the fact that he engages in the practice is one of the most regular features. The accounts of Sgam-po-pa and Bla-ma Zhang are quite succinct; for them, Nāropā's "entering into the practice" simply means that he no longer teaches. Thus, even though Mar-pa is said to meet him, Nāropā does not instruct him, but only occasionally leads *gaṇacakras* that he attends.

Ngam-rdzong ston-pa provides a more detailed version of Mar-pa's relationship with Nāropā during that special time, one that derives from Mar-pa's description of his quest in the songs. The importance of these visions in songs explains their centrality and ubiquity in the biographies.⁷⁰⁹ After stating that Nāropā is no longer available, as he has entered the practice, Ngam-rdzong ston-pa has Mar-pa visit his other masters and then return to Nāropā's place in Vikramaśīla, after which he has many visions of the Indian siddha, and then meets him and receives his teaching.

Although the descriptions of the visions originate with the songs, it is Rngog Mdo-sde's narrative that really initiates two motifs: the predictions by his other masters that Mar-pa would meet Nāropā, and Marpa's quest for the Indian siddha. This recurring description cannot be found as such in songs, and it is likely that its fame goes back to Mdo-sde's version, which was taken up by Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas and thus acquired a central status in most of Mar-pa's biographies. In these descriptions, the search has become systematized: each month, Mar-pa visits one of his masters and makes offerings to him, and then the master prophesizes the future meeting with Nāropā. After this collective endeavor, Mar-pa spends several months alone and has visions of Nāropā. Finally he meets him, and this is the climax of the biography.

In many respects, this motif seems paradigmatic. Not unlike Nāropā with his twelve major and twelve minor hardships, Mar-pa has to endure hardships in order to purify himself and be able to meet his master at the most subtle and secret level, as shown in this example taken from Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's narrative:⁷¹⁰

After seven days, the glorious Nāropā himself arrived bearing a human skin, a skull-cup, and a *khatvāṅga*. He was naked, his matted hair was drawn on the top of his head, and he was

⁷⁰⁹ For examples of these visions, see the songs in Gtsang-smyon's version: Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 108–111, 119–121 and 137–140, as well as the note p. 141. The first and third songs belong to the "eight great songs" and are mentioned in most biographies that include the songs.

⁷¹⁰ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 93.

adorned by the six bone ornaments. With exceedingly great joy, [Mar-pa] cried and shrieked, embraced [Nāropā] and pressed heart against heart, forehead against forehead. With both faces touching, [Mar-pa] narrated the story of his hardships and bemoaned the lord's lack of compassion. [Nāropā] answered: "It is through this complete purification of your continuum by the maṇḍala of body, the maṇḍala of speech, and the maṇḍala of mind that I now give you my spiritual influence!"

This account of the quest is likely more symbolic than "historical" (whatever that may mean in the framework of *rnam thar*). Its length—most of the second section of the texts divided into parts—even though the episode is supposed to have lasted only a few months, shows that its importance is subjective: what matters is not the objective truth of the meeting, but its significance in terms of Mar-pa's spiritual progress. Seen from this angle, the fact that the meeting is more visionary than "real" is not problematic from a traditional point of view. Many masters have, in fact, received their most important transmission by "seeing the face" (*zhal gzigs*) of a past master or a meditation deity, that is to say, by having a direct vision of them. Examples of such transmissions include the central preliminary training of the Sa-skyapas, *Parting from the Four Attachments* (*zhen pa bzhi bral*), received from Mañjushri by the Sa-skya hierarch Sa-chen Kun-dga'-snying-po (1092-1158),⁷¹¹ and the vision Tsong-kha-pa had of that bodhisattva. This exchange between the founder of the Dge-lugs school and the bodhisattva of wisdom had a major influence on the way the former developed his dialectic.⁷¹² The visionary character of Mar-pa's last encounter with Nāropā is what 'Gos-lo refers to when he states that, "The manner in which [Mar-pa's] meditation, and so on, develop in the moments between Guru [Nāropā's] entering the practice and [Mar-pa's] meeting with him is beyond expression."⁷¹³

⁷¹¹ For details, see Davidson 2005, pp. 295–296, and for his primary sources p. 434.

⁷¹² See *Bka' gdams chos 'byung gsal ba'i sgron me*, f. 346a–b, and Ary 2007, pp. 30–58 (in particular pp. 49, 55–56).

⁷¹³ *Deb ther*, vol. 1, p. 486: *bla ma spyod pa la gshegs nas mjal pa'i skabs tshun chad du thugs dam ji ltar 'khrungs pa la sogs pa'i tshul ni brjod pa las 'das so*. The translation in BA, p. 401, is a bit misleading: "The story of Mar-pa's progress in meditation up to the time of his meeting with the Teacher who had gone for Tantric practices, cannot be expressed in words."

The Evolution of Nāropā's role in Mar-pa's biographies

Despite this harmony among the descriptions of Mar-pa's final journey to India, the biographies' treatment of Nāropā's role in Mar-pa's life, especially during the less esoteric first journey, is quite dissimilar and evolutive. To understand this evolution, it helps to keep in mind the two large families of biographies. One is broadly made up of the texts by Mdo-sde, Sgam-po-pa, Bla-ma Zhang, Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas and those who follow them, especially "U-rgyan-pa," Rgyal-thang-pa and Gtsang-smyon. Some of them (Sgam-po-pa, Zhang and Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas) mention the Indian journeys, but the descriptions of Tibet are at least of equal importance, particularly in Sgam-po-pa's case where three-quarters of the narrative is about Tibet. In Zhang's version, the part on India has been developed and a visit to Maitrīpā is mentioned, but the time spent in Tibet is still more important. In Mdo-sde's version, two-thirds of the account is occupied by Mar-pa's Indian peregrinations.

In the other group, headed by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, greater importance is given to the Indian sojourns. Even if the final quest is described in detail, Nāropā has not yet been given the preponderant role he would come to play in later accounts. Encounters with Nāropā⁷¹⁴ only fill a half page of the five devoted to the first trip, and Mar-pa receives many transmissions from other masters. Nāropā's relatively reduced role was expanded in later versions, and some of the events that had previously taken place with other masters progressively came to be attributed to Nāropā. For example, when Ngam-rdzong ston-pa describes the qualities of Ku-su-lu the Elder, he says that a crow once made off with his amulet and Ku-su-lu used his yogic gaze to retrieve it.⁷¹⁵ In Gtsang-smyon's work, this exploit is attributed to Nāropā⁷¹⁶ and it is Mar-pa's amulet which is stolen. The story is coupled with a song,⁷¹⁷ but that part of the song is an interpolation. The song as it is quoted in the *Mar pa bka' bum*⁷¹⁸ or by "U-rgyan-pa"⁷¹⁹ omits the passage about the crow.

In the 13th century, biographies are becoming syntheses of various older versions. For example, Don-mo-ri-pa takes after Ngam-rdzong ston-pa but also incorporates Rngog Mdo-sde's version, where Nāropā is more promi-

⁷¹⁴ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 86.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷¹⁶ Tsangnyön 1982, p. 98.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 108–111.

⁷¹⁸ MK25, pp. 438–440.

⁷¹⁹ "U-rgyan-pa," p. 150.

ment. Even though details about other masters are mentioned, Nāropā is more in the spotlight. During the second journey, for example, after meeting Maitrīpā, Mar-pa returns to see Nāropā, who sends him to receive Mahāmāyā from Śāntibhadra.⁷²⁰ In Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's version,⁷²¹ Mar-pa goes straight from Maitrīpā to Śāntibhadra. This addition derives from a similar passage in the MKNT⁷²² and points to an evolution that culminates in Gtsang-smyon Heruka's account. There, the whole of Mar-pa's spiritual progress, including realizations inspired by other masters, is conditioned by Nāropā. This is significant of Gtsang-smyon's *modus operandi*: all the elements drawn from his sources are organized to highlight the relationship between Nāropā and Mar-pa. Mar-pa meets him each time he goes to India and does not meet any other gurus without his approval. His experience culminates in the third journey with the quest, encounter, and transmission of the innermost instructions.

In general, biographies of the Mdo-sde and KSTC group (where Mar-pa begins his trip to India with meeting Nāropā) stress Nāropā's role more than Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's group, where important experiences are obtained through other masters, specifically Jñānagarbha and Śāntibhadra. In the KSTC for example, Spyi-ther-pa, Painḍapā, and Prajñāsiṃha—all the masters that link Mar-pa to Nāropā—are portrayed with care, but Maitrīpā and Śāntibhadra are only mentioned *passim*.

The controversy about the meeting between Mar-pa and Nāropā

The progressive emphasis on Nāropā's role might be explained to some extent by a controversy sometimes alluded to in the biographies of Mar-pa. In modern Tibetology, this recently came to light via Ronald Davidson in his *Tibetan Renaissance*. He says:⁷²³

In one case, the discontinuities between fabulous claims made and what little can be known of the actual nature of the translators' lives were apparent. Marpa-lotsawa Chökyi Lotrö was certainly one of the great exemplars of the period, and his hagiographical association with the siddha Nāropā has become a monument of Tibetan fictionalization. [...]

In fact, Marpa probably received much of his instruction in Pharping, where the two (or four) Phamtingpa brothers—who were Nāropā's disciples—taught. [...] By the common Ka-

⁷²⁰ DRNT, p. 143.

⁷²¹ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 87.

⁷²² MKNT, p. 173.

⁷²³ Davidson 2005, pp. 142–144. See also the part on Nāropā, pp. 44–49.

gyüpa reckoning, Marpa went to study with Nāropā in Kashmir and eventually worked with thirteen panditas [...].

Part of the problem that has dogged Marpa's record is the fact that Nāropā died around 1040–42 and that Marpa was supposed to have spent twelve or more years with Nāropā during his three trips to India. Even with an early birthdate for Marpa, this length of contact is difficult to justify. Although some scholars have tried to resolve this dilemma, the approved response seems to be to ignore the inconsistency altogether. Some Kagyüpa writers even resorted to the expedient of having Marpa meet Nāropā *after* the latter's death during the Tibetan's third trip to India. The question is germane, considering the testimony of the eminent Nagtso, the Tibetan who shouldered much of the responsibility for inviting Atiśa and guiding him through West and Central Tibet. His story is found in a letter written by Drakpa Gyeltsen in response to three questions put to him by a teacher from Kham, Jangchub Sengé, who indicated that there was a controversy as to whether Marpa ever actually met Nāropā.

As this declaration sometimes seems to have become the new reference in terms of how Mar-pa's life is seen among scholars of Tibet, it is worth examining some of its ins and outs. Even though there are no biographies in which Mar-pa does not meet Nāropā, there are numerous clues in older texts that point to parallel versions which subsequently disappeared from the tradition. Ngam-rdzong ston-pa writes:⁷²⁴

At this point, there are two traditions. In that of Dge-bshes Gzhung-pa, after the above narrative, [Nāropā] enters the practice. [Rngog] says that Mar-pa wanted to request the *Cakrasamvaratantra* the following morning, but as [Nāropā] had already entered the practice, this did not take place. Other says that even though he received the *Cakrasamvaratantra*, his son died before he could transmit it to him and so it did not spread.

These two versions show that already in the 12th century there were questions about which transmissions Mar-pa had received from Nāropā, particu-

⁷²⁴ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 95: 'di'i dus su lugs 2 yin tel dge bshes gzhung pa'i lugs kyis gong bzhin du gsung nas spyod pa la gshegs tel nang par na mar la bde mchog gi rgyud zhu snyam pa lal de man chad spyod pa la gzhags nas med gsung/ gzhan rnams na re bde mchog gi rgyud kyang bsan de jo sras kyis don du bzhas pa'i bar du grongs stel ma dar ba yin gsung/

larly during the third journey. Here, the divergence is concerned with the *Cakrasamvaratantra*, and more precisely the Cakrasamvara Aural Transmission, which is to be expected from Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, who was a holder of that lineage. The two versions agree that Mar-pa did not transmit the complete instructions, but disagree on the question of whether or not Mar-pa received them before Nāropā disappeared. Thus, even though the question is not whether Mar-pa met Nāropā or not, it appears that there were already questions about what he had received from him when the tradition was still in the early stages.

The actual controversy appeared at the turn of the 13th century in a letter written by the Sa-skya-pa hierarch Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1147–1216)⁷²⁵ in answer to questions from the Yogin Byang-chub-seng-ge, who, according to the 4th Zhwa-dmar-pa Chos-kyi-grags-pa (1453–1524), came from 'Phanyul. In two exchanges with his disciples, the Red Hat Lama analyzes this letter at length in order to refute its conclusions.⁷²⁶ According to him, Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan's letter is the source of doubts some may have about the meeting. The question was reignited—in the framework of texts dealing with Mar-pa—in the 18th century by Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu and 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab.⁷²⁷ 'Be-lo too identifies Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan as the source of the controversy.

In this letter, translated by Davidson,⁷²⁸ the uncle and tutor of Sa-skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) quotes Nag-'tsho Lo-tsā-ba (1011–?), a well-known translator and disciple of Atiśa. Nag-'tsho relates his own encounter with Nāropā, during which he was so far from the throne that he could see but not hear him. This took place shortly before Nāropā died, which Atiśa and Nag-tsho learned about while in Nepal. Nag-'tsho then states that he met Mar-pa a few years later, while Atiśa was teaching at Snye-thang. After this meeting he declared:⁷²⁹

⁷²⁵ “Rnal 'byor byang chub seng ge'i dris lan.” In: *Sa skya bka' 'bum*, vol. 7 (*ja*), pp. 417–420. The part of the letter on Mar-pa is also cited *in extenso* by the 4th Zhwa-dmar in his *gsung 'bum*, vol. 6, pp. 471–472. There are some variations between the two versions.

⁷²⁶ The “Zangs chen mkhan po skal bzang ba'i dris lan” and the “bram ze'i rigs kha che'i nā ro pa dang rgyal rigs shar phyogs pa'i nā ro pa gnyis byas na gzhan gyi rtsod pa mi 'jug pa 'dra zhes pa'i dris lan.” See bibliography for details.

⁷²⁷ TWNB, vol. 3, p. 644; Diwakar, vol. 1, p. 66: *gzhan yang blun po phyogs zhen yin du re ba 'gas mar pas nā ro ta pa ma mjal zhes sa skya rje btsun gyi gsung du brdzus te byas pa la [...]*.

⁷²⁸ Davidson 2005, pp. 144–146.

⁷²⁹ “Rnal 'byor byang chub seng ge'i dris lan,” p. 418, here translated by Davidson 2005, p. 145.

People have said that having met Lord (Nāropā), [Mar-pa] listened to the Dharma a long time. I heard the unimpeachable story through a direct source that Marpa did not say that. Marpa's own disciple, while he was at Penyül, was Tsangdar Dépa Yéshé. He said, "What others say about my teacher and Lord Nāropā meeting, he himself said, 'I never arrived there (Phullahari)!' My teacher [Marpa] heard all of his instructions from Nāropā's direct disciple Gaṅga Metrīpa." Now I myself heard this statement from one of Dépa Yéshé's own disciples.

Before going into the debate itself, it must be acknowledged that the absence of historical documents dating from the period under scrutiny makes it impossible to ascertain whether Mar-pa met Nāropā or not. The study of Mar-pa's biographical tradition shows with sufficient clarity that the only solid conclusions that can be reached concern the biographies themselves; what they relate is long gone and colored by the hagiography genre, which does not have a historical aim in the modern sense of the term. The identity of the debate's protagonists is therefore significant. Whether at the time of Nag-'tsho or that of Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan and Sa-skya Paṇḍita, the competition between lineages to establish their superiority, and therefore earn the support of influential families and the power that came with it, was intense. It may simply have been the case that the Bka'-brgyud-pas had a great deal to gain by accentuating the role of Nāropā, while it was in the interest of the Bka'-gdams-pas and then the Sa-skyas to minimize the role of this important figure of Indian Buddhism. Nag-'tsho Lo-tsā-ba was a contemporary of Mar-pa and a disciple of Atiśa, another leading Indian luminary. They lived at a time when it was crucial for translators to establish a solid network of disciples in order to insure income from material offerings and gain influence. In fact, as Davidson points out,⁷³⁰ a new aristocracy appeared in Tibet during the 11th century, in which the *lo-tsā-ba* held a prominent position. The rivalry between them explains the overt tensions exposed in the biographies of Mar-pa between himself, 'Brog-mi, Gnyos-lo, and Ākarasiddhi, to mention only the best-known examples. In fact, many versions relate that Mar-pa was jealous when Ākarasiddhi went to Tibet... and one of the few Tibetans who received Ākarasiddhi's teaching was Nag-'tsho Lo-tsā-ba!

In the 13th century, the tension between the Sa-skyas and Bka'-brgyud lineages, which were by then firmly established, was quite overt. Masters of the Bka'-brgyud lineages had managed to establish tight bonds with local

⁷³⁰ See the chapter "Translators as the New Aristocracy," in Davidson 2005, pp. 117–160.

lords, while the 'Khon family, into which most Sa-skya dignitaries were born, was reaching its acme thanks to its alliance with the Mongol emperors. The political tensions translated as sharp theoretical debates, especially fed by Sa-skya Paṇḍita's attacks on the Bka'-brgyud style of teaching Mahāmudrā.⁷³¹ It is hardly surprising that tensions appeared during this period, which was particularly fertile for biographical collections designed to establish the roots of the Bka'-brgyud lineage.

Allusions to these debates can be found in the biographies. In the texts composed by Rngog Mdo-sde and Don-mo-ri-pa, for example,⁷³² there is the same *skad* attracting attention to Mar-pa's text and the masters with whom he wrote them. Here is what Mdo-sde says after listing the transmissions Mar-pa received from Nāropā during their final meeting:⁷³³

Then, as Lord Nāropā was not teaching, he told [Mar-pa] to study the Dharma at Mi-tri-pa's place; it is said that [Mar-pa] listened to the glorious Mi-tri-pa and worked on his texts. This is why now all tantras and instructions come from both Lord Nāropā and Mi-tri-pa.

This sentence could be a justification of the few available texts that Mar-pa composed in Nāropā's presence, as well as an argument in favor of the meeting between the two despite very little evidence. In essence, what Mdo-sde says here is that Mar-pa's texts are mainly based on the transmission received from Maitrīpā because Nāropā had engaged into the practice by then and was no longer teaching. Doubts of this kind indeed appear in Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan's letter:⁷³⁴

Now in answer to your question on whether or not Marpa ever met the Lord Nāropā, because these [Kagyüpa] traditions have no source text (*lung*), they entirely rely on chronicle (*lo rgyus*) and are hard to understand beyond the chronicle's presentation.

⁷³¹ See Jackson 1994 and Rhoton 2002 on the intense theoretical debates in the 13th century between the Sa-skyapa and the Bka'-brgyudpa.

⁷³² DRNT, p. 301.

⁷³³ MKNT, p. 180: *der rje na ro pa chos mi 'chad par 'dug pas/ mi tri ba can du chos nyan bshad bgyis gsung bas/ rgyal la mi tri ba la mnyan cing dpe sgrubs pa yin skad/ da lta rgyud dang gdams ngag thams cad la/ rje na ro pa dang mi tri ba gnyis su byung ba de ltar yin no.*

⁷³⁴ Davidson 2005, p. 145. See "Rnal 'byor byang chub seng ge'i dris lan," p. 417: *spyir 'di dag la lung med pa'i phyir lo rgyus tsam la brten te brjod pa las gzhan shes par dka'.*

Less than two centuries later, in 1418, Rlangs-lha-gzigs Ras-pa openly tackled this controversy in the part of his religious history concerning Mar-pa:⁷³⁵

Some say that when the supreme being Mar-pa went to India, the great Nāropā was already dead, or that they were not contemporaries, or that he did not meet him because Nāropā had already entered the practice. However, these declarations are not true. The first is completely illogical because [Nāropā] had simply entered the practice but had not displayed his death. The second is not tenable either because during the last of his three journeys to India, lord Mar-pa met Jo-bo Rje [Atiśa] while the latter was reaching Tibet, and received the Ratnamālā empowerment from him; our opponents do recognize that the Jo-bo and Venerable Nāropā were contemporaries. It is also not true that he did not meet him because he had entered the practice. In fact, [Nāropā] was not engaging in the practice during the first two of [Mar-pa's] three journeys to India, and even if he was during the last, [Marpa] prayed in the company of the Śrāmaṇera Prajñāsimha, Maitrīpā, Śāntibhadra, Kasoripā, Riripa, and the charnel ground *dākinī* Adorned with Bone Ornament. In the end he met him, then received specific instructions such as the Scrolls on the Essence,⁷³⁶ the

⁷³⁵ *Opening Eyes*, pp. 62–63: 'ga' zhig/ skyes mchog mar pas rgya gar la byon dus/ nā ro pa chen po gshegs tshar zhes pa dang/ dus mi mtshungs zhes pa dang/ spyod p la gshegs zin pas ma mjal zer ba rnam mi bden lal/ dang po shin tu'ang mi 'thad stel spyod pa la gshegs pa tsam ma gtogs/ shegs tshul ma bstan pa'i phyir/ gnyis pa'ang mi 'thad del/ rje mar pa rgya gar du lan gsum byon pa'i tha ma lal/ jo bo rjes bod du byon pa dang la khar mjal/ dbang rin chen phreng ba gsan zhing jo bo dang/ rje btsun nā ro pa dus mtshungs par brsod pa po nyid kyis khas blangs sol [63] spyod pa la gshegs pas ma mjal zhes pa'ang mi bden stel mar pas rgya gar du lan gsum byon pa'i snga ma gnyis kyi dus su spyod pa la ma gshegs shing phyi ma byon du gshegs nā'ang/ dge tshul shes rab seng ge dang/ mai tri pa dang/ dpal zhi ba bzang po dang/ ka so so [sic] ri pa dang/ ri ri pa dang/ dur khrod kyi rnal 'byor ma rus pa'i brytan can gyis grogs mdzad nas gsol ba btob pal/ dus ring du song nas mjal stel/ khyad par can gyi gdams pa rgyus kyi snying po dril bal/ nā ro'i chos drug dang/ bde mchog snyan bryud yid bzhin nor bu rnam gsum sogs dang/ lus med mkha' 'gro'i chos bskor dgu la sogs pa gsan nol!

⁷³⁶ *Opening Eyes*, p. 63: *khyad par can gyi gdams pa rgyus kyi snying po dril ba*. I am not sure which instruction is being referred to here and how the title should be translated. It could be the set of scrolls coming from Mar-pa kept in the *Gdams ngag mdzod* and introduced in Mei 2009, pp. 29–40, called *Rje btsun lho brag pa'i khyad par gyi gdams pa snyan gyi shog dril bzhi'i lo rgyus gzhung lhan thabs dang bcas pa* (*The History of Four Scrolls of Special Instructions Heard from Venerable Lho brag pa together with the Main Texts*). It could also be the fifteen scrolls about the six doctrines that Mar-pa hid as a treasure. See Ducher 2016 for details about this collection.

six doctrines of Nāropā, the wish-fulfilling jewel of the Cakra-saṃvara Aural Tantra, as well as the nine cycles of teaching of the bodyless *dākinīs*, etc.

These Bka'-brgyud arguments aimed at defusing any diminishment of Nāropā's role in their transmission were developed in the letter that the fourth Zhwa-dmar-pa wrote in 1506 in response to Zangs-chen Mkhan-po Skal-bzang-chos-kyi-rgya-mtsho,⁷³⁷ an acquaintance of Gser-mdog Paṅ-chen Shākya-mchog-ldan (1428–1507), a Sa-skyapa master who adhered to the Gzhan-stong viewpoint. When questioned by this Mkhan-po about Marpa's meeting with Nāropā, the fourth Zhwa-dmar-pa responded by citing Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan's letter and challenging its authenticity. According to him, it was added to Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan's writings by a Sa-skyapa zealot, but could not be his work because it contains too many contradictions. For example, he says that Nag-'tsho's account contradicts his other descriptions of Atiśa's arrival from India found in the *Jo bo rje'i lam yig*. According to the Bka'-brgyud hierarch's reading of this text, Nag-'tsho's meeting with Nāropā lasted three weeks and took place in the presence of Atiśa a few weeks before Nāropā passed away; the two men learned of his death not a year later but only after a few weeks, when they were given some of his relics, which were still to be found at Snye-thang during the Zhwa-dmar-pa's time. This account of a meeting between Atiśa and Nāropā at Vikramaśīla in the presence of Nag-'tsho does indeed appear in one of Atiśa's biographies, the *Rnam thar rgyas pa yong grags*.⁷³⁸ However, this passage is not part of the *Rnam thar lam yig*⁷³⁹ attributed to 'Brom-ston-pa (1005–1074), which may

⁷³⁷ See colophon of Zhwa-dmar Chos-grags-ye-she's two texts, vol. 6, pp. 481–482.

⁷³⁸ In: *Bka' gdams pha chos*, pp. 125–126. The description of this meeting is translated by Sarat Chandra Das (for example in Das 2006, pp. 88–89), as well as Chattopadhyaya 1999, pp. 139–140. As pointed out by Zhwa-dmar-pa, 'Gos-lo-tsā-ba refers to this in the *Deb ther sngon po*, p. 48 (BA, p. 25): "In the book containing the story of Atiśa, it is said that the Master Nārotapa had entrusted the Doctrine to Atiśa, and then proceeded towards the South, etc. Though there exists many similar accounts, I was unable to write them down" [in his description of the successive holders of the Vinaya].

⁷³⁹ "'Brom ston pa rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas kyis mdzad pa'i jo bo rje'i rnam thar lam yig chos kyi 'byung gnas.'" In: *Bka' gdams pha chos*, pp. 229–290. This text, largely made up of Nag-'tsho's first person account, describes the events leading to Atiśa's arrival in Tibet and his itinerary. It contains allusions to Nāropā, who is in Vikramaśīla at the same time as Atiśa and Nag-'tsho, but it does not correspond to the Zhwa-dmar-pa's descriptions. This text is studied and summarized in Decler 1997, pp. 157–177. Eimer 1982, pp. 41–42 questions its attribution to 'Brom-ston-pa on account of its mention of the Muslim armies' invasion of India, which took place in the 1200s, more than a century after 'Brom-ston's death. According to Eimer, most of Atiśa's biographies revolve around the

be the text referred to by the Zhwa-dmar-pa. Furthermore, according to the Bka'-brgyud hierarchy, Phullahari was located in the north of the Magadha, not at a month's journey south-east of Vikramaśīla as Nag-'tsho suggested, and Gtsang-dar Dad-pa-ye-shes's words are little more than worthless gossip. Even though it is difficult to substantiate this last assertion, it is true that his name does not appear in any of Mar-pa's biographies.

Chos-grags-ye-shes adds many other arguments, including many calculations of the years of birth of several contemporaries of Mar-pa and Nāropā. These arguments are not convincing as there are no 10th or 11th century figures that can be dated with certainty. What transpires from this was already obvious in Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan's letter, namely that even though Nāropā had passed away during Mar-pa's last journey, he was there during the previous two, and therefore their meeting could certainly have taken place at that time. In fact, the meeting between Mar-pa and Atiśa does not derive from the former's biographies, but is Nag-'tsho's assertion. Since no one disputes that Nāropā and Atiśa were contemporaries, Nāropā and Mar-pa must have been as well. Moreover, in the traditional Tibetan Buddhist setting, even the death of Nāropā does not hinder a spiritual exchange at a more subtle level, as shown in the examples of 'Brom-ston-pa's (1004–1064) visions of Atiśa at Rwa-sgreng monastery several years after Atiśa's death.

Finally, the 4th Zhwa-dmar-pa mentions a few texts outside of Mar-pa's biographical tradition that provide evidence of the meeting between the two. For example, he refers to Mar-pa-do-pa Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug's biography, where it is said that when Mar-pa meets Mar-pa-do-pa in Nepal during Mar-pa's final return to Tibet and Do-pa's initial departure for India, Mar-pa tells him that Nāropā had entered the practice and that it would therefore be better to receive transmissions from his disciples. The *Deb ther sngon po* also refers to this exchange with Do-pa,⁷⁴⁰ adding a vision that Do-pa has of Nāropā before he receives Cakrasaṃvara from the Pham-thing-pas, and so does 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab in the *Rosary of Crystal Gems*. Zhwa-dmar-pa also alludes to affirmations by Dge-bshes Grwa-pa-mngon-shes⁷⁴¹ who is said to be Mar-pa's contemporary in the *Deb ther sngon po*.⁷⁴² Gtsug-

sayings of Nag-'tsho because he composed a eighty-verse homage to Atiśa (*Bstod pa brgyad bcu pa*) on which all later biographies relied. See also Eimer 2003.

⁷⁴⁰ BA, p. 383, *Deb ther*, p. 462.

⁷⁴¹ Sørensen and Hazod 2007 indicate the existence of a manuscript biography of this master, but I was not able to consult it: *Gr[w]a pa mngon shes can dang dpal lnga ldan gra thang gi byung ba brjod pa rnam dkar dgo ba'i sa zhing*. Ms [Lha-sa]. f. 1b1–23b2. For a short biography, see Dudjom 1991, pp. 753–754.

⁷⁴² BA, pp. 94–101, *Deb ther*, pp. 124–132.

lag-phreng-ba quotes one of his songs, which, if authentic, shows that Grwa-pa-mngon-shes acknowledged the encounter between Mar-pa and Nāropā.⁷⁴³

In conclusion, I could say that on the basis of Mar-pa's biographical tradition, I am quite convinced that he met Nāropā, even though my only "proof" resides in the traditional narratives. These narratives—songs that can putatively be attributed to Mar-pa and biographies that were written a few decades after his death—all state that he went to India and met Nāropā at one point or another. The encounter or encounters may not have lasted for twenty years, as some biographies would have it, but they were certainly central for Mar-pa, and, of course, for those who followed his lineage and who inherited his transmissions. It is no wonder that this connection was disputed, given the tensions between the different lineages. Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan's account, however, is not built on strong ground, but on the hearsay of one of Mar-pa's alleged disciples. Therefore, until more convincing evidence has been provided, I think we can assume that the Bka'-brgyud tradition is not completely baseless, even though its foundation stage was magnified over the centuries to make it appear bigger than it actually was. The meetings may only have consisted in a few months and a few transmissions, but they had a profound and enduring effect on the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

3.2.2.2. Gnyos

The figure of Gnyos Lo-tsā-ba and his role in Mar-pa's first journey to India are among the most memorable elements of Mar-pa's life as told by Gtsang-smyon Heruka. This biography popularized the depiction of Gnyos as a jealous villain who obliterated twelve years of Mar-pa's efforts by plotting the destruction of his texts. As Hubert Decler showed in an article on Rwa Lo-tsā-ba that explores the differences between *rnam thar* and *chos 'byung*,⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴³ Dpa'-bo II, p. 129: [...] *rgya gar yul gyi mthil shed tul /sgra bsgyur lo tsā slob dus nal /lkhyod dags po'i gling bu gang na nyall /rje na ro mai tri la sogs lal /gser gyi mandala 'bul tsa nal /lkhyod dags po'i gling bu gang na nyall /gnas pushpa ha ri'i dgon pa nal /gsang sngags kyi gdams pa zhu tsa nal /lkhyod dags po'i gling bu gang na nyall /bi kra ma la shi la'i gisug lag nal /dus mtshungs pañ chen bzhi pa lal /dngul gyi mandala 'bul tsa nal /lkhyod dags po'i gling bu gang na nyall /rgya gar shar phyogs pa rnams lal /bsod nams chen po'i 'phel ba'i phyir/ /mchod sbyin chen po byed tsa nal /lkhyod dags po'i gling bu gang na nyall*

⁷⁴⁴ Decler 1992, pp. 20–22. In this article, Decler also describes the tensions between Mar-pa and another famous translator, Rwa Lo-tsā-ba, who is said in his biography to have "liberated" (killed) Mar-pa's son Mdo-sde. On that topic and the description of saintly evil in Tibetan biography, see Ramble 2010. Rwa-lo's existence and his role in the death of Mar-pa's son is completely absent from Mar-pa's biographies; there is only a

Gtsang-smyon's depiction of the complex relationship between Gnyos and Mar-pa is not unanimously acknowledged, be it within Mar-pa's biographical tradition or outside of it. Indeed, several texts completely ignore Gnyos' reprehensible act, or even rehabilitate him. In fact, there are many divergences in the way Gnyos' role is described, and there is an evolution in the traditional presentations of the cooperation between the two translators and of Gnyos' eventual treason. Therefore Gnyos' role in Mar-pa's life, as a major trope in the latter's biography, is our next focus.

Gnyos' biography and its parallels with Mar-pa's biographical tradition

Before delving into Mar-pa's biographical tradition itself, let us take a look at the Gnyos clan's vision of Gnyos Yon-tan-grags and of his relationship with Mar-pa. There exists a short account of the Gnyos clan's history,⁷⁴⁵ ten pages of which depict the life of Kha-rag Gnyos Yon-tan-grags, also known as 'Byung-po.⁷⁴⁶ The author of the text is unknown but its composition can be dated to 1431.⁷⁴⁷ Yon-tan-grags belonged to the third generation of the Gnyos clan, which settled in Kha-rag along the former border between Dbus and Gtsang, a place now found in the Sna-dkar-rtse district.⁷⁴⁸ This translator turned his stay in India to good account and established himself as a rich and influential lo-tsa-ba. There are three transmissions associated with him, the "three Gnyos tantras" (*gnyos kyi rgyud gsum*): Guhyasamāja in the form of Mañjuvajra, the protector Trakṣad Mahākāla and the cycle of Kṛṣṇa Yamāri (Vajrabhairava). Gnyos is also famous for his transmissions of the Lūyipā tradition of Cakrasaṃvara and of Yamāntaka.⁷⁴⁹ He received all of these

short reference in the 2nd Dpa'-bo's work, p. 113. This is another example of the subjective perspective adopted by biographies, comparable to the presentation of the role of Gnyos in the works on Mar-pa. I have explored this topic further in my forthcoming dissertation.

⁷⁴⁵ "Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs khyad par 'phags pa," pp. 6–16.

⁷⁴⁶ There are numerous variations in the spelling of Gnyos' name in the biographies of Mar-pa, both among biographies as well as within the same biography, and sometimes even on the same line. Ngam-rdzong ston-pa in Mon-rtse-pa, p. 88, l. 5, writes for instance *snys 'byung po* and *gnyos*. The second occurrence is the most common in this text (two against ten). KSTC-1, p. 156, has three different spellings: *gnyos kha rag pa*, *rnyos* and *brnyos 'byung po*. In general, the spelling of the clan's name varies according to different times and places. The homonymous forms Gnyos/Snyos/Mnyos/Smyos have all been attested (Sørensen and Hazod 2007, p. 671).

⁷⁴⁷ "Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs khyad par 'phags pa," p. 96: *lcags mo phag*.

⁷⁴⁸ Sørensen and Hazod 2007, p. 417.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 384–385.

instructions from his Indian master Balyācārya (Balin *ācārya*, “the master of the *gtor mā*”). In this biography he is also said to have obtained the cycles of Hevajra, Mahāmāyā and Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti.⁷⁵⁰

Apart from the question of the destruction of Mar-pa’s texts, the biographies of the two translators correspond remarkably well. The account from the Gnyos family states that Gnyos went to India at 56, when Mar-pa was 17.⁷⁵¹ The elder was accompanied by about twenty young people. This corresponds to the description of Gnyos’ meeting with Mar-pa given in the KSTC⁷⁵² and developed by Rgyal-thang-pa and “U-rgyan-pa.” For “U-rgyan-pa,” it took place “in Rtsang, at the Rtsis temple in Upper Myang.”⁷⁵³ For Rgyal-thang-pa, “[Mar-pa] passed through Nyin-ro and arrived at Rtsibs, in Upper Nyang.”⁷⁵⁴ Gtsang-smyon also states that the encounter takes place “at Rtsis Gnas-gsar, in Upper Nyang.”⁷⁵⁵ Sørensen⁷⁵⁶ indicates that the designations M/Nyang-ro and M/Nyang-stod are synonyms and refer to a place in today’s Rgyal-rtse (Gyantse) district, where there is a temple dating from the Empire called Rtsis Gnas-gsar. Mar-pa spent the night in a guest house there and met Gnyos, who is described as an important man accompanied by several young horsemen. Gnyos offered his financial help, and in return Mar-pa served him with attention. Gnyos’ biography states that the two men journeyed together to India, sharing Gnyos’ resources and the experiences of the journey, but it omits the three years in Nepal mentioned by Mar-pa’s biographers. According to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, Mar-pa and Gnyos only met after the former’s stay in Nepal,⁷⁵⁷ but the KSTC and the biographies it influenced describe at length the encounter with the Pham-thing-pa brothers and the reservations Gnyos held about them, thus diverging more noticeably from the Gnyos clan’s version. This

⁷⁵⁰ “Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs khyad par ’phags pa,” p. 9.

⁷⁵¹ It may be remarked that no dates of birth or death are provided for Gnyos in this text. The dates generally put forward for him come from the alleged 39-year age difference with Mar-pa. On that basis, if Mar-pa was born in 1012, as ’Gos-lo affirms, then Gnyos was born in 973. However, the year of birth 1012 is not found earlier than in the *Deb ther sngon pa*, and only derives from ’Gos-lo’s comparing the lives of different translators and masters of the time. See Appendix 5 for more details on Mar-pa’s date of birth.

⁷⁵² KSTC, p. 151: *nya stod rtsib[s] su slebs nas [...]*.

⁷⁵³ “U-rgyan-pa,” p. 107: *rtsang myang stod rtsis kyi lha khang du*.

⁷⁵⁴ GLNT, p. 148: *nyin ro la thog nas nyang stod rtsibs su slebs nas [...]*.

⁷⁵⁵ Gtsang-smyon, p. 10: *nyang stod rtsis gnas gsar du*.

⁷⁵⁶ Sørensen and Hazod 2007, p. 418, n. 20.

⁷⁵⁷ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 84.

text declares that once in India, Mar-pa headed west while Gnyos headed east. This is also what Ngam-rdzong ston-pa indicates, specifying that in the west, Mar-pa met Jñānagarbha in Lakṣetra. For the KSTC group, however, Mar-pa went directly from Nepal to Nālandā and then to Phullahari where he met Nāropā, which would mean that he went towards Magadha (in northern India), not western India. Then the biographies of the Gnyos clan and of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa describe similar events: Gnyos and Mar-pa try to determine who the most famous paṇḍita is, and leave to find and study with him. Gnyos meets Balyācārya in the east, and Mar-pa Jñānagarbha in the West. Then they return to Tibet together, several years later—seven years, seven months, and seven days, according to the Gnyos biography; twelve years according to Mar-pa's. The Gnyos account states that by then Gnyos had acquired a solid reputation and great fortune.⁷⁵⁸

The point of divergence: the treason of Gnyos

The Gnyos account echoes the Mar-pa biographies up to this point, but this is where the two diverge. This is what Ngam-rdzong ston-pa states about the return to Tibet:⁷⁵⁹

Gnyos Lo-tsā-ba and [Mar-pa] had then reached equal fame in terms of scholarship and the rest. When they reached the Nepal-Tibet border, Gnyos seemed outwardly to have the greatest fortune. When they then reached the four parts of the La-stod, they were equally famous for translation and instructions. [...] When they reached Dbus-gtsang, the heart of Tibet, it was Mar-pa who acquired all the glory due to his instructions. At this reverse of fortune, Gnyos became jealous. While the two were crossing Lake Rnub-bal-cha, in a fit of pique he threw Mar-pa's books into the water, so that none were left.

This description of how Gnyos destroyed Mar-pa's texts is a recurring theme in Mar-pa's biographies. As the episode is mentioned in even the earliest accounts, it is obvious that it circulated from a very early date. Even without taking into account the inherent bias bound to be found in any hagiography, this event can be understood in light of the competitive atmosphere of the time: in the 11th century, the tantric transmissions and texts brought back from India could either make or break their owner's glory and wealth. As was shown when we focused on the controversy surrounding Mar-pa's

⁷⁵⁸ “Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs khyad par 'phags pa,” p. 10; *de nas mar pa dang gdongs nas byonl snyan grags dang zang zing gi sku bsod shin tu che bar byung zhing*.

⁷⁵⁹ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 89.

meeting with Nāropā, accounts of rivalries between translators or masters abound in biographies of the time. In the following passage from the MKNT, Rngog Mdo-sde is explicit about the subject:⁷⁶⁰

While [Mar-pa] was crossing the River Ganges on a boat with Snyos 'Byung-po, Snyos threw the Glorious Guhyasamāja's cycles into the water by mistake. As he was in the wrong, he said: "It is fine if you copy my text!" Mar-pa, thinking he was trustworthy, answered that he would copy them in Nepal, but [Gnyos] replied: "Do it when we reach Tibet!" They went on and reached Kha-rag. There, [Snyos] gave him a horse-saddle as well as a lot of gold and turquoise, and told him: "Now, don't say that! Teach the Mother tantras! If you teach the Father tantras, who will come to listen to me?" And he did not lend [his texts].

[175] [Mar-pa] then reached Lho-brag. He did not stay home for very long, however, as he felt uneasy about not having the texts on the Glorious Guhyasamāja Noble Tradition. He gathered a good deal of gold and set off again for India.

It is noteworthy that the *Guhyasamājantra* is specified here, even though the MKNT is the only text that does so. This tantra does indeed figure among both men's beacon transmissions, and they were probably counting on using it to build their reputations. It is also this very tantra transmission that makes Mar-pa anxious about Ākarasiddhi's trips to Tibet and China, fearing that if this Kashmiri master who had also received Nāropā's transmission decided to spread it in Tibet, it would rob Mar-pa's chances of being successful when he returned home. This jealousy is mentioned in the KSTC,⁷⁶¹ "U-rgyan-pa"⁷⁶² and Rgyal-thang-pa.⁷⁶³

⁷⁶⁰ MKNT, pp. 174–175: *snyos 'byung po dang 'grogs nas chu bo gha gha la gru btang nas phyin pa'i dus su snyos kyis bskyon byas nas dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i skor rnam chu la skur/ kho la skyon yod pas nga'i dpe la bris pas chog zer rje mar pas kyang bden snyam na bal yul du bri byas pas/ nga bod du sleb nas/ bya zer/ rims kyis 'ongs pas kha rag du sleb pa dang/ rta khrab dang gser g.yu mang du phul nas/ da de skad ma zer khyod ma rgyud shod/ pha rgyud bshad na nga la nyan pa ga la 'ong zer nas ma gnang stel der lho brag du byon/ de nas yul du bzhud pa'i dus su yun ring por ma chags tel/ dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i 'phags pa'i skor rnam kyid dpe med pas thugs ma bde nas/ glar gser mang po sgrubs te rgya gar du byon/*

⁷⁶¹ KSTC, p. 161.

⁷⁶² "U-rgyan-pa," p. 121.

⁷⁶³ GLNT, p. 159.

Various presentations of this treason

In golden rosaries and hagiographies, there are generally more details about this type of event than in the religious histories, and the description of how Mar-pa lost his texts varies greatly from one text to the next. As usual, the differences often tell more about the composer's circumstances than about Gnyos and Mar-pa, and it is interesting to examine which strategies were adopted and to wonder why. Concerning Mar-pa and Nāropā's relationship, what was at stake was lineage-related; interpretative differences were at play between the Sa-skyapa and the Bka'-brgyud-pas who were vying for the endorsement of wealthy patrons. In the case of Gnyos' guilt or innocence, the choice seems to be much more personal and varies from one author to the next. The matter, which essentially concerns Mar-pa's biographical tradition, can be approached from different angles, which, as we will see, might be influenced by the author's relationship with the Gnyos clan.

One approach, probably the least "political," was to try to be objective and mention several possibilities. This was chiefly adopted by Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas as well as by Sgam-po-pa and Rgyal-thang-pa. The KSTC states:⁷⁶⁴

Then, while [Mar-pa] was travelling with Mnyos, he arrived in Nepal where he met Spyi-ther-pa again. [Someone important] says that on the road to Mar some of the texts that the master himself had were lost in water. There are also some that state that it was Mnyos 'Byung-po who threw them in the water, and some who argue that during a break they were burnt in the center of a forest fire.

Rgyal-thang-pa follows this careful approach by stating that some of Mar-pa's texts had fallen into the water without his noticing it, adding that some say that Mar-pa wondered whether Gnyos did not steal them from him, and therefore they parted ways.⁷⁶⁵ Sgam-po-pa similarly states that Mar-pa lost his instruction booklets while crossing a lake in Bsnums,⁷⁶⁶ but that some say

⁷⁶⁴ KSTC, p. 164: *de nas mnyos dang 'gro ba'i dus byas nas/ bal yul du byon nas bal po spyi ther pa dang yang jal/ mar la byon pa'i lam khar dpe cha bla ma rang la yod pa 'ga' min pa yod tshad [?] chu la shor ba yin gsung/ la la na re mbyos 'byung pos chu la skur pa yin nam yang zer/ la la na re gro btap pas nag la me shor ba gseb tu tshig pa yin nam yang zer.*

⁷⁶⁵ GLNT, p. 165.

⁷⁶⁶ This lake is mentioned in three biographies, with different spellings. Ngam-rdzong (p. 89) states that Mar-pa lost his texts while crossing Lake Rnub-bal-cha. For Sgam-po-pa (Sgam-po-pa, p. 24), this took place at Lake Bsnums and for "U-rgyan-pa" (p. 122), at Lake Snubs. This may refer to a lake in the Snubs district (also spelled Gnubs) to the east of Gzhis-ka-rtse in Gtsang.

that Gnyos threw them in the Ganges out of jealousy.⁷⁶⁷ What seems clear is that Mar-pa did indeed lose some texts, but it is not clear exactly why and how it happened. No one really knows, and there are many rumors: the version chosen by an author may simply be his personal choice, as most early versions state several possibilities. Clearly, we are not in the presence of facts, but of interpretations.

When confronted with alternative explanations, one narrative strategy is to be less ambiguous. Some authors chose to accuse Gnyos and blame the act on his jealousy, without alluding to alternative versions. This is the case, for example, of the aforementioned versions of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa and Rngog Mdo-sde, as well as those by “U-rgyan-pa” and Mkha’-spyod-dbang-po. The last one blends several versions by stating that Mar-pa lost a booklet of the *Hevajra Root-Tantra* (*rtags gnyis*) in a forest fire while he was having a break (thus expanding on KSTC). Later, while he was crossing a river on a large boat, he showed his remaining texts to Snyos-lo, who threw them overboard.⁷⁶⁸ As far as this strategy is concerned, it seems to be narrative rather than political: an account feels livelier when it is seamlessly narrated. Since Gnyos’ fault was mentioned anyway, it was easier from a narrative point of view to simply go ahead and blame him. In this case, the explanation is not to be searched in the author’s life but can be considered a narrative device.

This may not be the case if a third strategy is chosen: that of simply not mentioning the loss. This is the case in the versions by Bla-ma Zhang, Don-mo-ri-pa and the *Rwa-lung Rosary*, for example. In the cases of the latter two texts, it is difficult to guess the reason for their omission since not much is known about their authors, Don-mo-ri-pa and Sangs-rgyas’-bum. As far as Bla-ma Zhang is concerned, however, it may very well be explained by the Tshal-pa master’s connection with the Gnyos clan. Zhang maintained close and reasonably friendly ties with this clan that ruled the Lha-sa region until he himself took power in the 1180s.⁷⁶⁹ The patriarch of the Gnyos family, Grags-pa-dpal (1106–1165/1182), controlled the region and was a forerunner in Tibet of the *chos srid*, or clerical government, until Bla-ma-zhang took over that responsibility from him.⁷⁷⁰ Grags-pa-dpal was known as a true religious master; he taught such luminaries as Phag-mo-gru-pa (1110–1170) and Rmog-lcog Rin-chen-brtson’grus (1110–1170). He attracted many disciples, maintaining the rule of his clan over the region all the while. Bla-ma Zhang had a good relationship with him, and probably looked up to

⁷⁶⁷ Sgam-po-pa, p. 28.

⁷⁶⁸ KWNT, pp. 27–28.

⁷⁶⁹ See Sørensen and Hazod 2007, pp. 424–442, for more details.

⁷⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 419–437, for his biography.

looked up to him as an example for the time when the power would be his. The transfer went quite smoothly as Grag-pa-dpal's son, Gnyos Lha-sngang-pa (1164–1224),⁷⁷¹ did not pursue his father's career but devoted his life to spiritual practice under the guidance of 'Bri-gung 'Jig-rten-mgon-po (1143–1217) instead. These friendly relations between the Gnyos clan and Bla-ma Zhang easily explain why the latter would choose to silence rumors of Gnyos Yon-tan-grags's jealousy towards Mar-pa, especially as the Gnyos scions continued to maintain ties with Mar-pa's transmission: Gnyos-lo's son Rdo-rje Bla-ma, for example, is said to have studied with Mar-pa's disciple Mtshurston,⁷⁷² and Gnyos Lha-sngang-pa received Mar-pa's transmission of the Guhyasamāja,⁷⁷³ though he also had his great-grandfather's transmission. Another example of the openness of the Gnyos clan towards Mar-pa's teaching in the 13th century is that of the *Sras mkhar ma*, a fifteen-scroll collection allegedly concealed by Mar-pa and revealed by the famous *gter-ston* Guru Chos-dbang (1212–1270). Chos-dbang gave these teachings, which contained Mar-pa's innermost transmissions, to Gnyos Lha Rin-chen-rgyal-po (1201–1270), Gnyos Yon-tan-grags's descendant and founder of the Gye-re lha-khang, without apparent tension.⁷⁷⁴ Whatever disagreements between Mar-pa and Gnyos may have been described in Mar-pa's biographical tradition, they did not seem to interfere much with the spiritual life of the early Bka'-brgyud-pas.

Gtsang-smyon Heruka's account and its consequences on the tradition

As we have seen, the best-known version of Mar-pa's life story, and incidentally of his relationship with Gnyos Lo-tṣā-ba, was composed by Gtsang-smyon Heruka.⁷⁷⁵ Gtsang-smyon's main source was Rngog Mdo-sde's version, which he greatly amplified and turned into a highly colorful narrative. In both texts, Gnyos has an Indian guide dispose of Mar-pa's texts while crossing the Ganges. Gtsang-smyon completes his account with a song of shame to Gnyos. As demonstrated by the discrepancies regarding Gnyos'

⁷⁷¹ See the biography of that master, also called Rje Rin-po-che Gzi-brjid-dpal, in the "Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs khyad par 'phags pa," pp. 31–41. For more details and many sources on the life of the founder of the Lha-pa Bka'-brgyud lineage, see Sørensen and Hazod 2007, pp. 437–441. Sørensen notes that Gnyos Grag-pa-dpal and his son were important benefactors of the 'Bri-gung founder 'Jig-rten-mgon-po, which might explain the ascent of the 'Bri-gung-pas in Dbus in the 13th century.

⁷⁷² "Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs khyad par 'phags pa," p. 18.

⁷⁷³ Sørensen and Hazod 2007, p. 438.

⁷⁷⁴ See Ducher 2016, pp. 118–120, for details.

⁷⁷⁵ Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 37–39, then p. 48.

role found in earlier biographies as well as by their omission of this song, this passage was very likely poetic licence on the part of Gtsang-smyon, composed for the coherence and vitality of his account.

It was probably against this song, obviously quite pejorative where Gnyos is concerned,⁷⁷⁶ that Kaḥ-thog Si-tu and 'Be-lo Tshé-dbang-kun-khyab reacted in the 18th century. Those who say that Gnyos threw Mar-pa's Indian texts into the water are even called fools in the *Rosary of Crystal Gems*,⁷⁷⁷ even though two of 'Be-lo's illustrious predecessors—Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba and Padma-dkar-po—had written just that. To challenge any implication of Gnyos in the loss of Mar-pa's texts, 'Be-lo refers to Kaḥ-thog Si-tu, who justifies his opinion as follows:⁷⁷⁸

Furthermore, even though it is said that Smyos-lo from Kha-rag returned to Tibet with [Mar-pa], it would seem that he went slightly before or after him. Later, to express his gratitude to Smyos for the kindness he had shown him by sharing his gold, etc., while in India and Nepal, Mar-pa is known to have offered Smyos a stone statue of Cakrasaṃvara that had been on Nāropā's altar as well as some Indian items that were dear to his heart, such as Indian texts. Regarding the stone statue from Nāropā's altar, it remains today as an [offering] support in the Gye-re Lha-pa [temple]: I saw it myself. In view of that, even though it is nowadays widespread in Mar-pa's biographies that Smyos-lo threw Mar-pa's texts into the water out of jealousy, it is either an interpolation or someone lied about it, since it does not ring true that Smyos-lo would do that.

⁷⁷⁶ Tsangnyön 1982, p. 38: “Today, you should abandon/ The name of guru, dharma teacher, and lotsāwa./ With remorse and repentance, return to your country./ Confess your evil deeds and do rigorous penance./ Thinking and acting as you have done,/ And boasting that you are a guru,/ Though you might deceive a few fools,/ How can you ripen and free those who are worthy?”

⁷⁷⁷ Diwakar, vol. 1, p. 65.

⁷⁷⁸ TWNB, p. 643: *de yang kha rag smyos lo bod du log pa dang lhan du byon zer yang cung zad snga phyir phebs pa mngon/ rje mar par smyos lo yi rgya bal du gser la sogs pa'i phan thogs legs par mdzad pa'i bka' drin rjes dran tshul du phyis bde mchog rdo sku nā ro pa'i thugs dam rten dang rgya dpe sogs thugs su byon pa'i 'phags yul gyi yo byad kha shas mar pas smyos la phul bar grags lal/ nā ro'i thugs dang rdo sku ni da lta yang gye re lha [pa]'i nang rten du bzhuḡs pa kho bos kyang mjall tshul de ltas smyos los phrag dog gi[s] mar pa'i dpe chu la bskyer tshul deng sang mar pa'i rnam thar rnam su khyab che yang yi ge la slad zhugs pa'am gzhan gcig dang 'phrul ba las smyos los byas pa bden bden mi 'dra'ol*

Even though it is impossible to check Kah-thog-pa's declaration about Nāropā's statue in the Gye-re Lha-pa temple,⁷⁷⁹ it is very unlikely that the ancient texts have been tinkered with. It rather seems to be the case that this story—true or false—had always been around and no one really knew what had happened. So what could have prompted Kah-thog-pa to defend Gnyos so vigorously? To shed a spot of light on the matter, a look at the author's political and familial background is edifying.

Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu (1698–1755)⁷⁸⁰ was a Rnying-ma-pa master with strong Bka'-brgyud affiliations. In his youth he received the transmission of Gter-bdag Gling-pa's (1646–1714) treasures from his sons. Through his father and teacher, Gnyos-ston Phrin-las-lhun-grub (1611–1662),⁷⁸¹ the great treasure-revealer and founder of Smin-grol-gling Monastery Gter-bdag Gling-pa was a member of the Gnyos clan, one of the most enduring and influential in Tibet throughout the medieval epoch.⁷⁸² We cannot be certain that the reason behind Tshe-dbang-nor-bu's defense of Gnyos was his relationship with later Gnyos clan members, but the fact that Kah-thog-pa systematically spells Mar-pa's rival's name "Smyos," the spelling preferred by the hierarchs of Smin-sgrol-gling, starting with Gter-bdag-gling-pa,⁷⁸³ seems to substantiate the idea.

Whatever may or may not have happened between Mar-pa and Gnyos, and whatever the biographers' reasons for mentioning it or not, what *is* clear in the biographies is that the translators' paths parted after Mar-pa's first return to Tibet, with Gnyos remaining in Tibet and Mar-pa continuing his journeys and finally settling in Lho-brag. Prior to that, Mar-pa and Gnyos

⁷⁷⁹ Sørensen and Hazod 2007, pp. 446–447, give some details about this temple, which was the former seat of the Gnyos clan and the Lha-pa Bka'-brgyud lineage. It was consecrated in the middle of the 13th century and was converted into the Dge-lugs school after destruction by fire in the end of the 14th century. It is today in ruins (see photograph in *ibid.*, p. 448). The presence of a stone-statue of Cakrasaṃvara given to Mar-pa by Nāropā was first reported by the Jo-nang master Kun-dga'-grol-mchog (1507–1565) who paid a visit to the temple (*Kun dga' grol mchog gi phyi nang gsang gsum gyi rnam thar*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2005, p. 196).

⁷⁸⁰ See Garry 2007 for a summary of his life and bibliographical references.

⁷⁸¹ See Dudjom 1991, pp. 825–834, for Gter-dbag Gling-pa, pp. 724–726, for Phrin-las-lhun-grub.

⁷⁸² See Sørensen and Hazod 2007, p. 671. Sørensen notes on p. 439 that prominent members of the Gnyos clan were Padma Gling-pa and the 6th Dalai Lama. They were descendants of Gnyos-ston 'Khrul-zhig chos rje (alias Bde-mchog), a natural son of Gnyos Lha-snang-pa who settled in Bhutan. This branch of the family called itself Smyos.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 671, n. 1.

seemed to have had a stimulating relationship which was unanimously acknowledged. Bcom-ldan-ral-gri (1227–1305), the abbot of Snar-thang from 1262 to 1305, briefly mentions together the two of them in his *Bstan pa rgyas par rgyan gyi nyi 'od*.⁷⁸⁴ In the biographies of Mar-pa by Rngog Mdo-sde and by Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas, and in all those they inspired (Rgyal-thang-pa, “U-rgyan-pa,” Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po, Gtsang-smyon Heruka...), Gnyos plays the role of mentor to Mar-pa by helping him materially, but also by introducing Mar-pa to several tantras he had never heard of. It is through Gnyos that Mar-pa learns the existence of the *Mahāmāya*- and *Guhyasamājatantras* and therefore requests them. In this regard, Gnyos' role parallels that of Nāropā: Gnyos acquaints Mar-pa with certain tantras, and Nāropā sends him to masters who can transmit them. Thus, Mar-pa became the master he was with the help of these two men. Some texts (notably Rngog Mdo-sde and Don-mo-ri-pa) even mention that Gnyos introduced Mar-pa to his guru Balyācārya, from whom he received numerous instructions. From this point of view, it was Mar-pa who lacked magnanimity when he hid from Gnyos the identity of the master who gave him Mahāmāya, and by being quite secretive about his possessions and knowledge in general. Rgyal-thang-pa gives an example of this when he recounts that Mar-pa hid his gold from Gnyos in order to take advantage of his elder's generosity when they traveled to India.⁷⁸⁵

In conclusion, it could be said that in this case, as in that of Mar-pa's relationship with Nāropā, there are several biographical families which place more or less emphasis on certain aspects of the relationship depending on the author's personal or spiritual situation. It was probably Gtsang-smyon Heruka's willingness to create a lively and coherent story that led him to magnify the episode of Gnyos' destruction of Mar-pa's Indian texts, although he did not invent anything new. The story highlights the value of texts at the time. It portrays Mar-pa as a touchingly human figure, a betrayed man who knows how to pardon, and provides him with a compelling reason to continue his quest for Indian teachings. In this regard, the literary success of Gtsang-smyon Heruka is complete, and if some later biographers such as Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba and Padma-dkar-po chose not to follow him in every regard, on this point they were unanimous. It was probably against this supremacy—which had managed to over-ride the doubts present in early texts—that Tshe-dbang-nor-bu and 'Be-lo Tshe-dbang-kun-khyab took a stand.

⁷⁸⁴ van der Kuijp & Schaeffer 2009, pp. 233–234.

⁷⁸⁵ GLNT, p. 148.

3.3. Conclusion

My work is somewhat like that of an archeologist who tries to build a 3-D representation of an ancient house by identifying the various parts built over the years. There were many biography-bricks, more or less visible, scattered throughout the Tibetan tradition. Some of them were well-known, neat and clean, clearly identified as belonging to Mar-pa's house. Others were buried nearby, in unpredictable places, but remained identifiable. Yet others were worn down; some of them were reused in other buildings and took time to identify and decipher. Most of the bricks were stored in the TBRC only waiting to be studied. I patiently gathered these bricks and excavated—to the best of my ability—the various layers of the house, trying to expose Mar-pa's biographical building as completely as possible. My conceptual reconstruction was shaken up several times by the revelation of another brick that had to be added, but this generally led to more stability.

Once the diachronical elements of the house were gathered together in an abstract structure, I gave a guided tour of Mar-pa's biographical house, hoping to shed light on some of its more interesting features. The songs, Mar-pa's most intimate accounts, lie at the foundation and are conspicuous throughout the edifice. Some of them may convey raw data about Mar-pa's life; maybe in the future we can analyze them more precisely and see what they can tell us about him. In fact, this is what many Tibetan authors have already done, and there is no guarantee that it will be a rewarding task. Nonetheless, those looking to learn more about Mar-pa might follow their lead. I have laid out some of the tools I used to rebuild the house. Among them, two were particularly useful: verbs of speech and the practice of entering another's body. Although of a very distinct nature, these two were instrumental in confirming relationships between texts, relationships which were often revealed in the first place by comparing the descriptions of how the first journey unfolded. I was also able to unveil some curios, such as Mar-pa's narrative status as an incarnation. Finally, I exposed two of the most contentious points in the biographies, and more generally in our perception of Mar-pa, e.g. his relationships with Nāropā and Gnyos Lo-tṣā-ba. I have not reached definitive conclusions about any of these topics, but this is only to be expected. As John McRae put it:⁷⁸⁶

Precision implies inaccuracy. Numbers, dates, and other details lend an air of verisimilitude to a story, but the more they accumulate, the more we should recognize them as literary tropes. Especially in Zen studies [*or is it the case in all hagiographical studies? C.D.*], greater detail is an artifact of temporal dis-

⁷⁸⁶ This and the following quotes appear in McRae 2003, pp. xix–xx.

tance, and the vagueness of earlier accounts should be comforting in its integrity. While we should avoid joining a misguided quest for origins, we should also be quick to distinguish between “good data” and ornamental stuff.

I did not set out to be more precise than Tibetan scholars, many of whom, talented though they may have been, reached unsatisfying and quickly-forgotten conclusions. The advantage of the huge corpus of texts currently available, however, is that it is now possible to distinguish “good data” from the decorative addenda that followed it, which is what I have tried to do. But this is not to say that “good data” is truth. Here is another of McRae’s Rules of Zen Studies:

It’s not true, and therefore it’s more important. The content of Zen texts should not be evaluated using a simple-minded criterion of journalistic accuracy, that is, “Did it really happen?” For any event or saying to have occurred would be a trivial reality involving a mere handful of people at one imagined point of time, which would be overwhelmed by the thousands of people over the centuries who were involved in the creation of Zen legends.

What if what really matters is not what Mar-pa did or where he went, but what his close and distant disciples thought of him, and how they built their identity by re-imagining his life? Whomever Mar-pa may have met in Nepal and India, he went back to Tibet and inspired disciples, these disciples had other disciples, and many strong and rich lineages of practitioners have thrived on Mar-pa’s instructions. To advance further in our knowledge of Mar-pa, should we not expand our vision so as to take his legacy into account? What did he transmit to his disciples? Who were they? How did they use and transform what they received from him? These are some of the questions I would like to probe in the future, all the while being aware of the third of McRae’s rules:

Lineage assertions are as wrong as they are strong. Statement of lineage identity and “history” were polemical tools of self-assertion, not critical evaluations of chronological fact according to some modern concept of historical accuracy. To the extent that any lineage assertion is significant, it is also a misrepresentation; lineage assertions that can be shown to be historically accurate are also inevitably inconsequential as statements of religious identity.

Appendices

In the following appendices are presented a diplomatic edition and translation of what may be the first and most original biography of Mar-pa, that of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, as well as the translation of the biography found in the DK-DZO and tentatively attributed to Rngog Mdo-sde. The import of the two is quite different. The former is interesting in itself, as an example of one specific way of narrating Mar-pa's life, with rather detailed descriptions that do not appear in the well-known version by Gtsang-smyon, as well as a distinctive poetic power. The latter, though it may have a less evocative potential, is another very early witness of Mar-pa's biographical tradition, very different in content. It contains a large amount of verses and provides lists of instructions. It may be the first occurrence of a trope that became widespread in later accounts, that of Mar-pa's quest of Nāropā. It would have been desirable to offer a third translation, that of Mar-ston Tshul-khrims-'byung-gnas' version as found in the KSTC. As I feel, however, that the Tibetan of this text is easier to read than the previous two, and as it is closer to Gtsang-smyon's version, a translation has not been provided.

Finally are presented two charts, first of the location of Mar-pa's songs in the various biographies, and second of the dates of his birth and death as provided in the various texts. The latter is complemented by a short note summarizing the various versions and establishing why the dates ca. 1000 for Mar-pa's birth and ca. 1085 for his death may be chosen.

Appendix 1

Diplomatic Edition of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's Biography of Mar-pa as Found in Mon-rtse-pa's Golden Rosary

The late-15th-century manuscript is in a very condensed *dbu med*. The condensed letters (*bskungs yig*) are untied and underlined in the present edition. A chart in which the condensed form of each underlined word is indicated is presented after the text. When two identical letters are underlined in the text (ex: འོག་གི་), it means that there is only one letter indicated in the text (འོག་). In such cases, the word has not been added to the chart. The original has been transcribed faithfully; spelling peculiarities have not been altered, though some corrections are suggested as footnotes. When there is no indication of origin, the correction is based on the usual spelling of the word. The source of the correction is indicated (ex: Don-mo-ri-pa, p. 1) when it corresponds to the expression in the indicated text. Words that have not been deciphered or understood are followed by a question mark. In the original, sentences' ends present one of two main signs: | or །. Most of the time, the second sign shows that the sentence is not finished but this usage does not occur systematically. Sometimes a space is simply added without any sign. I have left these indications as they appear. The paragraphs are mine. A translation of the text follows the Tibetan edition and the chart of abbreviated words.

སྐ་བསྐྱུང་མར་པ་ལེ་རྩེ་རྩུ་པར་མར་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

༄༄༄། །།སྐ་མ་མར་པ་ལྟོ་བཀ་པ་དེའི་ཡིན་ཏན་ལ། སྐ་མ་དེད་དེ་པོ་འཁྱུངས་པའི་ཡུལ་ནི། ལྟོ་བཀ་གི་སྤ་རྒྱུ་མཇུག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ལུ་མོ་ཨོ་ཞུ་ལོད་དེ། རོང་ལུ་སྤོང་ལུ་ལུ་རྩོ་ལོ་སོ། ལུ་དེ་ཕུ་རྩ་ཞུ་ནི་ ལུ་མི་བསྐྱུན་པའི་མི་ཏེ། ཡིན་ཏེ། ལྱིབ་རྩོས་⁷⁸⁷ཀྱི་ལྱིས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་འཐབ་བརྒྱུད་པ་ཏེ། ཡོད་པ་ལས་པ་མ་སྐོ་མ་ བདེ་སྟེ་ཐ་⁷⁸⁸འདྲི་མི་བསྐྱུན་པས་ཡང་ན་འདིས་ཏེ། ཡར་གསལ་དནས་ལུ་⁷⁸⁹ལ་སྐོ་སྐོ་སྐོད་གཞུལ་དགོས་ ཡང་ན་ལོ་ རང་གཞན་ལྱིས་གསོད་ཏེ། ཡོང་པས་ འདྲི་ཚོས་ལ་གཏང་ན་ཤེད་བྱེ་ནས་འོང་བྱས་པ་མ་ཟེ། མོས་བྱས་ནས། དེའི་དུས་ ནག་ཅུང་ལ་སྟོད་ན་འབྲོག་མི་ལ་ཚབ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཏེ། ལྷ་གུ་ལུང་གི་དགོན་པར་བཞུགས་བ་དེ་སྐྱོན་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཆེ་བས་ ཉ་ནག་པོ་སེ་རྗེ་ལ་རྩད་བྱ་བ་ལ་ཟེ། འོག་གི་གདན་ཀོང་ཚེ་⁷⁹¹དགུ་[84]སྐྱིལ་བྱ་བ་གཏང་ནས་ དཔུལ་སྐྱོགས་ཤུག་ ཅན་ གསེར་གྱི་བརྒྱད་སྟོང་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཡོ་བྱད་མང་དུ་བྱོར་ཏེ་ཚོས་ལྷ་རུ་བྱིན་པས་ འབྲོག་མི་ལོ་རྒྱུ་དེད་ཀའ་ རི་དོག་ཀའ་ དེར་ལོ་ཏེ། བཞུགས་ནས་ཚོས་ལུས་པས་གདམས་དག་ཡོ་རང་མ་གནད། ཚོས་ཆུང་ལོ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་ལྷ་རྟེན་ རེ་མེད་⁷⁹²པར་ཡོ་རང་མི་གསུང་པ་ལ། རོང་ཅན་དུ་རྒྱ་གར་བ་མང་པོ་འོང་པའི་ལྷགས་གྱིས་ སྐ་མས་ཀྱང་ལོ་ཚེ་ རྐང་མཁུལ་པར་བྱུང་ནས་ དུས་ནམ་ཞེག་གི་ཚེ་སྐྱགས་དགོངས་བཏང་པས་ ཡོང་སྐུ་མ་འདི་བཀའ་དོག་པས་ཚོས་ ལུང་ལོ་ལ་ཤ་རེ་གི་རེ་དགོས་པར་འདུག། ཐད་ཀར་ངས་འདི་མི་ལང་པས། སྐ་མས་ཀྱང་དཀའ་བ་སྤུད་པ་ལས་བྱུང་ པ་ཡིན་ རང་རགས་རྐང་ནི་ཤེས་རྒྱ་གར་རང་དུ་འབྲོ་དགོས་སྟེ་ནས་ཡོད་པ་ལ། ཉེན་ཏེ། གི་ཚེ་སྐུ་མ་འབྲོག་མི་ན་ རེ་ཁྱོད་དལ་རྟ་སུལ་བས་མི་དག་འན་རྟ་ཁྱོད་རང་བཞིས་གསུང་ནས་རྟ་ཡང་རྩུར་ལ་ལྷས་སོ།

དེ་ནས་ཡུལ་དུ་མ་བྱིན་པར་རྟ་དེ་གསེར་དུ་རྩེངས་པས་གསེར་སྲང་དུག་སྤུགས་⁷⁹³ནས་ ལྟོ་བལ་དུ་ཟད་གིས་ བྱིན་ཏེ། བལ་ཡུལ་ན་བལ་པོ་སྤྱི་ཐེར་བ་བྱ་བ་གདན་གཞི་⁷⁹⁴འི་མཁའ་ན་པོ་ཏེ། འདུག་ནས་རྩོ་རྩོ་གདན་ལ་ལྷས་ ཚོས་ རྩོད་དུག་སོལ་གྱི་རྩོ་མ་⁷⁹⁵ལུས་ འཕོ་བ་བྲོང་འཛུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གདམས་དག་ལེགས་པར་ཐོབ་ནས་ དེའི་དུས་

787 ལྱིས་མཚོས་

788 མཐའ་

789 ལུ? The word ལུ refers to a boy or a son in the old dialect of the border regions of Nepal (Mkhan-po Chos-grags, 07/08/2010).

790 མཚོ་

791 Don-mo-ri-pa: ཚེ་

792 The sign in the text, ཐ, most probably means མེད, as is obvious in another instance, where Maitreya's name is spelled འཐེལ་བ་འདུ་སྐྱེ་བ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་, p. 91.

793 Don-mo-ri-pa: ལྷགས་

794 གདན་བཞི་

795 དུད་སོལ་གྱི་རྩོ་མོ་

ལྟ་ན་བལ་ཡུལ་གྱི་པ་རྗེ་ཉ་བས་རྒྱ་གར་ནས་ཚུར་བྱོན་པ་ལ་ཕྱིས་ཆེ་བར་བྱེད་ཀྱི་འདུག་ནས་ ལོ་༥་འཐེལ་དུ་སྤང་དེ་དང་
 ཚད་པ་ནི་འབྱོར་ས་པས་རྒྱ་གར་རང་དུ་འགྲོ་སྐྱེས་ན་ཟེངས་ཀྱིས་བྱོན་པས་ དེའི་དུས་ན་སྐྱོས་འབྱུང་པོ་བྱ་བ་ལ་རག་པ་
 །ཉ་ལོ་ཚ་སྐོབ་དུ་འགྲོ་བ་དང་འཕྲད་ནས། དེར་ཁོང་བཅག་༥་ཀྱིས་སྤྱིང་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་གྲོགས་པོ་བྱས་ནས་ །གིས་ཀ་
 པ་རྗེ་ཉ་ལྟེན་པར་ཅན་དང་འབྲལ་⁷⁹⁶ན་སྐྱད་བཏོང་པར་བྱས་། བ་ཚ་བྱུང་ན་སྐལ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྤྱིང་སྐྱེ་པའི་
 གྲོགས་པོ་བྱ་ཏེ། ལོགས་ལོགས་སུ་ཕྱིན་ གཉེས་ཀྱིས་ཤར་དུ་ཕྱིན་ མར་པས་[85]རུབ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པས། དེའི་
 དུས་པ་རྗེ་ཉ་སྐྱན་པ་ཆེ་བ་ཅི་དང་ཡོད་བྱས་དེས་པས། རུབ་དུ་ལ་གྱུ་ཏེ་མོང་ཁེ་ལེན་ པ་རྗེ་ཉ་ལེ་ཤེས་སྤྱིང་པོ་
 བྱ་བ་པ་རྒྱུད་གསང་བ་འདུས་པའི་མཁའ་པོ་ཡོད་ཅེས་ཟེར་ནས་དེར་ཕྱིན་པས་མི་ཟན་གྱི་དུག་ཚུལ་བྱ་བ་འདུག་པས་
 ཚུད་ལ་སྐལ་ན་ཤ་དང་ལྷགས་པ་སུལ་གྱིས་ཞུས་འགྲོ་བ་འདུག་པས་ རི་བྲག་།ཀ་ན་ཡུལ་ཚུང་།ཉ་འདུག་པ་དེའི་མི་ཀ་
 ལ་རན་བ་བྱིབས་ཐབས་སྐབས་པས་ དེབས་ཤིང་ལོ་།ཀ་ནགས་གསེབ་ནས་ཁྱེར་འོངས་ཏེ་ དེ་ལུས་ལ་བྱུགས་ནས་
 ཕྱིན་པས་ཀྱང་སྐལ་གྱི་ལྷགས་བཞེན་ནད་ཡམས་ཀ་ཞུས་སྐད། དེར་དུ་ལ་ཁྱེ་ཏེ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དེར་ཕྱིན་ནས་ལེ་ཤེས་
 སྤྱིང་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དེ་ལ་སྐྱུགས་ཏེ། གསང་བ་འདུས་པ་ཡང་ཉན་ སྐྱུ་ལུས་དང་འོད་གསལ་གྱི་གདམས་རབ་ཐོབ་
 བས་ཡོད་པ་ལ། དུས་གཞན་ཞེས་ན་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་།བྱེད་པའི་དུས་སུ་རྣལ་འབྱོར་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་མང་པ་།ཉ་ཚོགས་
 པས་ ལྟེན་པར་དུ་ཀུ་སུ་ལུ་ཆེ་ཚུང་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྣལ་ལུགས་སྤྱོད་པ་མང་དུ་ཡོད་པས། དེའི་དུས་སུ་རྣལ་འབྱོར་
 པ་སྤྱིད་ལྟར་⁷⁹⁷ལ་ཞོན་པ་།དང་། བྱི་ལ་ལ་ཞོན་པ་།འོངས་ནས་སུ་ཡིན་དེས་པས་ ཀན་རྩ་བ་བྱ་བ་དང་སྤྱིན་རྩ་བ་
 བྱ་བ་ན་རོ་པའི་སྤོབ་མ་ཡིན་ཅེས་ཟེར། དེ་ཡང་སྤྱི་མ་ན་རོ་པ་དེ་ལ་སྐབ་ཐོབ་ཀྱི་སྤོབ་མ་རྒྱ་ཚ་བ་རྒྱུད་ རྣལ་ལུགས་
 སྤྱོད་པའི་སྤོབ་མ་ཉི་ཤུ་རྩ་བ་རྒྱུད་ཡོད་པ་ལ། སྤྱི་མ་ལྟོ་པ་དང་མཇལ་བ་ཡང་།པོ་དེ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་རྩམས་ཡོན་ཏན་
 ཡང་ཀུ་སུ་ལུ་ཆེན་པོ་དེས་དབྱེད་སྐྱོབ་སེལ་ནས་བསྐྱུང་འཁོར་རྩེར་བཞག་པ་བྱ་ལོག་གིས་ཁྱེར་ནས་ལྷ་སྤོངས་ཀ་མཛོད་
 པས་བྱ་ལོག་བསྐྱུང་འཁོར་དང་བྱས་པ་ས་ལ་བབས་པའི་ལྷ་སྤོངས་ཏེ། ལྷ་སྤོངས་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལ་སྐབ་པའི་རྣལ་
 འབྱོར་པའོ། རྣལ་ལུ་ཚུང་དུ་དེས་སྤུན་མོང་གི་དོར་ས་སྐབ་ཆེན་བརྒྱུད་ལས་༥་འབྲལ་ཏེ། རལ་གྱི་གསེར་མཚིན་
 ལྷམ་མིག་སྐྱེན་ལ་མངའ་མཉེས་⁷⁹⁸[86]པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་པའོ། སྤོན་རྩ་བ་དེས་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་དུས་སུ་སྤྱོད་བཟེད་པས་
 བོང་ཁྱེར་གྱི་ཆང་ཚོང་མའི་ཆང་རྣམས་སྤོད་ཀྱི་ནད་དུ་དོར་ས་སུ་བྱུང་པ་ ལལ་ཏེ་གཉིད་པས་ཤ་དང་ཟན་ལ་སོགས་
 པ་འབྱུང་པ་ ཉིང་ལེ་འཛོན་གྱིས་དུར་ཁོད་ཀྱི་རོ་རྣམས་སྐྱེལ་འགྲུགས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་འབྱུང་པའོ། ཀན་རྩ་བ་དེས་

796 མཇལ་
 797 Don-mo-ri-pa: ཅེས་ཏེ་
 798 བརྗེས་

སྤྱིན་སྤྲེག་གི་ཐབ་བྱང་དུ་སྤྲེགས་དམ་གྱི་ཞལ་དངོས་སུ་གཟུགས་པའོ། དེལ་སོགས་པའི་ཡོན་ཏྟན་དང་ལྷན་པའི་
ནལ་འབྱོར་པའོ།

དེས་སྐྱེ་མ་མར་པ་དེས་༥་དང་དངོས་སུ་མཇལ་། ཚོས་འབྲེལ་བཏགས་པས་ལྷག་པར་ཡང་སྐྱེ་མ་སྤྱིན་རྩ་བ་
ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དེས་སྤྲེགས་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱུད། དེར་ལོ་ལྷ་བཏགས་ནས་རྒྱུགས་ཆད་རྩེར་བལ་པོར་བྱོན་པས་རྒྱུགས་སྐྱེལ་
བའི་མི་དང་འཕྲད་ནས་། ཡང་ལོ་ག་ནས་ཕྱིན་ཏེ་སྐྱེ་མ་རྣམས་ལ་རིམས་ཀྱིས་ཞབས་རྟོག་ལ་སོགས་པ་བྱས་། ལྱད་
པར་དུ་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྤོང་པོ་དང་སྤྱིན་རྩ་བ་༥་སྐྱེ་བྱེད་ཆེ་བས་གསེར་སྤང་དེའི་མཛུལ་སུལ་བས་། དེའི་དུས་སུ་སྤྱིན་རྩ་བ་
དེ་ཤིན་ཏུ་མཉེས་ཏེ་འདྲི་དམ་ཚིག་པར་འདུག་པས་། དཀོ་སྐྱེ་མ་ན་རོ་བ་དང་སྤྱད་དགོས་སྐྱེ་མ་ནས་། སྤྱིན་རྩ་བས་
མིད་ནས་ཕུལ་ཏེ་རིན་པོ་ལ་དང་སྤྱད་དོ། དེའི་དུས་སུ་དཔལ་ན་རོ་བས་དབང་བསྐྱར་མཛེད་། དབྱེས་རྩོམ་ལྷ་དགུ་
མདུན་གྱི་ནམ་མཁའ་ལ་སྐྱེལ་ནས་། ན་རོ་བ་ན་རེད་བར་སྐྱར་དལ་ལུ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ལུ་ཞེས་གསུང་པས་། མར་པས་
ལྷ་ལུ་དབང་སྐྱར་དངོས་སུ་ཐོབ་པ་དོ་མཚན་ཆེ་སྐྱེལ་ནས་། དབང་སྐྱར་ནི་ལྷ་ལུ་ལུ་ གདམས་པ་དག་ནི་སྐྱེ་མ་ཉིད་ལ་
རང་གིས་སྤྲེགས་ལ་གདགས་འཚལ་ཞེས་ལུས་པས་། སྐྱེ་མས་ལྷ་དེ་རྣམས་སྤྲེགས་ཀྱིས་ཉེས་ནས་བྱིན་སྐྱབས་ཀྱི་ཚ་
བ་སྐྱེ་མ་ཡིན་པའོ། ལྱེད་ཀྱིས་སྐྱེ་མ་ལས་ལྷ་འདམ་པ་། མི་ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་པ་མཚམ་མི་ཐོགས་པ་༥་ཡོད་གསུང་དོ།
དེའི་དུས་སུ་དབྱེས་པའི་རྩོ་རྩེ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དབང་དང་གདམས་པ་དག་༥་ཀྱི་སྤྲེགས་ལ་བཏགས་། [87]ནས།

ཤར་སྤྲེགས་སུ་རྒྱུ་བོ་སྤྲེའི་འགའ་དུ་ཕྱིན་ཏེ་། མེ་རྟོག་མདངས་འཕྲོག་གི་དགོན་པར་བྱེན་ནས། རྩེ་མངའ་བདག་
ཚེན་པོ་མེ་རྟི་པ་ལ་དཔལ་དབྱེས་པ་རྩོ་རྩེའི་དབང་དང་། ལྷོད་པ་སྐྱར་སྤངས་དང་། སེམས་དངོས་པོའི་བཏགས་ཚུལ་
སྤྲན་ལ་དབབ་པའི་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ཚེན་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཟངས་ཀྱིས་བསན་ནས་། ཡང་ཉ་ལ་པར་དུ་བྱག་མཚོ་ལོལ་མའི་དེ
ལ་དཔལ་ཞི་བ་བཟང་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་མ་རྒྱུད་མ་ཉེ་མ་ཡི་འཁར་པོ་བཏགས་ཞེས་ཐོས་ནས་བྱོན་པས་། ཉེ་མའི་གྲང་ལ་
ནམ་སྤོས་ཏེ་སྤྲེག་བསལ་བ་ལ་། སྤྲེགས་བསྐྱེད་བཟང་པོས་སྤོད་རྒྱུགས་གསོལ་བ་གདབ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པས་། ལུས་
སོག་ཡལ་བར་དོར་ནས་རྩེ་བཙུན་རྩལ་བས་སུན་པ་ཡང་དངས། དཔལ་ཞི་བ་བཟང་པོ་དང་ཡང་མཇལ་བས། ལྱོད་
པོ་ཉལ་དང་མ་འཕྲད་དམ་གསུང་། སྤྲེག་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་འཕྲད་། གཞན་སུ་དང་ཡང་མ་འཕྲད་བྱས་པས་། པོ་ཉ་
པ་བྱས་པ་སྤྲེག་ལ་སོགས་པ་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཡིན་ཅེས་གསུང་དོ། དེར་འདུད་པ་བྱས་ཞབས་རྟོག་དང་སྤྱིན་རྩེར་ལ་
སོགས་པ་བྱས་སྟེ། མ་རྒྱུད་མ་ཉེ་མ་ཡ་དང་སྐྱེ་མ་སྐྱེ་མ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་གདམས་པ་དག་རྣམས་མ་ལུས་པར་བསན་ནས་། བོད་
དུ་བྱོན་པས་དེའི་དུས་སུ་རྩོ་རྩེ་གདམས་ཀྱི་དུས་མཚན་ལ་བྱོན་པས་སྤྱར་གྱི་གྲོགས་པོ་སྤོས་འབྱུང་པོ་དང་འཕྲད་ནས་། སྤོང་
སྤོངས་བྱས་སྟེ་༥་གིས་༥་ལ་རྩིས་པས་། གཉོས་ན་རྒྱ་མ་རྩ་ཡིང་ཨ་ཅོ་ཅུ་བྱ་བ་དང་མཇལ། [88] སྐྱེ་མའི་རྒྱ་ཚེ
བའི་ཡོན་ཏྟན་ནི། སྤྱིན་ཤིང་ལ་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་བ་ཅིང་ཆད་སྤང་གསུང་པས་ཤིང་གི་ལྷ་མོས་ཆང་ན་ནར་གཏོར་བའི་གྲུབ་
ཐོབ་དངོས་ཡིན་ཏེ་། དེལ་ཚོས་གང་ལུས་ན་འཇམ་དཔལ་གཤེན་རྩེ་གཤེན་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་དང་། དབྱེས་པའི་རྩོ་རྩེ་དང་།
མཚན་བཛེད་དང་གསང་བ་འདུས་པ་དང་བཞི་པོ་དེ་ཡིན་ཏེ་། གཉོས་ཀྱིས་རྒྱུད་༥་ཤེས་སོ། དེའི་དུས་སུ་ལོང་
རང་༥་ཉ་གིས་༥་རང་རང་གིས་སྐྱེ་མ་དང་ཚོས་ལ་ཡིད་ཆེས་ནས་མ་ལུས་སོ། དེར་༥་པོས་འགོགས་ནས་བྱོན་པས་།
ལལ་དུ་བཟོད་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་འཆིང་ལུགས་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྤོང་སྤོང་ཞིབ་པར་བྱས་པས་དེར་མར་པས་དབང་པོ་རབ་ལ་མཚན་

སྟན་པས་ལོ་བ་ འབྲིང་ལ་སྲིང་གཞི་སྟན་ཚོགས་པ་གང་ཟག་དབང་པོ་ཐ་མ་སྟེན་པ་སྟེན་པར་བྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་དུ་སྟེང་
 སྟོགས་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་འདི་ལྟར་དུ་འདོད་ལ་སོགས་བྱས་བས་ གཉེས་ཐེ་ཚོམ་སྐྱེས་ནས་ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་སྐྱེས་དེ་གང་ན་
 བཞུགས་སམ་མཚན་སྟེན་ཉ་ཟེར་ དེར་ངའི་སྐྱེ་མ་ཐར་པའི་ལམ་སྟེན་བྱ་བ་ཡིན་གྱིས་འཚོལ་དུ་སོང་བྱས་པས་ གཉེས་
 ཀྱིས་རྒྱ་གར་ཤར་ལུབ་ཚུལ་⁷⁹⁹དེ་བུ་གས་པས་མ་སྟེད་ནས་ལོག་དཀ་ལ་སྐྱེ་མ་མར་པ་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བས་ལོ་བདུན་བཞུགས་
 ནས་ སྲ་ཕྱི་²ལོག་པས་ལོ་བདུན་གཉིས་བཞུགས་ སྐབས་ཐོབ་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་མ་རྣམས་དང་མཇལ་དབང་གང་མས་ངག་
 དང་བཅས་བུགས་ལ་གང་གས་ནས་ གཉེས་དང་²འགྲོགས་ནས་རྒྱ་གར་ནས་རྒྱུར་ལ་ཟང་གིས་བོད་དུ་བྱོན་པས་
 བལ་ཡུལ་འབྲིལ་དུ་སྟེབས། སྐར་གྱི་སྐྱེ་མ་འབྲོག་མོ་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བའི་སྐས་པོ་རྩ་སྐས་རྩེ་རྩ་བ་ལོ་རྒྱུ་སྟོབ་དུ་འགྲོ་བ་དང་
 མཇལ་ནས་ཞེས་ས་སུལ་ཏེ་བཏམ་རྩིས་པས་སྐྱེ་མ་སྐྱེ་མམས་བདེ་ ཡུམ་གྲོངས་སྐྱེ་གཤོང་ཤིན་དུ་ཆེ་ཟེ། [89] དེར་
 རྩོ་སྐས་ཀྱིས་ཡས་ཀྱིས་ལོ་རྒྱུ་མཇལ་པའི་སྟེན་པ་ནི་དེད་ཀྱིས་ཐོས་ རྒྱ་གར་གྱི་ཡུལ་རི་ལྟ་བུ་མཐོང་ཞེས་ཞིབ་བར་
 འདྲི་པར་བྱུང་པ་ལ་ དོམ་ཚར་ཅན་གྱི་མཐོང་བརྟགས་རྣམས་མཁྱུར་དུ་བཞེས་པ་ཡི་གེ་གྲུང་ན་ཡོད་དོ། དེར་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བ་
 གཉེས་དང་²གང་མཇལ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གྲགས་པ་སྐྱེ་མ་པོར་⁸⁰⁰ཐོབ་ནས་ཡོད་པས་ བལ་བོད་²ཀྱི་འཚོམས་སུ་
 ཐོན་ཅུ་ན་གཉེས་རོས་བསོད་ནམས་ཆེབ་རབྱུང་། དེ་ནས་ལ་སྟོད་ཚོ་²ར་སྟེབ་ཅོན་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུར་དང་གང་མས་ངག་གི་
 གྲགས་པ་སྐྱེ་མ་པོ་ཅོམ་བྱུང་པའོ། ལམ་དུ་དགེ་བཤེས་འབྲོག་མི་ལ་བུག་སྐྱེལ་དུ་བྱིན་པས་ དེའི་དུས་སུ་དགེ་
 བཤེས་དེ་སྟག་སྟོག་དུ་སྐྱེན་རངས་ནས་གང་འསྐད་པ་ལ་ དེའི་དུས་ན་གྲ་ཐོག་⁸⁰¹ཉ་བྱེད་པའི་ས་སུ། ལོ་ཚབ་³པོ་
 དེག་ཡས་གལ་གཡོན་གལ་དུ་བྱས་པ་ལ། དགེ་བཤེས་འབྲོག་མི་དེ་དེ་དུས་སུ་འགྲོད་པ་སྐྱེས་སྟེ་ དང་པོ་ངས་དབང་
 སྐར་གང་མས་ངག་སྟན་ན་ནའི་དབང་དུ་འདུའ་བ་ཡིན་པ་ལ་སྐྱེ་མ་པའི་འགྲོད་པ་ཡིན་སྐད་དོ།
 དེ་ནས་གཉེས་དང་²འགྲོགས་ནས་ཕྱིན་པས་ བོད་དབུས་གཙང་འབྲིལ་དུ་སྟེབ་ཅོན་གང་མས་ངག་གི་སྟེན་པ་
 ཐམས་ཅད་མར་པས་ཐོབ་ཏེ་ སྐྱེ་བསོད་སྐྱེས་པ་ལ་གཉེས་ཀྱིས་སྐྱེ་དོག་བྱེད་སྟེ་རྩུབ་བལ་ཆ་འཚོའ་ལ་²ཀྱིས་
 སྐལ་བས་ སྐྱེ་མ་མར་པའི་དཔེ་ཆ་རྣམས་རྒྱལ་ཐོག་⁸⁰²གིས་སྐར་ནས་མེད་དེ་ དཀྱུ་ཡང་ངའི་སྐྱེ་མ་ན་རོ་པ་ལ་
 སོགས་བ་སྐྱེ་མ་འདས་པར་བཞུགས་ཀྱིང་⁸⁰³ཡོད་པས་ གསེར་འདྲ་ཅུལ་ལ་འགྲོ་སྐྱེས་ནས་ཚོག་གསུང་པས་
 དེའི་དུས་སུ་བྱང་ངམ་རའི་གསེར་ཁུང་རྩོལ་བ་དང་ཐུད་ནས་ མར་པ་མཐོ་ལོགས་བྱ་བ་འཕྲིན་ཡུལ་བ་ཉ་གིས་ཚོས་

799 བཞུན

800 མཉམ་པོར

801 Don-mo-ri-pa, p. 147: སྐྱེ་འདེགས་ celebration?

802 ཐ་དོག་གྱིས་? In the preceding sentence, the condensed form of *phra dog* was *phrog*. The homonymous *khrog* might be a mistake referring to the same?

803 ཀྱིའང་?

དང་དབང་སྐྱར་ལྷུ་ནས་གསེར་སྣང་དོ་⁸⁰⁴ཁྱེར་བྱུང་གཞན་རྣམས་ལོས་དང་ཁབ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ གསེར་སྣང་ལ་
 བཅུ་ལྷུ་བཀའ་ནས་སྤུལ་ གཞན་དག་ཀྱང་འབྲུལ་བ་མང་དུ་བྱུང་ནས་གསེར་སྣང་དུ་གཉེན་པོ་ ཡང་རྒྱ་
 གར་དུ་བྱོན་ནས་རྗེ་བལ་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྐྱེ་མ་རྣམས་ལ་འབྲུལ་བ་རིམས་ཀྱིས་[90]བྱིད་སྟེ། དེའི་དུས་སྤྱི་ནོར་
 པ་དེ་སྦྱོང་པ་ལ་གཤེགས་ནས་མི་བཞུགས་གདའ་སྐྱད་དོ། དེ་ནས་ལུབ་དུ་ལ་ཁྱེ་ཏའི་གོང་ཁྱེར་དུ་བྱོན་ནས་དཔལ་ཡེ་
 ཤེས་སྦྱིང་པོ་གདའ་ན་བཞུགས་དེས་པས་ རིགས་དཔལ་མོ་ཉ་གིས་ཉེ་གནས་བྱེད་ཉེ་གནས་གསེབ་ན་བཞུགས། རིགས་
 དཔལ་མོ་དེ་ཁྱེར་དུ་སོང་ནས་བུམ་པ་ཉ་ཁྱེར་འོངས་ཉེ་ རྒྱུ་འདི་སྤུམ་ཆས་ཁྲུས་བགྱིས་ སྤུམ་ཆ་ཁར་འཕྲུང་ཟེར་ནས་
 རིགས་དཔལ་མོ་དེ་མུ་ཉི་ལ་རྒྱ་གཟེན་ཅིང་འདུག་པས་ རྒྱ་བུམ་པའི་ནང་དུ་སྐྱུག་པ་དང་བྱང་རྒྱུབ་གི་སེམས་སྤྱི་དཀར་
 མེར་སོང་ བྱང་མེད་དེས་བུམ་པའི་ཁར་དཀྱིལ་ཀྱངས་བཅས་པས་དེའི་གསལ་པའི་གནས་ནས་རག་ཉེ་རྒྱུན་བབས་
 པས་ བྱང་སེམས་དཀར་དམར་ཉ་ཉེ་འདྲེས་པ་དེ་ལ་ཁྲུས་བྱས་པས་ རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་བཅོམ་ཉེ་ཁར་
 ཡང་འཕྲུངས་ དེ་ནས་བུམ་པའི་ནང་ཉེ་ལྷུས་པས་རྒྱུའི་ནང་ན་དཔལ་གསལ་པ་འདུས་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་སྤྱོ་རྩོགས་
 ཐམས་ཅད་བཀྲལ་བཅོག་ཞལ་གཟིགས་སོ། དེའི་རྗེས་ལ་དཔལ་ཡེ་ཤེས་སྦྱིང་པོ་བྱོན་ནས་བྱུག་སྤུལ་བས་ ཡེ་
 ཤེས་སྦྱིང་པོའི་ཞལ་ནས་ཁྱོད་ཉེན་མོངས་པའི་འཆིང་པ་ལས་གོལ་ལམ་རྒྱུད་ཡོངས་སྤྱི་བྱང་སེམས་ དེའོ་ན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་
 རོན་ཁོང་དུ་རྒྱུད་དམ་དབང་ལ་དེ་སྦྱོང་ དེའི་དུས་སྤྱི་ལུས་དང་འོད་གསལ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གདམས་རག་
 རྣམས་མ་ལུས་པར་གནང་དོ།

དེ་ནས་ལྷོ་ཕྱོགས་སུ་བྱོན་ཉེ་དུག་མཚོ་འཁོལ་མའི་གླིང་ལ་དཔལ་ཞི་བ་བཟང་པོ་དེ་རྩོགས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་བྱེད་པས་དེ་
 སྐབས་པའི་གལ་ཉེ་བྱུང་མེད་ཉ་གིས་མོ་ཉ་རྩོགས་གལ་དུ་སྐྱུལ་ དེར་མོ་དེའི་ཐོད་པ་བཅད་མ་ཐག་ཁག་རྩར་རེ་⁸⁰⁵བའི་
 རང་དུ་ཀྱང་པའི་སྦྱངས་སྤྱ། དཔལ་ཞི་བ་བཟང་པོའི་མགུ་ཡ་མ་ཉི་རྒྱུ་མ་ནས་ཀྱང་པ་དང་རི་རྒྱུ་སེམས་པ་དམ་རྩོག་
 དུ་འགྲིམ་ཞིང་འདུག་པས་ ལྷ་མ་མར་པའི་ཐད་ཁར་ཐུག་པ་དང་སྤུམ་རྣམས་བྱིལ་ལི་ལི་⁸⁰⁶ལོལ་ཞིང་འདུག་ནས་
 རང་དུ་སྤུམ་པས་དཔལ་མ་ཉ་མ་ཡའི་ཡིག་འབྲུ་སྤྱགས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་རྣམ་འབྱོར་དུ་ཞལ་གཟིགས་ ཟབ་པ་སྤྱགས་
 ཀྱི་རྣམ་འབྱོར་དུ་རྟོགས་[91]པ་སྦྱིས་ མཐར་ཐུག་དེའོ་ན་ཉིད་ཁོང་དུ་རྒྱུད་པ་བྱས་སོ། ཟག་པ་མེད་པའི་ཉིང་འི་
 འཛིན་ལ་ཞག་བདུན་དུ་བརྟན་པ་ཐོབ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བྱས་སོ། དེའི་དུས་སྤྱི་རྣམ་པ་འབྱོར་པ་རྣམ་པ་ལྷ་གྱིས་དོན་ལ་
 སྤུམ་པས་སྤྱི་མ་ལྷ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་གདམས་རག་ཐོབ་པོ།

དེ་ནས་རྒྱ་གར་ཤར་ཕྱོགས་སུ་བྱིན་པས་མཁའ་འགོ་མས་ལམ་སྤྱི་དྲངས་བྱ་བ་ཡང་གསུང་ དེའི་དུས་སྤྱི་རྗེ་
 མངའ་བདག་ཆེན་པོ་མི་ཉི་པ་དེ་རི་མེ་ལྷར་འབར་བའི་དུར་ཁྲོད་ན་བཞུགས་ཉེ་ དུར་ཁྲོད་དེའི་གནས་ལུགས་རི་ལྷ་བུ་
 ཞེན་དུར་ཁྲོད་དེ་ནོར་ཐམས་ཅད་དགའ་མོ་དགོད་པ་དང་ བཤུགས་པའི་ངོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་སྤྱི་རྣམས་སྦྱོགས་པ་ མོ་

⁸⁰⁴ Don-mo-ri-pa, p. 148: གསེར་སྣང་བཅུ།

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150: ལག་ཚེས་ “fresh blood.”

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150: རྣམ་ཆེས་ཆེས་ལོལ་གྱིན་འདུག

བམ་པོ་དང་། ལུ་མས་པ་⁸⁰⁷དང་། བྱེད་ཚིག་བྱེད་མ་ཚིག་ལ་སོགས་པ་དུང་ཁྲོད་དེའི་མེ་ལྷེ་ལྷང་ནག་ལ་སོགས་
 པར་འབར་བས་། མེའི་དུད་བ་སྤྱིན་དུ་འཇིགས་ཏེ་། དུད་པ་དེས་གར་བྱེད་པ་དེར་རིམས་འོང་བས་ན་དེའི་ཕྱི་རིམ་མེ་
 ལྷར་འབར་བའི་དུང་ཁྲོད་ཅེས་བྱའོ། དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་དུང་ཁྲོད་དེན་ཤིང་ཅུ་ཉེ་ཏའི་བསེལ་གྱི་བ་ལ་ཇི་མངའ་བ་དག་ཚེན་པོ་
 བཞུགས་པ་མཐོང་ནས་། དེར་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མཉེས་པའི་མཚོན་པ་བཤམས་། སྐྱ་མ་མཉེས་པའི་མཇུལ་ལུལ་ཏེ།
 ཐལ་མོ་སྐྱར་ཏེ་ལུས་ཀྱིས་དུད་པ་ལ་སོགས་བྱས་ནས་། སེམས་རྩེ་༧་གི་གྲས་པ་དང་བཅས་ནས་གསོལ་བ་གཏབ་ཏེ་
 ལུ་བ་ལུལ་བས་། རྒྱུད་སྟོད་པ་སྐྱར་སྐྱངས་དང་། ཡི་དམ་དགྲེས་པ་དེ་རྗེས་སོགས་པ་དང་། མཐར་ཐུག་ལྷག་རྒྱ་
 ཚེན་པོ་གནང་ནས་སེམས་དངོས་པོའི་བཞུགས་ཚུལ་སྟོན་ལ་པབ་པོ། དེའི་དུས་སྐུ་དཔལ་༢་མེད་ཨ་བ་འདུ་སྟེ་པ་
 ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དེས་གྲགས་ལ་གཏགས་ཏེ་། ཅན་ཟབ་མོ་གདའི་⁸⁰⁸དབང་༤་སྐྱར་ནས་། གཞི་འདུན་པའི་ས་བོན་
 གཏོང་ནས་ཟག་པ་མེད་པའི་ཉིང་པེ་འཛིན་སྐྱེས་། ཞག་བདུན་བར་དུ་སྟུན་⁸⁰⁹པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བྱུང་ཏེ་། གཞི་ལམ་སྐུ་
 ༣་སྟུན་ལ་པབ་པོ། དུས་དེའི་ཚོ་རོ་མཚར་ཆེ་བའི་ལྷས་ནི་རྣམ་པ་སྐྱ་ཚོགས་བྱུང་ཏེ་། བེམ་པོའི་ལྷོན་ཤིང་ཀྱང་གཡོའ་
 བ་དང་འགྲུལ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་བྱུང་དོ། [92]དལ་སོགས་པ་སྐུལ་པའི་ལྷེ་ལྷང་དམར་མོ་བདུན་ཡོངས་སུ་གཏོར་མ་
 ལེན་པ་དང་། ས་འོག་ས་སྐྱངས་ས་སྟེངས་༣་གྱི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་རྣམས་གཟུགས་ནི་མ་མཐོང་། ལྷགས་ཀྱི་རང་སྐྱ་དེ
 རི་རི་སྐྱོག་པ་དང་། བར་སྐྱར་གང་བའི་ཞིང་སྐྱོད་གི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་རྣམས་རོལ་མོ་རྣམ་པ་སྐྱ་ཚོགས་པ་སྐྱོག་པ་⁸¹⁰ཐོས་
 པ་དང་། དེའི་དུས་སུ་ཇི་མངའ་བ་དག་ཚེན་པོས་ལུང་སྟན་ཏེ་། རྩོད་སྐྱེ་བ་༣་གྱི་འོག་རོལ་དུ་མཚོག་གི་དངོས་
 ལུབ་རྙེད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ་ཞེས་། ལྷོངས་ཁ་བ་ཅན་གྱི་རི་རྒྱུད་བྱང་ཕྱོགས་སུ་སོང་༧་དེན་གདུལ་བྱ་སྟོད་དང་ལྷན་པ་ལ་
 སོགས་པ་ཡོད་ཞེས་ལུང་སྟན་དང་ཇིས་སུ་གནང་པ་མཛད་དོ།

དེན་ས་ཤར་ཕྱོགས་འབྲི་ཀ་མ་ལ་ཤི་ལར་བྱོན་ཏེ། དཔལ་ན་རོ་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དེའི་བཞུགས་གནས་ཤར་སྐོ་
 ཕྱིགས་པའི་ཕོ་བྱང་བྱ་བ་ཡོད་དེ་དེའི་བྱང་ཁང་ན་གཟེགས་རྟག་མཛད་⁸¹¹ཅིང་ཡོད་པས་། རྒྱད་པར་དུ་དཔལ་ན་རོ་པའི་
 ལུགས་རྒྱུད་དགྲེས་པ་དེ་རྗེས་ལུགས་ཚིངས་དང་འཆ་ལུགས་ལ་ཤིན་ཏུ་རོ་མཚར་སྐྱེས་སྟེ་། གང་ན་བཞུགས་ཀྱང་
 ཕྱལ་དགོས་སྐྱུ་ནས་ཀ་ལི་ཞལ་ལྷབ་⁸¹²ཏེ་འཚོལ་དུ་བྱོན་པས་། ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་ཕྱལ་བས་ཡི་རང་མ་བརྟེན་ནས་
 སྐྱར་རིགས་དན་གྱི་གྲོང་ཁྲིམ་དུ་སོང་ཏེ་། དེའི་རྒྱལ་པོས་བཙོན་དུ་བཟུང་ནས་ཕོ་བྱང་མོ་ཏྲོག་གི་སྐོར་བཞག་ནས་ཡོད་

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 151: ལུངས་པ་

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 152: བཛའི་དབང་བཞི་

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 152: གཏན་པ་. Read བཅན་པ་?

⁸¹⁰ Word added in *dbu can* above the text and indicated with a cross.

⁸¹¹ གཟེགས་རྟོག་མཛད་

⁸¹² ཞལ་བསྐྱབ་

པས་ རྒྱལ་པོ་དེ་མཚོན་⁸¹³བའི་ཡོ་བྱང་ནི་སྦྱིན་སྲིད་གི་ཐབ་ཁྲུང་དུ་རྒྱུད་གཡལ་བ་ཀྱིས་གཡལ་བས་པས་མེ་བྱུང་དེའི་ནང་
 རས་ཟས་རྒྱལ་པོ་སྤྲོ་ཚོགས་པ་གཟར་བུས་བརྟུས་ནས་འོང་བའོ། དེར་བཙོན་ཞག་ལྔ་ནས་རྒྱལ་པོས་བཏང་ངོ། དེར་
 ཡེ་མ་རྗེད་དཔལ་སྲིད་རྒྱ་པ་ཅན་དུ་བྱོན་སྲིད་རྒྱ་པ་གོགས་པོར་ཁྲིད་དེ། འབྲས་དཀར་མོ་བྲེ་དང་ཉལ་གྱི་ཁྲུང་ནས་
 ཡང་འཚོལ་དུ་བྱོན་པས། ཉིན་ཉི་མོ་ཅན་དན་གྱི་སྤོང་པོ་ཉི་མོ་སྲིད་ན། དཔྱེས་པ་དྲོ་རྗེ་ལྷ་དགུ་འཇའི་གུར་ཕུབ་
 པ་ལྷ་བྱར་གཟིགས་ཏེ། སྤང་བ་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་སྤོང་པོ་ལ་ཅུང་མ་རེག་ལ་ཁད།[93]པར་ཞལ་གཟིགས་ཏེ་མོས་
 པ་ཁྲུང་པར་ཅན་སྦྱེས་སོ། ཡང་དེ་བཞིན་བྱོན་པས་ ཤིང་རྒྱུད་ཉི་མོ་རྒྱལ་འབྱོར་མ་ཉི་མོ་མཉམ་གཞག་ལ་བཞུགས་
 འདུག་པས་ རྒྱལ་འབྱོར་མ་དེའི་བྱུགས་ཁ་ན་ཨེ་ཏ་ལྷ་གས་ཀྱི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་དེ་རྗེ་ལྷ་བྱར་མཐོང་ན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྦྱིང་
 ཁ་བྱར་ལ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་ རྒྱལ་འབྱོར་མ་དེའི་ཁ་བྱེད་ལ་ལས་པད་མ་འདབས་མ་བརྒྱད་པ་ དེའི་སྦྱིང་ན་ཉི་མོ་ཁ་
 སྦྱིང་གཞུང་ དེའི་ནང་ན་ལྷ་གས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་འགལ་མའི་འཁོར་ལོ་ལྷ་ར་འཁོར་བ་མཐོང་ཏེ་མོ་འོང་ནང་གི་གཟུགས་
 རྩན་བཞིན་དེའི་འདུད་པ་བྱས་ནས་ན་རོ་པ་གང་ན་གཞུགས་ཞེས་དེས་པ་ བྱུང་མེད་དེ་བཅུང་མི་བཟོར་བར་ཞལ་གྱི་
 བཅུང་ཉི་མོ། དེར་དེའི་ཕྱོགས་སུ་མཚུངས་མ་བཅས་སྦྱེ་བྱིན་པས་ཤེལ་གྱི་པ་འོང་ལ་ན་རོ་པའི་ཞབས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་སུ་
 ཤད་སྤལ་རིས་རྩོད་ཚད་མ་ཉམས་པར་འདུག་པ་མཐོང་ དེར་དེའི་མདུན་དུ་མཇུལ་འབྱུང་ཞིང་ཕྱོད་དུ་གྲུས་པ་དང་
 བཅས་སྦྱེ་གསོལ་བ་གཏང་བས་ཞག་བདུན་ནས་དཔལ་ན་རོ་པ་ཞལ་དངོས་སུ་བྱོན་ཏེ། དེ་ཡང་མི་ལྷན་གྱི་གཡལ་
 གཞི་བསྐྱམས་པ་ ཐོད་པ་དང་ཁ་ཏྲི་ལ་བསྐྱམས་པ་ སྦྱ་ཅེར་བུ་རལ་པའི་ཐོར་བུ་རྩུགས་སྦྱི་བོར་བཟེད་པ་ རུས་པའི་
 བརྒྱན་དུག་གིས་བརྒྱན་པ་ཉི་མོ་ཚངས་ཀྱིས་བྱོན་ནོ། དེར་རབ་ཏུ་དགའ་ཚེས་སྦྱེ་རུས་མོས་བཏབ་ནས་སྦྱལ་འབྱུང་
 བྱུགས་དང་བྱུགས་སུ་སྦྱུང་ དཔལ་བ་དང་དཔལ་བ་བཏུགས་ ཞལ་ལ་ཞལ་གྱིས་བཏུགས་ནས་ དཀར་ལས་
 བྱས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་སྦྱེད་ རྗེ་བྱུགས་རྗེ་རེ་རྒྱུད་ལས་སྦྱུང་འདྲི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ གསུང་གི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་
 བྱུགས་ཀྱི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱིས་རྒྱུད་ཡོངས་སུ་སྦྱུངས་པ་དེས་དའི་ས་བྱིན་གྱིས་སྦྱབས་ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ། དེར་གསེར་
 སྤང་བརྟུ་བདུན་བྱམ་སྒོགས་འཁྲུང་ནས་ཕུལ་བས། བཞེས་སུ་ཡི་རང་མ་གནང་ནས་ཡང་ཡང་སྦྱར་ཏེ་བཞེས་པར་
 ལུས་པས་ ཕྱག་དུ་བཞེས་སྦྱེ་ ལྷ་མའི་རྒྱལ་འབྱོར་ཉི་མོ་གསུང་[94]ནས་ཚུམས་ཉི་མོ་བར་བཞག། ལྷ་མ་དཀོན་
 མཚོག་མཚོད་པར་བཞེས་གསུང་ཏེ་རྒྱལ་མཁའ་ལ་ཐོར་གྱིས་གཏོར་ནས་བཏང་པས་ ལྷ་མ་མར་པའི་བྱུགས་ལ་རེ་
 འཕངས་ངས་འཚོལ་བ་ལ་རྗེ་རྗེད་ཉི་མོ་དཀར་སྦྱང་ལོ་ལོ་ དེ་བས་ང་རང་རྗེན་ཁྲུང་པར་ཅན་ལ་མཚོད་པ་བྱ་བའམ་
 ལྷ་མ་གཞན་དག་གས་ མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་ལ་ཚོགས་མཚོད་བྱས་ན་ཡང་རྗེ་རྗེད་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་ཉི་མོ་སོགས་པ་ལ་སྦྱུས་ནས་
 ཡོད་པ་ལ་ ལྷ་མའི་བྱུགས་ཀྱིས་མཚུན་ཏེ། རྒྱུད་འདོད་ན་སྤར་ཡང་ཡོད་པར་བྱའོགས་པ་ནས་ཏིང་པོ་འཛིན་ཉི་མོ་མཚོད་
 པ་དང་ གསེར་སེ་བ་རྟེན་མ་གོད་པར་སྦྱིམ་པའི་དུ་ཏུབ་ཀྱི་བྱུང་ངོ། དེ་ནས་ཀྱང་རྒྱུད་འདོད་ན་རའི་འདྲི་ཀུན་ཀྱང་
 གསེར་ཡིན་གསུང་སྦྱེ་ སེ་ཐག་ཉི་མོ་འདུག་པ་ལ་ཞབས་སུ་གྱིས་མཚོད་པ་དང་སེ་ཐག་དེ་གསེར་དུ་སོང་། དེར་

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ཡིད་ཚེས་པ་དང་མོས་པ་བྱུང་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་བྱུང་དོ། དེར་ན་རོ་པའི་ཞལ་ནས་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་གྲིས་གསུང་།
 འོན་ཏེ་ཉ་གཤམ་འདི་ལས་ཅི་ཡང་མི་བདོག་ཞུས་པས་། དེ་དུས་བུ་རྒྱལ་བརྒྱུར་སྐབས་ལ་ལབ་ཉིའི་ཁྲུང་དུ་ཤིང་ལོས་ལ་
 ཚོད་ལ་བཞོག་གསུང་ནས་། དེ་ནི་དུ་བྱས་པས་། ན་རོ་པའི་བྱིན་གྲིས་སྐབས་པས་བཟའ་བ་དང་བཅས་བ་དང་བཏུང་
 པ་རྣམ་པ་སྐྱེ་ཚོགས་པ་རྣམས་བྱུང་སྟེ། ཤ་དང་འབྲས་དང་ཞོ་དང་ཚོད་སྐྱེ་མ་ལུས་པ་དང་། བྱ་རམ་དང་ཁྲར་བ་
 དང་ཚང་ལ་སོགས་པའི་བཏུང་པ་སྐྱེ་ཚོགས་པ་དང་། བཟའ་བཏུང་གི་སྐྱམ་⁸¹⁴པ་དུ་མ་བྱུང་ནས་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་
 མཛད་དོ། དེར་བྱུགས་དབང་སྐུར་ཉེ་ཚོས་གསུང་པས་སྐར་སྐྱེ་ཉིའི་དུས་ལས་ཚོགས་ཉེང་ལ་དོན་འདི་ལ་བར་གནང་།
 དེའི་དུས་སྐུ་གདམས་དག་རྣམས་མ་ལུས་པར་གནང་ཉ། ཁྲུང་པར་དུ་ཡང་ལས་རྒྱ་དང་གཏུམ་མོའི་གདམས་དག་
 གི་མཐར་བུག་གནང་ཉ། སྐར་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་གནད་ལ་དོ་སྲོད་མཛད་དེ་། དེའི་དུས་སྐུར་ཡང་སྐྱེ་མ་འདི་མ་རྩེད་ནས་སྐྱུང་ས་
 ད་ཞལ་དངོས་སྐུ་འཇལ་ནས་ད་ནི་སྐྱབ་ཐོབ་དང་། ༢་མཇལ་བས་བོད་[95]རང་དུ་འགྲོ་ལ་ན་མི་འདུག་སྐྱུས་ཉི་ སྐ་
 མའི་ཞབས་དུང་དུ་སྐད་ལ་ཉམས་སྐྱེད་སྐྱེད་ནས་ཡོད་པས་། དེད་པལ་ན་རོ་པའི་བྱུགས་ལ་ཤར་ནས་ད་ཁྲིད་འདིར་
 མ་འདུག་པར་བོད་ལ་སོང་། སྐབ་ཐོབ་ཀྱིས་རྣལ་འབྱོར་པ་དང་སྐྱེ་ཉ་༨ས་བྱིན་གྲིས་བསྐྱབས་པ་ནི། སྐོབ་དཔོན་
 བཀའ་པོ་སྲོད་པ་བས་ཤར་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་བྱིན་གྲིས་བསྐྱབས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། དེ་བཞིན་དུ་སྐོབ་དཔོན་འཕགས་པ་ལྟ་སྐྱབ་
 ཀྱིས་ལྟོ་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་བྱིན་གྲིས་བསྐྱབས་པ་ཡིན། རྒྱལ་པོ་ཨིན་ཏ་སྟོ་རྩེས་ཏུ་བཙོགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་བྱིན་གྲིས་བསྐྱབས་
 པ་ཡིན། དས་བྱང་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱོངས་པར་ཉ་ནི་ཡལ་ལ་བ་ཅན་གྱིས་ཕྱོགས་བྱིན་གྲིས་བསྐྱབས་པ་ཡིན་པས། ཁྲོད་
 འདིར་མ་སྐྱོད་པར་ཡལ་དུ་སོང་། བྱང་ཕྱོགས་ལ་བ་ཅན་ན་གཏུལ་བྱ་སྐྱོད་དང་ལྷན་པ་ཡོད་དོ་གསུང་། འདིའི་དུས་
 སྐུ་ལུགས་༢་ཡིན་ཉི་ དགེ་བཤེས་གཞུང་པའི་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་གོང་བཞིན་དུ་གསུང་ནས་སྐྱོད་པ་ལ་གཤེགས་ཉ། ནང་
 པར་ན་མར་ལ་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་རྒྱུད་ལུ་སྐྱེས་པ་ལ་། དེ་མན་ཆད་སྐྱོད་པ་ལ་གཤེགས་ནས་མེད་གསུང་། གཞན་
 རྣམས་ན་རེ་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱང་བསན་དེ་ཚོ་སྐས་ཀྱི་དོན་དུ་བཞག་པའི་བར་དུ་གྲོངས་སྟེ། མ་དར་བ་ཡིན་
 གསུང་། དེ་ནས་སྐྱེ་མ་སེར་མེད་མེད་པས་སྐྱེད་དང་པའི་ཚོས་འབྲེལ་བྱས་པའི་སྐྱེ་མ་བཏུ་༢་བཞུགས་པ་ཡིན་ཉི་ཐམས་ཅད་
 ཀྱིས་བྱིན་སྐྱབས་གདམས་དག་གནང་དོ། རྗེ་འདུན་གྱི་དོ་མེད་ན་རོ་པ་དང་མི་ཉི་པ་༢་ཡིན་། དེ་༢་ཀྱི་ནང་ནས་
 ཡང་མཚོད་སྐོང་བཞིན་དུ་འདུན་སྐྱེ་མེད་པ་ནི་སྐྱེ་མ་ན་རོ་སྐྱེ་ཚོན་ཡིན་ནོ།

དེ་ནས་ཡང་རྒྱུར་འབྱོན་ཁར་དེ་རྗེ་གདན་དུ་དུས་ཀྱི་མཚོད་པ་དང་མཛོམ་ནས་བྱོན་པས་། དེའི་དུས་སྐུ་ཉིན་མོ་མི་
 མཚོད་པ་། མཚན་མོའི་དུས་སྐུ་མི་མ་ཡིན་གྱི་མཚོད་པ་འབུལ་བ་ཡིན་ཉ། ལྷ་དང་། ལྷ་དང་། གཞོན་སྐྱིན་དང་། སི་ཟ་
 དང་། མི་འམ་ཅི་དང་། སྐོན་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པས་མཚོད་པ་རྒྱ་ཚོན་པོ་བྱེད་[96]པ་ཡིན་པས་། དེའི་དུས་སྐུ་ཏུ་མོ་ལྟ་
 ཅོ་ཚོན་པོ་གཤམ་ནས་ནང་པར་མི་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ལྷས་པས་། སྐོན་པོ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཚེབ་གདོང་པ་ལ་མཐོ་བཏུ་རྒྱལ་ཡོད་པ་། ཉ་གི་
 ནས་ཐམས་ཅད་འཛིགས་སྐུག་ཅིང་ཡོད་པ་ལས་། དེའི་དུས་སྐུ་སྐྱེ་མ་མར་པས་སྐོན་རྩེ་པ་ལ་དས་བསྐོན་པའི་ཏུས་

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པའམ་གདམས་དག་གི་རྩལ་ལམ་ཅི་འདུག་ལྟའི། བདག་གི་སྤང་པོ་འདི་གཉེར་བགྱིས་། ཅེས་སྟེན་རྒྱ་པ་ལ་གདམས་
 རྟེ་ སྟེན་པོའི་རོ་ལ་གྲོང་དུ་འཇུག་པ་མཛད་ནས་རིག་གུ་ཐག་རིང་པ་། ཉ་དུ་སྐྱུ་ལོ། དེར་ལ་ལ་ན་རེ་རོ་ལངས་ནས་
 དསོང་།⁸¹⁵ཟེར་ ལ་ལ་ན་རེ་། གིས་གྲོང་འཇུག་བྱས་ནས་སྐྱུ་ལ་ན་ཡིན་ཟེར་ཉི་ཐམས་ཅད་རིན་དུ་བཟོ་འདོ།

དེ་ནས་སྐྱ་མ་རྣམས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་ཕྱི་ཕྱག་རྩལ་⁸¹⁶ནས་ནང་གི་ཐ་མ་ལྟོ་དུག་མཚོའའཁོལ་མའི་གྲིང་ཉ་ལ་པར་པ་
 ཐང་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དེ་ན་ དཔལ་ཞི་བ་བཟང་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དེ་ལ་ཕྱག་སྐྱེལ་དུ་བྱོན་པས་། དེའི་དུས་སུ་སྐྱ་མ་མིག་
 གི་འབྲས་བུ་འམ་། མཚེད་གོགས་སྟིང་དང་འདྲ་བ་རྣམས་ཤུལ་དུ་ལུས་པ་ནི་མ་བས་ཀྱང་འཕྲེང་། གནས་
 པོ་དང་གོགས་པོ་འམ་ལ་མཚན་ལྷན་གྱི་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་མ་བྱ་བས་ལྟ་བུ་⁸¹⁷རྣམས་ལུས་པ་ནི་ཡིད་ལ་ཤིན་ཏུ་བཅགས་མཚོའ་
 དུག་མཚོའའཁོལ་མའམ་། མི་ཀུན་གྱི་ཇག་པ་དང་། ཞེལ་མེད་ཀྱི་ཤོ་ཁམས་⁸¹⁸ལ་སོགས་པ་ལམ་ན་ཡོད་པས་ནི་ཤིན་
 ཏུ་འཛིགས་ཤིང་བཀྲག་། པ་ལ་ཉ་རི་⁸¹⁹དང་ཁ་ལ་བྱ་ལ་དང་། དཔལ་མོ་དཔལ་ཐང་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གཅེ་འབྲེང་⁸²⁰
 དང་། ལ་དང་ཐང་འཛིགས་ལ་ཆེབ་གཤེག་པ་ནི་དདུལ་ཚུབས་འཚོར་། སྐྱ་ཀ་ལ་དང་རྩན་ཏུ་པམ་དགུས་རྟོར་གདན་
 ར་དང་བཀའ་ར་འདི་གདམས་དག་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྐྱད་སྐྱ་དང་རྒྱུད་འབྲེལ་ལམ་གདམས་དག་ལ་མ་དམོངས་པར་
 མཚུན་པས་ནི་བོད་པ་ཡང་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཆེ། དུས་སོལ་གྱི་ལྷ་མོའམ་བསྐྱེ་པ་དང་འཕོ་བའམ་། རིམ་ལྡའི་[97]དམར་ཁྲིད་
 ལ་སོགས་པ་སྟན་བསྟུངས་དང་ཁྱད་ཚེས་ལ་སོགས་པའམ་། སྟོགས་རིམས་མང་པོ་མཚུན་པས་ནི་མཚན་ཡང་
 ཤིན་དུ་ཆེན་མོ་། དེའི་དུས་སུ་ལམ་མགུར་རིང་མོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞེས་པས། བྲམ་ཟེལ་སོགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་
 མཚེས་ཤོར་སྐྱད་དོ།

དེ་ནས་སྐྱ་མ་སྐྱབ་ཐོབ་ཐམས་ཅད་⁸²¹ནི་མཇལ། དབང་གདམས་དག་གྲུགས་ལ་གཉགས་། ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་
 ཕྱི་ཕྱག་རྩལ་ནས་ཟང་གིས་བོད་དུ་བྱོན་པས། ཚུབ་སྐྱ་སྐྱ་དགལ་⁸²²རྩ་ན། རིགས་དན་ཤི་ཀྱིད་⁸²³ལྷུ་ལ་ཕྱི་

⁸¹⁵ The meaning of this word is unclear. Gtsang-smyon, pp. 195-196, reads (in another context, the death of Mdo-sde): *nga ro lang min nga rang sos pa yin*. Maybe it should read *ngal sos*, “resuscitate.” I chose to amend the text to *ro lang nas song zer* in the translation.

⁸¹⁶ ཕྱི་ཕྱག་བཅོལ་

⁸¹⁷ ལྷག་པ་

⁸¹⁸ ཤོགས་

⁸¹⁹ པ་ལ་ཉ་རི་ The last letter looks like a *ri* but could also be a deformed *ti*. In the song containing this narrative (cf. Gtsang-smyon, p. 84), the place is called Palahati.

⁸²⁰ བཅའ་འབྲེང་

⁸²¹ Addition in *dbu can* under the line.

⁸²² བརྒལ་

⁸²³ སྐྱིད་

འཛུལ་བྱ་སྟེ་བྱུང་པ་ལ། སྒྲིན་ཏུ་སྒྲག་ཏི་སྐྱམ་མེ་བཅུ་སྟེ་སྐྱི་ཐོག་དུ་སྒྲོམ་ས་པས་ དེགས་དན་དེ་2 ཀྱིས་མ་མཐོང་པར་
 གཞིངས་ཀྱི་ཁར་ཡང་སྟེངས་ཡང་སྟེངས་བྱས་བཅེར་རེ་བ་ལྟས་ཡང་ལྟས་ཤིང་ལོག་ཏེ་སོང། དེར་སྐྱ་མ་སྒྲིན་ནས་
 རེ་ཆེ་སྟེ་སྐྱམ་ནས་མོས་གྲས་ཁྲུང་པར་ཅན་དུ་སྒྲིབ་སོ། དེན་ས་གླ་གླ་སུའི་འགམ་པ་ལི་པ་བྱ་ཅེས་བྱ་བ་དེར་དོལ་བས་
 བྱ་མོ་ཉ་ཤིང་ཐོག་བསྐྱེད་འདུག་པ་ལ་སྐྱ་མས་ཤིང་ཐོག་སྐྱངས་པས་བྱ་མོ་དེན་རེ་ འམ་ལ་སྟོངས་བེར་ནས་མ་
 སྒྲུན་པས་ འམ་དེན་རྒྱལ་འབྲོར་མ་ཉ་འདུག་པ་ལ་རྒྱལ་འབྲོར་མ་དེས་འབེབས་པའི་ལྟ་སྟངས་ཉ་མཛོད་པས་ཤིང་
 ཐོག་རྒྱས་ས་ས་ལ་སུལ་ནས་བྱུང་ཏེ་ རྒྱུམ་འབྲུམ་དང་ ཀྱ་ཤུལ་མོགས་པ་རྒྱལ་པ་སྐྱ་ཚོགས་པ་འདུག་པ་སྒྲ་མས་
 གསེལ་ཏེ། ཉ་གི་ནང་ན་ཅི་འདུག་ལྟ་སྟེ་སྟེ་ལུ་ལྷོ་ནས་ལྷོ་སུལ་པས་ བདུད་རྩེ་འོད་ཀྱི་ལྷགས་སྐྱ་བདད་ག་མེད་མའི་
 ལྟ་མོ་བཙོ་བཙོའི་ཞལ་ཤིང་ཐོག་གི་ནང་དུ་མཛོད་སུམ་གཟེགས་སོ། བྱུང་མེད་མ་སྐྱོང་དུ་ནི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མར་འདུག་
 གསུང། དེན་ས་བལ་ཡུལ་འཕྲེལ་དུ་སྟེབ་པས་དུར་ཁྲོད་ར་མ་འདོལ་བྱ་བ་དེན་རྒྱལ་འབྲོར་པ་ཚན་ཚོགས་འཁོར་
 བྱུང་ཅིང་འདུག་ནས་ དེར་སྐྱ་མ་ས་ཀྱང་བྱོར་པས་རྒྱལ་འབྲོར་པ་དེ་རྒྱམས་ན་རེ་ཚོགས་འགྲོགས་པར་གྱིས། དེན་ས་
 མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་འོང་རྩེར་ཅིང་འདུག་པས་ སྐྱ་མ་ལོ་རྣམས་འདེམ་བྱས་ན་བོད་མ་ལ་རྒྱལ་འབྲོར་པ་རྒྱམས་ལ་ཁྲེལ་ཏེ་
 འདྲི་འདྲ་བའི་རྒྱལ་འབྲོར་པ་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་ལ་འཛོམས་ མཁའ་འགྲོ་མས་ནི་བྱིན་རྒྱབས་དངོས་གྲུབ་[98]གཏིར་
 བ་ཡིན་པ་ལ་འདྲི་རྒྱམས་འཛོམས་ཞིང་འདུག། ཡང་སྐྱ་མ་བྱ་བ་མ་ཞོར་བའི་སྐྱ་མ་དང་འཕྲད་ནས་འདུག་སྟེ་ས་པ་སྐྱུས་
 ལས་ སྐྱར་ལོག་ནས་རྒྱ་གར་རང་དུ་འགྲོ་སྟེ་ས་པ་བྱུང་པས་ ལམ་ཐོར་ངས་རྒྱལ་དུ་བྱུམ་⁸²⁴སོང་བས་ ཤིང་ལོ་
 གོན་པའི་བྱུང་མེད་ཉ་སྐས་སུ་འོངས་སྟེ། དུག་གསུམ་པ་སྐྱིའི་ཐོག་དུ་བཞག་ནས་ཁྲོད་རྒྱ་གར་དུ་མ་ལྟོག་པར་བོད་དུ་
 སོང་ཉ་ལུང་ཁ་བ་ཅན་དུ་མ་བྱིན་གྱི་བར་དུ་⁸²⁵བར་ཆད་མི་འབྱུང་གི་ཟེར་ཏེ་ དེན་གསུལ་བྱ་སྟོད་ལྷན་ཉ་ཡོད་ཀྱི་
 གསུང་ནས་ལུང་སྟན་པ་དང་བྱིན་རྒྱབས་མཛོད་དོ། དེན་ས་བལ་ཡུལ་རིན་ཆེན་ཚུལ་གྱི་འུག་ལག་ཁང་ན་ རྗེ་དཔལ་
 སྟོན་རྒྱལ་པ་ལ་བདུད་རྩེ་འོད་ཀྱི་སྐྱབ་ཐབས་དང་ རལ་ཉ་མའི་མཛོད་རྩོགས་གསུན་ཅིང་ཡོད་པས་ལུབ་ཉ་གི་རྒྱལ་ལམ་ན་
 རྗེ་མངའ་བདག་ཚེན་པོ་མི་ཉི་པ་དེ་ཉིད་སེལ་ལ་བྱིབས་ཏེ་རྒྱུམ་མཁའ་ལ་གཤེགས་པ་མཐོང། དེར་བདུད་⁸²⁶པ་
 དང་བྱས་ནས་གསོལ་བ་གཏབ་ཏེ་མོས་གྲས་བྱས་པས་ མདུན་གྱི་ནམ་མཁའ་ལ་བྱོན་ནས་སྟེ་མེད་མཚོན་པའི་བཤའ་
 ལྟན་ ཡི་གེ་མེད་པའི་ཚོས་གསུང་ བཙོད་དུ་མེད་པའི་དོན་རྟོགས་ སྐར་མ་ཤར་བའི་ཉུམས་ཤར་བ་རྩིས་ནས་རྒྱལ་
 སང་པ་དང་ རྗེ་སྐྱམ་རྒྱན་ནས་མིག་མངའ་ལས་འབྲེལ་མ་མོད་དེ་ཅེས་ཀྱང་རྒྱ་གར་རང་དུ་ལོག་ལ་འགྲོ་སྟེ་ས་ལས་
 ཡོད་པས་ དེའི་ཕྱི་དེ་སྐྱམ་ལ་གསོལ་བ་གཏབ་པའི་མཚོད་པ་རྒྱུང་ཉ་མཛོད་པའི་ཚོགས་གྲུལ་དུ་མཚུམ་བཤའ་
 པའི་མཁའ་རྗེ་སྟོན་རྒྱལ་བ་ལ་བཞེས་པའོ། དེན་ས་ཡར་བྱོན་ཏེ་ལིང་ཤོ་གར་རིབ་བྱ་བ་དེར་སྐྱབ་རྩ་ན་ཡང་ལུབ་ཉ་གི་མཚུམ་
 མ་ལ་བྱས་ཟེའི་བྱ་མོ་2 མགོ་བོ་ལ་ཚངས་སྐྱད་ནི་བཏགས་ ལག་ན་ མེ་ཏོག་གི་འཕྲོང་པ་ཐོགས་ཏེ་རིགས་བྱེད་འདོན་

824 ཐོས་
 825 Syllable erased, probably by the scribe.
 826 འདུད་

གྲིན་འོངས་ནས། ལྷོ་ཕྱོགས་དཔལ་གྱི་རིལ་དཔལ་རིམ་འོད་དབང་ལྷག་ལ་ཚེས་ཉམ་དུ་འདོད་ཟེར་། དེར་ངས་ལམ་
 མི་བསྐྱོད་ཅེས་བྱས་པས་། དེའི་སྐྱབས་བསྐྱེད་མི་དགོས་པར་མིང་པོ་ཁྱོད་དེད་ཚོ་གྲིས་སྐྱལ་ཞེས་ཟེར་ནས་། བུད་མེད་
 ཨ་གྲིས་མ་དོའ་ལི་ལ་ [99] བཏེག་ནས་ལྷོ་ཕྱོགས་དཔལ་གྱི་རིལ་ཕྱིན་པས་། དཔལ་རིམ་འོད་དབང་ལྷག་ཅེས་བྱ་ན་དེ
 ཉིད་ནི། ཤིང་སྐྱབས་ཤ་ལྷོ་ན་པའི་ཚལ་ན་སྐྱལ་ལ་དུར་ཁོད་ཀྱི་བརྒྱན་གྱིས་བརྒྱན་པ་། སྐྱལ་བའི་ར་བུ་རལ་པའི་ཐོར་
 ཚུགས་སྐྱོད་སྐྱབས་སྐྱེ་བོར་བཅེངས་པ་། བཅུན་མོ་⁸²⁷ ཨ་གྲིས་གཡམས་གཡོན་ནས་རྟེན་པ་པ་། གཞུགས་ཅིང་འདུག་པས་།
 དེས་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ཚེན་པོའི་དོ་སྐྱོད་མཛད་ཅིང་དབང་དང་གྲིན་ལྷབས་མཛད་པ་མཚན་མ་ལ་བྱུང་། ཕྱིས་མར་པ་མགོའ་
 ཡགས་ལ་མགུར་དུ་བཞེས་སོ། དེའི་དུས་སྐུ་མར་པ་མགོ་ཡེགས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་དེ་ཤིན་ཏུ་དམ་ཚིག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་། ཁོང་
 གི་བསམ་པ་ལ་འདི་སྐྱེ་མ་དེད་རུང་ཡང་མི་འབྱོན་པ་རྒྱ་གར་དུ་གོངས་སམ་མ་གོངས་པར་འབྱོན་གྱི་ཡོད་དམ་སྐྱམ་སྐྱེ་
 སྐུ་ཏུ་བྱོན་པའང་། རོང་བུ་ཏུ་སྐྱབས་ནས་འབྱུང་། དེ་ནས་དེ་བཞིན་འཐོན་ཏེ་བོད་ཏུ་བྱོན་པ་དང་། གཏོང་དང་
 ལྷོ་ག་སྐྱེ་སྐྱོན་པ་འབྱུང་རྒྱལ་ཅན་དུ་སྐྱེ་བ་དང་ཚོགས་གཡལ་དུ་ དཔལ་རིམ་འོད་པ་དང་མཇལ་བའི་མིས་ལྷམ་མགུར་
 དུ་བཞེས་པའོ། དེ་ནས་ཉམ་རོར་ཕྱིན་ནས་སྤོངས་⁸²⁸ ཀྱི་འཁར་ཀོངས་དཀར་པོ་བྱ་བ་ན་ མར་པ་མགོ་ཡེགས་
 ཀྱི་མེས་པོ་ཕྱག་པོ་། ཡོད་པས་དེས་ཚེས་ག་རྩུགས་སོ། དེའི་དུས་སྐུ་སྐོབ་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་དེས་རྒྱ་གར་དུ་བྱོན་པ་
 ལ་སྐྱེ་མ་དང་ཇི་ལྟར་དུ་མཇལ། དེས་གདམས་དག་ལ་སྐྱེད་དམ་ཁྱེད་པར་ཅི་བྱུང་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཟེངས་གིས་དེས་
 པས་། དེའི་དུས་སྐུ་དཔལ་རྣམ་པ་དང་མཇལ་ལུགས་དང་གདམས་དག་ལུས་ལུགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་མགུར་དུ་བཞེས་
 པའོ། དེ་ནས་ཡུལ་དུ་བྱང་གིས་བྱོན་ནས་ཕྱི་ཕྱི་ལས་སྐྱལ་བསོད་ས་སྐྱེས་པར་བཞུགས་སོ། དེའི་དུས་སྐུ་ཁབས་། ཀྱང་
 བཞེས་སྐྱེ་སྐྱེས་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་མཛད་པའོ། དེ་ནས་ཕྱིས་རྫོག་གཞུང་པ་དང་། མེས་ཚོན་པོ་དང་། མཚུར་དབང་དེ་
 ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྐོབ་མ་དུ་བྱུང་ཚེ་ཡང་མང་དུ་བྱོན་ནས། སྐྱལ་བསོད་ཇི་ཚེར་སོང་པ་ལས་རང་ཉེ་མཛད་སྐྱོད་ཐམས་ཅད་
 ཐམས་པ་པར་མ་ཉམས་སྐུ་ཡི་མི་ལེན་ [100] པ་ ཡན་དུ་བཞུགས་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་སྐྱེས་པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་པར་བཞུགས་པའོ།
 གཞན་གྱི་ལྷ་རྒྱུ་ལ་རེ་བུ་བའམ་ཕྱགས་ལ་བདེག་ཐོགས་པ་རིན་ཚེད་འཇུགས་པ་ཡིན་སྟེ། དེར་མི་རྣམས་ཐམས་
 ཅད་འཆའ་ཞིང་མོས་པ་རྩམ་ཡང་ཆེར་མེད་པ་ལ་དུས་། གི་ཚོ་ལྷོ་ལ་ཡག་དུ་བ་རེད་སྟོན་གཟིའ་བྱ་བ་དེ་ཚོས་འཇུགས་
 ལས་སྐྱེ་མ་གདན་དུངས་སྐྱོ་བྱོན་པས་། དེའི་ལམ་ན་ཞིང་པ་སྐྱེ་གྲོག་⁸²⁹ པ་། གཞུགས་པས་། དེར་སྐྱེ་མ་ན་རེད་ལ་མི་
 ཐམས་ཅད་མ་སྐོ་མས་ཟེར་ཏེ། དས་བྱུང་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སེམས་བསྐོ་མས་མ་སྐོ་མས་འདི་ལ་ལྷོ་ས་གསུང་སྐྱེ་ རོ་། གྲོག་
 པའི་འོག་ན་གོག་མ་ཟད་མི་ཤེས་པ་འདུག་པ་ལ་ སྐྱེ་མས་ཕྱག་གི་ཁྱོར་བ་གཟེད་པ་དང་ཕྱག་གི་ནང་དུ་གོག་མ་
 རྣམས་རུག་བྱུང་པ་ཡིན་སྟེ།

⁸²⁷ The syllable མོ is added above the text (at the level of བཅུན) with a cross. There is no cross in the body of the text; it is therefore likely that it should be added here.

⁸²⁸ རོང་

⁸²⁹ ཕྱོགས་ to plough.

གྲོང་དུ་འཇུག་པ་ནི་བོད་དུ་ལན་ལྔ་། རྒྱ་གར་དུ་ཉ་ལ་མཛད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། དེ་ལ་བོད་དུ་ལྔ་ཇི་ལྟར་མཛད་ན་ དུས་ཉ་གི་
 ཚོ་སྐྱེ་མ་ཡབ་སྲས་ཉ་ཀྱིས་ལུང་པའི་སྤྱན་ལྷུང་པ་གཏན་ནས་ཡོད་པས་དེར་གཡལ་གྱི་མིད་ནས་ལྷུང་པ་རྩེན་གྱིན་པས་
 ལྷུང་པའི་རབར་སྐྱེབ་པ་དང་གཡལ་གྱི་ནས་མེད་ དེར་སྲས་པོས་ཁུར་བ་ནི་མེད་ལྷུང་པ་རྩེན་གྱི་མི་ཕན་སྐྱེས་ནས་
 ཡོད་པས་ ལྷེ་མའི་ཞལ་ནས་ལྷུང་རྩེས་ཉ་འཁུར་བ་ཉ་འོང་གི་གསུང། དེར་ཁོང་རང་གི་ཁུར་མེད་པས་⁸³⁰ ཡབ་
 ར་མེ་སྐྱེན་པ་འདི་གཡལ་གྱི་ཁལ་ཡང་དར་མེད་པས་གསུང། དར་⁸³¹གཡལ་གྱི་ཁལ་ཡང་རྩེན་དོན་གསལ་པ་དང་ ཡབ་
 ར་མེ་འཁམས་⁸³²མོང་དུ་འགྲོ་ཡིས་དེ་ནས་གཡལ་གྱི་འདམས་ནས་འོང་གིས་ དེ་ཙམ་ལྟོད་རང་ཁལ་ཁོལ་མོང་ཉ་
 གསུང། དར་ཉ་ན་གཡལ་གྱི་བ་དེ་ལོག་གིས་ལངས་ནས་བྱུང་སྐད་ དེར་ཁལ་སྐྱལ་ཏེ་སྐྱས་ཕྱིན་པས་ཁལ་ཡོ་
 བ་ལ་རྩེས་ཡོ་ཁལ་བྱས་ཤིང་ཕྱིན་པས། མར་འོངས་ནས་ཁྱིམ་དུ་ཕོག་པ་དང་གཡལ་གྱི། དེ་[101]ནས་སློང་ཕྱི་མོ་
 ར་རྩེ་མར་རྩལ་ཤིད་⁸³³མཛད་ནས་སྲས་པོ་ལ་ཁལ་ཡོ་བ་བྱ་བ་ལེགས་པར་འཚོས་པ་ཡིན་ རྩོ་བཅུག་ནས་ངལ་རི་
 གསལ་དག་གསུང་ནས་བྱོན།

ཡང་དུས་ཉ་གི་ཚོ་བཀའ་ལ་གསུང་པའི་ཚོས་གྲལ་དུ་ ལྷེ་མའི་གསུང་ནས་གསལ་སྤྲུགས་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གྱི་ལམ་པ་
 ཡིན་པས་དལྱུ་རང་དུ་རྟུགས་ཐོན་དགོས་ དས་དེ་རིང་ཁྱེད་ལ་ལྟ་དམོ་ཉ་སྟན་གྱི་ངའི་ཕུང་པོ་འདི་ལ་གཞོན་པ་མ་བྱེད་
 ཉ་གསུང་ནས་ ཚིལ་པའི་རོ་ཉ་ལ་གྲོང་འཇུག་མཛད་ནས་ཚིལ་པ་འཕུར་ནས་གྲོང་གསེབ་དུ་སོང་བ་ལ་ བྱིས་པ་
 མི་རུང་⁸³⁴པས་བྱེར་ཀའི་ཐོར་ཏོ་ལ་འབོབ་བཏགས་ནས་སློར་བས་འཚིལ་པ་ཁུར་ནས་ལྷུང་ཐབས་སུ་བྱུང་པ་ལ་ བྲ་
 པ་རྩམས་ཀྱིས་སྐྱས་⁸³⁵སྟེ་གོས་བཀའ་ནས་ཁྱེད་ཡོངས་པས་ དར་ཉ་ཙམ་ལྟོད་རང་བཞེངས་ནས་འཚིལ་པ་སྐྱར་
 བྱིས་ཤི་སྟེ། རྟེན་སྐྱེན་པ་ལ་ཞུགས་པས་ཚོའི་བར་ཆད་དུ་དུ་⁸³⁶སོང་གསུང།

ཡང་དུས་ཉ་གི་ཚོ་ ཚོས་གསུང་པའི་མཐུལ་རེ་མོས་བྱེད་པས་ཉིན་ཉ་གི་ཚོ་བན་རྒྱུང་ཉ་ལ་རེ་མོས་བབ་ནས་
 བཀའ་སྟེགས་ཀྱི་རྩ་བ་ཏུ་ཚོས་ཉན་ཅིང་བྱ་བ་སྐྱུངས་པས་ རས་ལ་ཕྱ་རོན་ཟར་བྱུང་པས་དེར་རྩོ་ཉ་རྒྱབ་པས་ཕྱ་རོན་
 དེ་ཤི་ནས་ དེར་བན་རྒྱུང་སྐྱུངས་ནས་ཡོད་པས་ ལྷེ་མའི་ཞལ་ནས་དེ་ཤི་ནས་འདུག་མི་འདུག་གསུང། ཤི་ནས་
 གཤམ་བྱས་པས་ངས་དེ་རེས་ཁྱེད་ལ་ལྟ་དམོ་ཉ་སྟན་གྱི་གསུང་ནས་ ཁོང་གི་རྩམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་བྱ་རོན་གྱི་རོ་ལ་བཅུག་

830 ལུར་
 831 དེར་? Although དར་ could stand for Mar-pa's son Dar-ma-mdo-sde, it seems unlikely that he would be mentioned without any other element.
 832 འཁམས་པ་? to faint.
 833 Gtsug-lag, p. 99: རྩལ་ཤས་
 834 ཏུར་ ལུར་? Don-mo-ri-pa, p. 173: ལྷུངས་
 835 Don-mo-ri-pa, p. 173: བསྐྱགས་
 836 *Ibid.*, p. 174: འགྲོ་ལ་ཁད་པར་བྱུང་གསུང་

ཉི་ལྔ་མ་ཉིད་དབུ་བཀྲུག་མོང་དོ། སྤྱལ་རོན་རྒྱབ་རྒྱབ་འཕུར་ལ་ཁད་ལ་འདུག་པས་ ཡང་དར་ཏེ་ཁོང་རང་ལ་སྲར་
 ལན་རྣམ་ཤེས་བཅུག་བཅུག་ནས་ཐང་ཆད་རྟེན་དམན་པ་ལ་རྣམ་ཤེས་བཅུག་པས་བྲལ་དག་འབར་བུང་། གསུང་
 སྲིར་ཡང་ཤོམ་གྱི་ཉེ་རྩུལ་ལ་ཡང་ཡིན། [102] གསུང་སྟེ། དེ་ཅིས་ཤེས་ན་ལ་ཆིངས་ཡོན་ཏན་འབར་བྲལ་བ་ཏེ་
 རྒྱ་གར་དུ་ལོ་ཚོསྟོབ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པས་ ཐང་ཁོབ་ཏེ་དུ་ཚོམས་རྒྱན་པས་ཀྱིགས་⁸³⁷སྟེ་ཤེས་སྟོན་བུ་⁸³⁸ཚུན་ཚོད་གཡེངས་
 རས་གསལ་དལ་ཁད་ཡོད་པས་ ཀོ་ཉིང་ལ་ཞོན་པའི་བྱད་མེད་ཏེ་འོངས་ནས་ལྷ་སྟེངས་ཏེ་བྲལ་པས་ཚོམས་རྒྱན་རྣམས་
 རེངས་སོ། དེར་བྲུགས་རྗེ་ཅན་ཞེས་བྲལ་པས་དང་སྟོ་⁸³⁹འི་ཚོའི་དུས་བྱེད་དུ་འགྲོ་བར་མཐོང་ནས་འོངས་ རྩོད་རང་
 གང་ནས་ཡོང་བེར་ བོད་ནས་འོངས་རྒྱ་གར་དུ་ལོ་ཚོསྟོབ་དུ་འགྲོ་བྲལ་པས་ དའི་མིང་པོ་ཤོམ་གྱི་ཉེ་རྩུག་ཞེས་བྲལ་
 བ་མར་པ་ལོ་ཚོ་བ་བར་སྐྱ་སྐྱལ་ནས་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་དོན་བྱེད་ཀྱིན་ཡོད་པས་དེ་ལྟར་གྱིས་རོཤས་པམ་ཟེར་ དེ་ན་བས་
 བོ་ཐོས་མུང་མ་ལྟོང་བྲལ་པས་ བྱད་མེད་དེས་དེ་ལྟོ་⁸⁴⁰དཀར་ནག་སྐར་ཉེ་འཛིགས་པ་བྱུང་ན་གཉོར་ཏེ་གསུང་ནས་གར་
 བཀྲུད་ཚམེད་དོ། དེ་ནས་ལ་ཆིངས་ཀྱི་བསམ་པ་ལ་ལོ་ན་སྐྱལ་པར་འདུག་པས་མར་པ་ལོ་ཚོ་བ་རང་ཅན་དུ་འགྲོ་བ་
 ལས་འོས་མེད་སྐྱམ་སྟེ། འོག་ནས་བྱོན་པས་གོངས་པ་དང་ལྷ་ལ་བྲུག་གསུང། དོན་ལ་སྐྱལ་པར་གདའ་འོ།

ལར་སྐྱ་མ་ལོ་རྫོང་བ་ཚེན་བོ་དེས་ ཡོ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་དང་ དཔལ་མོ་རྣམས་ལ་གསལ་བྲུགས་ཀྱི་རྗེས་སུ་
 ལྷན་པའི་གནང་པ་ཐོབ་ རྒྱའི་བུམ་པ་དང་ཤིང་ཐོག་ཁ་ཕྱེ་བའི་ནང་ནས་བྲུགས་དམ་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་ཞལ་གཟིགས་
 རང་དུ་འོད་གསལ་གྱི་རྩལ་འབྱོར་ཤིང་རྣམ་ཤེས་གོང་འཇུག་དང་འཕོ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་མཐའ་ཕྱིན་པའི་རྟོགས་དང་
 ཡོན་ཏན་སྟོན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པ་ལྟར་པར་ཅན་དུ་མ་མངའ་ཡང་ སྐས་པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་དུ་བཀྲུགས་ནས་ཐ་མལ་པ་
 རྣམས་དང་སྐར་ཚུལ་སྐྱེ་ཉེ། འདོད་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་ལྷ་དང་འཛིག་རྟེན་ཚོས་བརྒྱད་ལ་པ་རོལ་པའི་རྩལ་གྱིས་ སྟོད་
 ལྷན་གྱི་སྟོབ་མ་གང་ཟག་ལས་འགྲོ་དང་སྟོན་ལམ་དང་སྐལ་བར་ལྷན་པ་སྟེ་དང་གྱའི་དོན་མཛད་དོ། རྣམ་སྟོན་གྱི་
 ལུས་རྒྱ་ལྷུ་ལ་བའི་རྩལ་སྟོན་ནས་ མཁའ་ལ་སྟོད་པའི་ [103] འོག་མིན་གྱི་གནས་སུ་གཤེགས་སོ། ། །

རྗེ་མར་པའི་མགུར་དང་ལོ་རྒྱུས་འདི་རྣམས། ། ། རྗེ་རས་པ་དང་ སྐྱ་མ་འཕམ་ཡུལ་བ་ལྷ་ལ་ལགས་པ་གཞན་
 ལ་གནང་པ་མེད་དོ། རྗེ་བཙུན་དེ་ལྷ་ལ་ལོ་བོ་བོད་དག་བསྟེན་གྱི་རྗེ་རེ་ལོས་ ཞབས་ཀྱི་པད་མོ་ཡུན་རིང་དུ་རྟེན་
 ཅིང་བྲུགས་ཡོངས་སུ་མཉེས་པར་བྲལ་ སྐྱ་མ་དཀོན་མཚོག་ལ་མཐུལ་དང་མཚོད་པ་ལུལ། མཁའ་འགྲོ་དང་ཚོས་
 སྟོང་ལ་མཐུལ་དང་ཚོགས་མཚོད་ལུལ་ཞིང་རྩལ་བཞིན་དུ་ཞུས་ སྐྱ་མས་ཀྱང་དབྱེས་བཞིན་དུ་གནང་ལ་ལགས་པ།
 ཁོ་བོས་རང་དགར་བྲིས་པ་ཅུང་ཟད་རྩམ་ཡང་མེད། རྗེ་བཙུན་རས་པའི་ཞལ་ནས་ཀྱང་ རྒྱུད་པ་འདི་རང་གི་སོལ་
 འཛིན་ཅིང་ཉམས་སུ་ལེན་ངེས་ཀྱི་སྟོམ་ཚེན་ཏེ་གས་ལྷ་མ་མཉེགས་པ་གཞན་ལ་འཕེལ་ན་མཁའ་འགྲོའི་བཀའ་ཆད་

⁸³⁷ Ibid., p. 138: བཀྱིགས་

⁸³⁸ Ibid., p. 138: མེན་བྱ

⁸³⁹ རྩོད་

⁸⁴⁰ Don-mo-ri-pa, 138: དེཙ

འབྱུང་གསུང། ཚེས་ལ་སེར་སྐུ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ་སྐྱོད་དང་མི་ལྡན་པས་མཐོང་ན་རྩ་བའི་བུང་པ་⁸⁴¹འཕོག། དུས་དྲིང་སངས་ལྷན་གང་ཟག་ཚོ་འདྲི་སྐྱོ་སྐྱར་འདེབས་ཤིང་སྐྱོག་པ་སོགས་ཏུ་ཡངས་པས་ ཡི་གེ་ལ་ཤིན་ཏུ་དམ་པོ་བྱེད་འཚོལ་ལོ། མཉམ་པ་མེད་པ་སྐྱུལ་པའི་སྐྱུ་རྗེ་མར་པ་ལོ་རྩུ་བའི་ལོ་རྩུས་རྗེ་གས་སོ། ། ॥

མདོར་ན་ རྗེ་འབར་རབས་ལུས་སོགས་མ་ཚགས་ཚེས་ཕྱིར་དཀའ་བ་སྐྱུད། རྗེ་མས་རྗེས་བབྱུང་དབང་སྐྱུད་བདེན་པ་གཟིགས། གངས་ཅན་སྐྱོངས་འདྲིང་སྐྱོད་ལྡན་སྐྱོན་གྲོལ་འཁོད། མར་སྐྱོན་ཚེས་སྐྱོའི་ཞབས་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། ཞེས་པའམ་ རྗེ་མོན་ཚེ་པས་ རྒྱ་གར་མཁས་གྲུབ་ཏུ་མའི་བླགས་ཀྱི་སྐས་ ལྷན་རྒྱུད་གདམས་པའི་གཏེར་མཛོད་སྐྱོ་བྲག་པ་ གངས་ཅན་སྐྱོངས་ན་སྐྱོན་སེལ་སྐྱོལ་མེ་ལྟར། མར་པ་ལོ་རྩུ་བའི་ཞབས་ལ་བྲག་འཚོལ་ལོ། ཞེས་པའི་དོན་དང་འབྲུན་པར་གཞུགས་པ་ལགས་སྟེ། བུ་ལྷོ། །

form in this edition	condensed cursive form	form in this edition	condensed cursive form	form in this edition	condensed cursive form
ལྷ་གྲུབ་	ལྷབ་	མགོ་པོ་	མགོའ་	ཉེན་མོངས་	ཉོངས་
དགོན་མཚོག་	དགོག་	དངོས་ལྷབ་	དདྲབ་	མཉམ་བཞག་	མཉྱག་
དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་	དཀྱོར་	དངོས་པོ་	དདོས་	ཉིང་རེ་འཛོན་	ཉིངཉི་
དཀྱིལ་ལྷངས་	དཀྱིངས་	བཅུ་གཉིས་	བཅེུས་	རྗེན་འབྲེལ་	རྗེལ་
ལྷད་པར་	ལྷདར་	བཅུ་བདུན་	བཅུན་	ལྷ་བུ་	ལྷུ་
མཁའ་འགོ་	མཁོའ་	ཆེ་རྒྱུད་	ཆུད་	ཐམས་ཅད་	ཐྷད་
འཁོར་ལོ་	འཁོར་	ཆེན་པོ་	ཆེནོ་	བླགས་	བླ་
གང་ཟག་	གངག་	ཚོས་གསུང་	ཚོསུ་	བླགས་ཀར་	བླར་
ལྷབ་ཐོབ་	ལྷོབ་	འཇམ་དཔལ་	འཇིལ་	བླགས་རྗེ་	བླེ་
ལྷོང་ལྷེར་	ལྷོར་	རྗེ་བཅུན་	རྗེན་	བླན་མོང་	བློང་
དགེ་ཉེན་	དགེན་	འཇིག་རྗེན་	འཇིན་	ཐོར་བུ་	ཐོར་
དགེ་བཤེས་	དེགས་	ཉི་ལྷོ་	ཉི་	མཐར་བུག་	མཐུག་

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དམ་ཚིག་	དྲིག་	ལྷ་དོག་	ལྷོག་	ཞེས་ཞུས་	ཞུས་
དུར་ཚོང་	ཚོང་	བར་ཚད་	བརད་	ཞེས་གསུང་	ཞེསུ་
སྐྱུག་བསྐྱུལ་	སྐྱུལ་/བསྐྱུལ་	བུ་མོ་	ཕྱོ་	གཟུགས་	གཟུ་
དེ་བཞིན་	དེནི་	ལུང་མེད་	ལུད་	འོད་གསལ་	འོདལ་
གདམས་རག་	གདེག་	བྱང་རྒྱབ་	བྱུབ་	ཡི་གེ་	ཡིགེ་
བདུད་ཚི་	བདུད་	བྱང་སེམས་	བྱུམ་	ཡི་དམ་དགེས་	ཡིདྲིགེས་
འདུལ་བུ་	འདུལ་	བྱིན་བྱིས་	བྱི་བྱིསྐབས་	ཡིན་ཏེ་	ཡིནེ
རྩོ་རྩོ་	རྩོ་	བསྐྱབས་		ཡིན་ལོ་	ཡིན་
ནད་ཡམས་	ནཡི་	བྱིན་བསྐྱབས་	བྱིབས་	ཡི་ཤེས་	ཡིས་
རྣམ་པར་	རྣིར་	འབྲས་བུ་	འབྲས་	ཡོན་ཏན་	ཡོན་
རྣལ་འབྱོར་	རྣོར་	མ་ལུས་	ལུས་	རང་བཞིན་	རངིན་
རྣལ་ལམ་	རྣཡི་	མེ་ཏྲུག་	ལྷོྲིག་	ལ་སོགས་	ལསོགས་
སྐྱ་ཚོགས་	སྐྱོགས་	མེ་ཤོང་	མོང་	གཤིན་རྗེ་	གཤིན་
སྐྱུན་རྒྱངས་	སྐྱུངས་	མེད་	ཡ	གསང་སྐྱགས་	གསྐྱགས་
སྐྱི་ཤོར་	སྐྱིར་	མོས་བྱས་	སྐྱོས་	གསུང་	སྐྱ་
སྤུན་ཚོགས་	སྤྱོགས་	སྤོན་ལམ་	སྤོན་	མེ་ལྷོ་	མེར་
ཤོ་བྱང་	ཤོད་	ཅན་དན་	ཅོན་	ཤེམས་ཅན་	ཤོན་
ཕྱག་སྐྱེལ་	ཕྱེལ་	མཚན་ལྡན་	མཚོན་	སྤོབ་དཔོན་	སྤོན་
ཕྱག་རྒྱ་	ཕྱརྱ་	ཞིབ་པར་	ཞིབར་	བསོད་ནམས་	བསོདྲིས་
ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ཚེན་པོ་	ཕྱརྱོན་	བཞིན་	ལན་	སྐྱ་ཚོགས་	སྐྱོགས་
ཕྱག་འཚལ་པོ་	ཕྱལེ་	བཞུགས་	བཞུ་		

Appendix 2

Translation of Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's Biography of Mar-pa

[p. 83, l. 3] As for the qualities of master Mar-pa from Lho-brag, first is the place where that master was born: Chu-khyer in lower Lho-brag. In their group of five siblings he had two younger brothers. From a young age, he was a very unruly person who beat all of his neighbors' children. His parents worried that with such a temper he might well kill someone—which could cost a thousand [cattle in compensation]⁸⁴²—or else someone could come to kill him [in retaliation]. His father and mother therefore agreed that he should be sent away to a religious life and made to come back when he had matured.

At that time in La-stod, Gtsang, there was a person named 'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba who had settled in the Myu-gu-lung hermitage. As he was very renowned, the parents gave [Mar-pa] a black horse called “Lion Mouth” and a silk saddle with “nine [84] interwoven longevity [symbols]” (*tshe dgu sgril*).⁸⁴³ Mar-pa then left in search of the doctrine carrying many goods, such as a silver ladle,⁸⁴⁴ a golden [Prajñāpāramitā] in Eight Thousands Lines, and so forth.

As 'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba was sparing of words, he did not give any instructions [to Mar-pa], although the latter stayed for one year to request teachings. To receive the least teaching there was a fee, without which ['Brog-mi] would not say anything. Many Indians came to this place, so Lama [Mar-pa] also came to know the language of translators. At one point, he thought: “This master is so sparing with words and it costs an arm and a leg⁸⁴⁵ for the merest teaching! Why shouldn't I do it directly myself? The master himself managed by undergoing hardships. I know the language, so I should go to

⁸⁴² The phrase used, *sgo stong gzhal dgos*, literally means “that would weigh as much as thousand doors.” The term *sgo*, “door,” could be emended to *mgo*, “head”, referring to a head of cattle, the phrase thus referring to a fine that must be paid in the case of a serious offence and which is counted in heads of cattle, fixed amount of grains, etc.

⁸⁴³ This might refer to a piece of brocade (*za 'og*) that covers the cushion on top of the saddle, with a Chinese design of “nine interwoven longevity symbols.” See Beer 1999, pp. 358–359 (plate 159).

⁸⁴⁴ The meaning of *sha ba can* is unclear. According to Mkhan-po Chos-grags (private interview, 07/08/2010), it is the name of a type of silver ladle (*dnkul skyogs*). The ladle could also be ornamented with a deer design.

⁸⁴⁵ *sha re gri re*: this saying refers to the fact that for each piece of meat you eat, you also have the price of a knife, that is to say that it becomes very expensive. Similarly, each time one wants a transmission from 'Brog-mi, one needs an offering.

India!” One day, master ’Brog-mi said: “You offered me a horse. If you don’t like it [here], the horse is yours!” and he gave the horse back.

Then, without going back home, [Mar-pa] sold the horse for six measures of gold. He immediately⁸⁴⁶ left for Nepal.⁸⁴⁷ In the Nepal Valley there was a Catuspīṭha scholar, the Newar Spyi-ther-pa. [Mar-pa] requested that he give him the Vajracatuspīṭha, as well as the protector Goddess Dhūmāṅgārī. He completely received the instructions on transference (*’pho ba*), entering another’s body (*grong ’jug*), and so forth. At the time, Newar scholars who had returned from India were most highly esteemed, so he decided to spend three years in the Valley⁸⁴⁸ [to study with them, while] getting accustomed to the heat before actually setting out for India; then he left directly. At that time, he met Snyos ’Byung-po from Kha-rag who was leaving to learn translation. They became close friends, and if one met a special paṇḍit, he would call [the other]; if one fell sick, [the other] friend would generously nurse him, and so on. They parted and Gnyos went towards the east while Mar-pa [85] headed west. He asked who the most famous paṇḍit was at the time, and was told that in the town of La-khye-tra in the west, there was a scholar of the father tantra Guhyasamājā called Paṇḍita Jñānagarbha. Along the way, there were unbearable poisoned waters.⁸⁴⁹ While crossing these waters, the flesh and skin would dissolve, layer after layer.⁸⁵⁰ In a small valley below a cliff, [Mar-pa] rewarded a man for showing him how to protect

⁸⁴⁶ The expression *zang gis* or *zangs gis* means “immediately.” According to Mkhan-po Chos-grags it is an old expression that is used near the Nepalese border (private interview, 07/08/2010)

⁸⁴⁷ The words *lho bal* refers to the country Nepal in a more general sense, and *bal yul* to the Nepal Valley, i.e. the actual Kathmandu valley. The term *bal po* points to the inhabitants of the valley, the Newars (See Lo Bue 1997, pp. 630–631). The term *bal* means “wool,” as the Tibetans were going to Wool-land (*bal yul*) to trade wool with Newars. Thanks to Hubert Decler for this information.

⁸⁴⁸ The term *’thil* can be emended to *mthil*, “palm,” referring to the fact that the Kathmandu Valley is “flat like the palm of one’s hand.”

⁸⁴⁹ According to Mkhan-po Chos-grags (private interview, 07/08/2010), the words *mi zan gyi dug chu* can also be understood as *mi bzad*, “unbearable poisonous water;” e.g. since this water is poisoned, it must not touch the skin: it is frightening because it is unbearably painful. In a different interview, Mkhan-po Chos-grags said that this term described the hot, wet fog of India which is very irritating to Tibetans coming down from the high plateaux; it makes their skin peel. There is no indication that it refers to a lake or a river to be crossed; it might well refer to mists, in which case it is feasible that rubbing a medicinal leaf against the skin could prevent blisters and shedding “like of a snake.”

⁸⁵⁰ *mul gyis?* According to Mkhan-po Chos-grags (07/08/2010), this is a word from the colloquial language which means “progressively,” “little by little.”

himself: he had come from the forest bringing a leaf, which [Mar-pa] smeared on his body before leaving. In spite of this, it is said that he contracted a disease due to which his skin became like that of a snake. He then went to La-khye-tra and met Jñānagarbha. He listened to the Guhyasamāḥ and received instructions on the body of apparition and on luminosity.

On another occasion, a large number of yogins assembled to celebrate a *ganacakra*, many of them, notably, were engaged in ascetic conduct, like Ku-su-lu the Elder, [Ku-su-lu] the Younger, and others. At that time a yogin riding a jackal and another riding a rat also arrived. [Mar-pa] asked who they were, and was told they were Nāropā's disciples Kan-dha-pa and Painḍapā.⁸⁵¹ Guru Nāropā also had 108 accomplished disciples and 28 disciples engaged in ascetic conduct, among whom [Mar-pa] met Guru Lho-pa.

As for their qualities, Ku-su-lu the Elder once left his amulet beside him to wash his hair and a crow took it away; he used a yogic gaze that made the crow fall to the ground with the amulet. He was thus a yogin who had accomplished the four gazes:⁸⁵² the falling gaze and so forth. Ku-su-lu the Younger was a yogin who had mastered four out of the eight great ordinary *siddhis*: he had mastered the sword, gold, magical boots [86] and eye balm.⁸⁵³ During a ceremony, Painḍapā produced a container in which beer from the town's taverns appeared and spread a sheet (*lab ti*) on which meat and food manifested. By the power of his concentration, he summoned the

⁸⁵¹ Painḍapā's name is written Spen-dha-pa in the text. In some of Mar-pa's biographies, Painḍapā is Newar and accompanies Mar-pa to India where he introduces him to Nāropā, since he is one of his disciples. Here, Mar-pa meets him at Jñānagarbha's place in the west of India. At the end of the text, however, Mar-pa visits him again at the Rin-chen-tshul *vihara* in Nepal, and at that point it is mentioned that he is Newar.

⁸⁵² The word *lta stengs*, usually written *lta stangs*, refers to one of the powers practitioners can obtain. The *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*, p. 994, lists eight kinds of yogic gazes used to make fruits or objects fall, to control animals, etc. (an example in this text, p. 97, is the gaze of the *dākinī* which makes fruit fall to the ground). Four of these gazes make objects fall or come to one and the other four send them back to their original places.

⁸⁵³ Four of the eight ordinary *siddhis*. Kong-sprul explains them as follows (Jamgön Kongtrül 2010, p. 340): "By applying medicine to the eyes, one can see the three worlds; by applying ointment to the feet, one gains fleetness of foot; by brandishing the sword, one can fly through the air; by revealing mineral treasures or vases of wealth hidden underground, one can satisfy the desires of beings." The *Ocean of Dākas (Śrīdākārṇavamāhayoginītantrarājanāma, Dpal mkha' 'gro rgya mtsho rual 'byor ma'i rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po zhes bya ba* (D 372), Rgyud 'bum, vol. *kha*, p. 351, l. 7) lists these as follows: "The sword, eye medicine, pills, foot ointment, alchemical powers, magical boots, mercury, seeing underground." There are alternative lists (See Jamgön Kongtrül 2010, pp. 338–339).

corpses from the charnel ground to follow him, etc. As for Kan-dha-pa, he directly saw the face of his deity in the *homa*'s hearth. Such were these yogins, endowed with these and other qualities.

Master Mar-pa directly met these four and established religious links with them. Guru Painḍapā felt great affection for him. [Mar-pa] stayed there for five years, then, when his resources ran low, he went to Nepal where he met people who provided him with supplies. He returned [to India] and went to serve, etc., each of his gurus, one after the other. As Jñānagarbha and Painḍapā had been particularly kind, he offered them each a maṇḍala of one measure of gold. Painḍapā was very pleased and thought that as [Mar-pa] had kept his *samaya*, he should now meet the Guru Nāropā. Painḍapā took him to Pu-la-ha-ri, where he met Nāropā.

At that time, the glorious Nāropā gave him an empowerment. He manifested the nine deities of Hevajra in the space in front of him, then asked: “Do you request the empowerment from me or from the deity?” Mar-pa thought that receiving directly an empowerment from the deity was wonderful indeed and answered that he would request the empowerment from the deity and prayed that the guru himself would accept to [give] him the instructions. The guru then dissolved the deities into his heart and said:

“The root of blessing is the guru. As you chose the deity over the guru, the religious lineage of your family will not be of benefit!”

He then agreed to give him the empowerment and instructions of Hevajra, and so forth. [87] Then [Mar-pa] went towards the east along the banks of the river Ganges and reached the Capturing the Luster of Flower hermitage.⁸⁵⁴ He received the empowerment of the glorious Hevajra, the *Melodious Praise* (*bstod pa glur blang*), and the Mahāmudrā which establishes mind's true nature, etc., directly from the great noble lord Maitrīpā.

He also heard that in the boiling, noxious lake of Ha-la-par-ta there was a scholar of the *Mahāmāyā-yoginītantra* called Śāntibhadra, so he went there. At noon it was twilight. When faced with pain, he generated a perfect state of mind and prayed with determination; at the risk of his body and his life, he looked for the Venerable, day and night. When he finally met the glorious Śāntibhadra, the latter asked:

“Did you not meet any messengers?”

⁸⁵⁴ *Me tog mdangs 'phrog*. This place, Puṣpahari in Sanskrit, generally refers to Nāropā's hermitage. In the song on which this part is based, however, it refers to Maitrīpā's place (see above, p. 20, n. 12).

“I met a tiger and other [animals], but I didn't cross anything else.”

“It was they, the tiger and the others, who served as messengers!”

Mar-pa bowed, served and honoured him, and so on. He listened to the integral *Mahāmāyā-yoginītantra* and to all of the instructions on the Triad of Illusions.⁸⁵⁵

While returning to Tibet, he passed through Bodhgayā during a festival and met his old friend Snyos 'Byung-po. They had a discussion and were asking each other questions. Gnyos⁸⁵⁶ said:

“I met guru Balyācārya. [88] Regarding the great qualities of that master, while he was leaning against a tree, he asked for a beer and the tree goddess held a beer out to him: he is a true siddha! If you wonder which teachings I received from him, there are four: the *Mañjuśrīyamāntakatantra*, Hevajra, the Nāmasaṅgīti, and Guhyasamāja.”

Gnyos knew four tantras. At that time, each trusted the other's gurus and teachings and did not question them. Next they left together and had detailed discussions on how to retain the continuity of patience on the path (*lam du bzod rgyud gyi 'ching lugs*),⁸⁵⁷ and so forth. Among other things, Mar-pa thought that by explaining the title, people of higher faculties would understand; that for those of middling capacity an introduction would be ideal; and that to mature individuals of lower capacity who had not yet matured spiritually, there were the stages of the path of creation and perfection. Gnyos had some doubts and asked:

“Where does your guru live? Tell me his name!”

“My guru is called the One who Points to the Path to Liberation. Go and seek him out!”

Gnyos dashed east and west through India like rain, but did not find him. When he came back, Master Mar-pa Lo-tsā-ba had spent seven years

⁸⁵⁵ See Jamgön Kongtrül 2008, pp. 390–391, n. 39, on this Triad of Illusions, which is a practice of the completion phase of the *Mahāmāyātantra*. Note that the term is generally written *sgyu ma sum brgyud* but is referred to as *sgyu ma 3 rgyud* here.

⁸⁵⁶ The fluctuating spelling of the text is maintained.

⁸⁵⁷ According to Mkhan-po Chos-grags (private interview, 07/08/2010), this phrase describes how to practice the creation and perfection phases while maintaining the essential points of the *nāḍīs* and *prāṇas* when one reaches the “patience” level of the path of unification.

[in India for a total of] twelve years including the previous time. He had met with accomplished gurus who had nurtured him with empowerments and instructions. Together with Gnyos, he left India and quickly proceeded to Tibet. When he arrived in the Nepal Valley, he met Jo-sras Rdo-rje, the son of his former lama, 'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba, who was going to learn translation. [Mar-pa] spoke to him with respect and asked him for news. [Jo-sras] answered that the lama was well, that his mother had died but that [his father] was very successful.⁸⁵⁸ [89] Then Jo-sras questioned him in detail; he had heard of his fame as a translator and scholar, and asked him what he had seen in India. Thus [Mar-pa] sang the Song of Marvelous Sights,⁸⁵⁹ which is written elsewhere.

Gnyos Lo-tsā-ba and [Mar-pa] had then reached equal fame in terms of scholarship and the rest. When they arrived at the Nepal-Tibet border, Gnyos seemed outwardly to have the greatest fortune. When they then reached the four parts of the La-stod, they were equally famous for translation and instructions. On the way, they went to pay their tribute to Dge-bshes 'Brog-mi. They were told at the time that the *dge bshes* was in Stag-stog, where he had been invited. At the place of the celebration, each of the three translators sat on distinct rows, and Dge-bshes 'Brog-mi was stricken with remorse. It is said that he thought with regret that if he had conferred empowerments and granted instructions in the first place, they would [now] be assembled under his authority.

Then [Mar-pa] left together with Gnyos. When they reached Dbus-gsang, the heart of Tibet, all the glory went to Mar-pa because of the instructions he held. At this reverse of fortune, Gnyos became jealous. While the two were crossing Lake Rnub-bal-cha, in a fit of pique he threw Mar-pa's books into the water, so that none were left. Mar-pa said:

⁸⁵⁸ *Sku gsod (bsod) shin tu che*: he had great merit, i.e. great success in terms of disciples, fame, etc.

⁸⁵⁹ No song with such a name can be found in Mar-pa's *mgur 'bum* (MK25) or in the biographies containing all songs. There are two songs with similar titles which contain the words *ngo mtshar can gyi mthong [lugs]* instead of *mthong brtags* (or *mthong rtags* in Don-mo-ri-pa's version). These songs belong to the last journey to Nepal; the first sums up the quest for Nāropā during the third journey and the second conveys Maitripā's teaching. It is likely that the song mentioned here is another one, which Ngam-rdzong ston-pa used to describe Mar-pa's encounters with his various masters. In Gtsang-smyon and Dpa'-bo II's versions, Mar-pa sings it to his Tibetan disciples (Rngog, Mtshur and Ba-rang lba-ba-can) who are asking him about his travels to India (Gtsug-lag, p. 30: *rgya gar na bla ma du bzhugs ngo mtshar can du mchis chos ci zhus/ phar tshur ji ltar byon zhus pas gsungs stem thar mgur du gsungs pa*, Gtsang-smyon, p. 60, Tsangnyön 1982, p. 53).

“At present, my gurus, Nāropā and others, have not yet left their bodies and are still around. I can therefore think about looking for gold and then go!”

At that time, he approached a gold mine that had been opened at Ngam-ra, in the north. A man from 'Phen-yul called Mar-pa Mgo-legs requested teachings and empowerments from him. Keeping a couple of measures of gold, [Mgo-legs] offered the rest [to Mar-pa], supplicating him with forty measures of gold, as well as clothes, armor, and so forth. Others also produced a lot of offerings, so that [Mar-pa] acquired sixty measures of gold.

Mar-pa left again for India and made offerings to his gurus, the Newar lord and others, one after the other. [90] Then he was told that Nāropā had entered the practice and was not present [any more]. Next he went to the city of La-khye-tra and asked where Jñānagarbha was; [he was told that] he dwelled in the forest together with a low-caste woman. That low-caste woman entered her home and came back carrying a bucket. She told him to bathe with a third of the water and drink another third. She collected the [bath] water in the drain and poured it into the water-bucket; it became white *bodhicitta*. The woman then crossed her legs over the bucket rim and a stream of *rakta* fell from her secret place: white and red *bodhicitta* merged into one. She cleansed [Mar-pa] with it, and all his mental fabrications vanished. He poured some in his mouth and then looked in the bucket: he had a dazzling vision of all the deities of the glorious Guhyasamājā maṇḍala. After that, the illustrious Jñānagarbha arrived, blessed him, and asked:

“Have you freed yourself from the bonds of afflictions? Have you perfectly trained your mind? Have you integrated the meaning of suchness?”

He introduced him to the four empowerments and granted him at that time all instructions on the illusory body, luminosity, and so forth. [Mar-pa] then left for the south, to the island in the boiling, noxious lake. While Śāntibhadra was performing a *gaṇacakra*, a woman who sat among the practitioners brought a corpse in among the assembly rows. After splitting open the skull of the corpse, she poured the *guhyaṃati* liquid of the glorious Śāntibhadra on the brain soaked in fresh blood. The blend of brain and urine was distributed as [the substance] of *samaya*. When it reached master Mar-pa, the substances were boiling. He looked inside and had a vision of the syllables of the mantra yoga of channel-wheels of the glorious Mahāmāyā.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁶⁰ See Jamgön Kongtrül 2008, p. 388, n. 35, for a description of that vision related to the Mahāmāyā perfection phase, which has four levels: the yoga of shape (the lesser), the

He generated a realization of the yoga of the mantra (the profound) [91] and integrated suchness (the ultimate). With this, he achieved an immaculate and stable seven-day *samādhi*, etc. At that time, he trained his understanding with the three yogas and obtained instructions on the Triad of Illusions.

He then left towards the east of India and was led by *ḍākinīs*, he said. At that time, the great lord Maitrīpā was staying in the charnel ground of the Mountain Blazing like Fire. If one wonders what that charnel ground is like, in that ground, all the corpses snigger and emit explosive roars, and so on. There are decaying corpses, rotten ones, some which are only half burnt, and so forth. Dark green flames blaze in the ground and the smoke of those fires form clouds which cause epidemics wherever they go—this is why it is called “the charnel ground that blazes with epidemic fires.” [Mar-pa] saw the great lord sitting in that ground, under the refreshing shade of a *nyagrodha* tree. He displayed offerings that delighted the *ḍākinīs* and offered a maṇḍala that pleased the guru. He joined hands, prostrated with his body and so on, and prayed, filled with one-pointed devotion, supplicating. [Maitrīpā] conferred on him the Tantra of Melodious Praise, the *yi dam* Hevajra, as well as the ultimate Mahāmudrā, thus introducing him to his mind’s true nature. It was at this time that the glorious Advaya Avadhūtipa accepted him [as a disciple] and transmitted to him the four empowerments by the profound inner symbols. From the depths of the seeds of his fundamental aspiration, [Mar-pa] generated an immaculate and stable seven-day *samādhi*, etc. Thus he established the basis, the path, and the three *kāyas*. At that time, he had different kinds of miraculous visions, like trees which, albeit inanimate, would drift and move about, and so on. [92] Seven red jackal emanations came directly to take the *balin*. The underground, terrestrial, and celestial *ḍākinīs* were invisible, but the humming of their mantra resounded. The earth-protecting *ḍākinīs* filled the space and could be heard singing various melodies. Then the great lord made a prediction: “You will obtain the supreme accomplishments after three lives! Go back to the north, to the snowy mountain range, as there are worthy disciples there!” and he blessed him.

He then went towards the east, to Vikramaśīla.⁸⁶¹ The dwelling place of the glorious Nāropā, called “the Palace Built at the Eastern Gate,” was there. He inspected the house and was particularly amazed by [some manuscripts] on the essential points and postures of the *Hevajratantra* transmission ac-

yoga of mantra (the profound), the yoga of suchness (the ultimate), and the practice related to the Triad of Illusions (an auxiliary teaching). See *ibid.*, p. 183.

⁸⁶¹ The following passage is the narrative that corresponds with the song to Mar-pa Mgo-legs in Dpa’-bo II, p. 86, Gtsang-smyon, p. 149 (Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 137–140).

ording to Nāropā's tradition. He thought that he should search for [Nāropā], wherever he may be; he drank from the *ka[pā]li* and left to seek him out. He looked everywhere but did not find him, and ended up in a low-caste village whose chief took him into custody and placed him at the gate of the flower palace. That chief's sustained himself by stirring the *homa*'s hearth with a fan so that from the inside of the fire various foodstuffs appeared that he would scoop up with a ladle. After three days of detention, the chief let [Mar-pa] go.

As he still could not find [Nāropā], he went to find Painḍapā, who accompanied him. He embarked on his quest by bringing three white rice grains and a fish-bone (*nya gug*). One day, above a sandal tree, [Mar-pa] saw the nine deities of Hevajra in a sort of rainbow tent almost touching the tree. When he had this vision of essenceless appearance, [93] he developed extraordinary devotion. In the same way, in front of a tree there was a yoginī who had settled in meditative equipoise. At the yoginī's heart, he saw the maṇḍala of the *aṣṭā*'s mantra as it is: by looking from above, he saw the whole heart, and by looking at the yoginī from below, he saw an eight-petaled lotus. Above, the sun and moon were touching and upon them he saw the mantra wheel turn in the reverse order, like a reflection in a mirror. He bowed to her and asked where Nāropā was. The woman did not say anything but made a pointing gesture with her head. He left in the corresponding direction and on a crystal rock saw Nāropā's footprint, so intact that the slightest hair looked like woolen thread. He offered a maṇḍala in front of it and prayed with one-pointed confidence. After seven days, the glorious Nāropā himself arrived bearing a human skin, a skull-cup, and a *khatvāṅga*. He was naked, his matted hair was drawn on the top of his head, and he was adorned with the six bone ornaments. With exceedingly great joy, [Mar-pa] cried and shrieked, embraced [Nāropā] and pressed heart against heart, forehead against forehead. With both faces touching, [Mar-pa] narrated the story of his hardships and bemoaned the lord's lack of compassion. [Nāropā] answered:

“It is through this complete purification of your continuum by the maṇḍala of body, the maṇḍala of speech, and the maṇḍala of mind that I now give you my spiritual influence!”

[Mar-pa] extracted seventeen measures of gold from a hidden pouch and offered them. As [Nāropā] would not receive them, [Mar-pa] insisted and begged him to accept. [Nāropā] took them in his hand, said that [Mar-pa] should perform the Guru Yoga, [94] and placed a pinch on his head. Saying “offerings to the guru and the three jewels!” he scattered the rest in space. Internally, master Mar-pa recalled with dread how many hardships he had undergone to get them, and what still had to be accumulated in order to make offerings at the special places, or *ganacakras* and offerings to his other

masters and *dākinīs*. The guru saw his thoughts and said: “If you wish, you can have it back!” He then entered a *samādhi*, and a pinch of gold became the two handfuls [that Mar-pa had offered], without any loss. “If you wish for more, for me all this is gold!” He trod upon a brick that was there, and the brick turned to gold. At that point [Mar-pa] generated extraordinary confidence and aspiration. Nāropā said:

“Perform a *gaṇacakra*!”

“I have nothing other than this fishbone with which I came!”

“Cut it into sixty pieces and place them on a cloth, covered by a leaf!”

This is what he did, and with Nāropā’s blessing, all kinds of food and drink appeared: meat, rice, curd, all sorts of vegetables, sugarcane, bread, and various drinks like beer, etc. They made a *gaṇacakra* with all the food and drink that had manifested. [Nāropā] gave him the mind empowerment and taught him the Dharma. He condensed the meaning into fewer words than when he was a paṇḍit, giving [Mar-pa] all instructions without exception, and particularly the ultimate instructions on the Karmamudrā and Caṇḍali. He introduced him to the essential points of the Aural Transmission. [Mar-pa] thought that he had purified by not having previously met the guru. Now that he saw his face directly and that the two of them, the siddha and himself, had met, [95] he would not go back to Tibet, but would rather stay at the feet of the guru and practice. This appeared in the mind of the glorious Nāropā, who said:

“Do not stay here now, go to Tibet! Four accomplished yogins and paṇḍits have imparted their spiritual influence: Ācārya Kṛṣṇācārya blessed the lineage of the east. In the same way, Ācārya Aryā Nāgārjuna blessed the lineage of the south, King Indrabhūti blessed the lineage of the west, and I blessed those countries lying to the north, the snowy places! Do not stay here! Go back home! In the snowy north, there are worthy disciples!”

At this point, there are two traditions. In that of Dge-bshes Gzhung-pa [Rngog Chos-rdor], after the above narrative, [Nāropā] entered the practice. [Rngog] says that Mar-pa wanted to request the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* the following morning, but as [Nāropā] had already entered the practice, this did not take place. Others say that even though he heard the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, [Mar-pa’s] son died before he could transmit it to him and so it did not spread.

Thus, there were thirteen gurus, led by Simhadvīpa, with whom Mar-pa established religious links. They all gave him their blessings and instructions.

There were two unrivaled lords, Nāropā and Maitrīpā, and among them one was like an offering tree with no equal: the Guru Nāro *Mahāpaṇḍita*.

On the way back, [Mar-pa] reached Bodhgayā during an assembly for a festival. In such times, humans would make offerings during the day, and non-humans during the night. One evening, while gods, nagas, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *kinnaras*, *rākṣasas*, etc. were performing vast offerings, [96] there was a great clamor. In the morning, men looked and saw the corpse of a huge *rākṣasa* with a sixteen-span face. Everyone panicked. Then Master Mar-pa gave these instructions to Paiṇḍapā:

“Look at my meditation abilities and power of my instructions!
Guard my body!”

He then entered the corpse of the *rākṣasa* and took it to a faraway rocky mountain. Some said that the corpse stood up and left, others that someone had entered its body and transported it. Everyone was grateful.

Then, [Mar-pa] made farewell prostrations to all his masters, finally paying respects to the glorious Śāntibhadra by the banks of the boiling noxious lake in the south, at Ha-la-par-pha-thang. He left behind his gurus, who were like his eyes, and his vajra siblings, who were like his heart, longing for them more than for his own mother. He lamented having to leave behind his hosts, his friends, and his authentic *mudrā* who were closer to him than his own children. As there was boiling noxious lakes, kidnappers, shameless customs [officers], etc., on the way, he was very anxious. The terrifying crossing of abysses, passes, and plains like Pa-la-ha-ti, Kha-la Bya-la, and Dpal-mo-dpal-thang made him quiver more than quicksilver. He felt very proud since he perfectly knew several languages, such as the grammars of Kalāpa and Chandra, tantras and commentaries such as Hevajra and Catuspīṭha, instructions such as those of the four precepts, etc. He marveled at his knowledge of protectors of the teachings such as the Goddess Dhūmāṅgārī, of special teachings such as entering another's body and transference, etc. [97] as well as of many phases of perfection such as the unembellished instructions of the Pañcakrama, etc. It was at that time that he sang the Long Song of the Journey,⁸⁶² and it is said that brahmins and all others freely shed tears.

Next, having met all these accomplished gurus, filled his heart with their empowerments and instructions, and paid respects to all of them, he quickly proceeded to Tibet. While crossing the river Ganges, two pariahs ready to die appeared from the depths of the water. He was very afraid and meditated that the venerable guru was above his head. The two outcasts did not see

⁸⁶² This song is among the eight great songs and all events related here in short are mentioned in it. See translation in Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 102–106.

him; at the port, they searched everywhere, looking attentively, and then left. Thinking how great the kindness of his guru was, he developed extraordinary devotion.

He then reached the bank of the Ganges, at a place called Pa-li-pa-tra. There was a girl watching over her orchard. The lama took a fruit and the girl said she would tell her mother that he was helping himself and called her. The mother was a yoginī. She conjured the falling gaze and all the fruit fell to the ground. There were many kinds—grapes, apples, etc.—and the lama enjoyed them. He thought about checking what was inside one of them, opened it and looked: he had a direct vision, in the fruit, of the fifteen deities of Nairātmyā according to Amṛtaprabha’s tradition. He said that the two women, mother and daughter, were *dākinīs*.

After that, when he reached the Nepal Valley, there was a group of yogins performing a *gaṇacakra* at the Ramadoli charnel ground. The lama joined them and the yogins said that they were hurrying to finish the accumulation because *dākinīs* would be arriving. The master-translator thought that these yogins were ridiculous; what kind of yogins would avoid *dākinīs*? *Dākinīs* were the ones who bestowed spiritual influence and accomplishments, [98] yet some actually shunned them! Suddenly recalling that one could become a guru only if one had met an unmistakable guru, he thought about turning around and returning to India. The next morning at dawn, while he was dreaming, a leaf-clad woman came to his pillow. She placed her right hand on top of his head and said:

“Do not return to India but go to Tibet! There will be no obstacles before you reach the land of snows!”

She predicted that there would be a worthy disciple there and gave him her blessing. Then, while he was at the Rin-chen-tshul Temple in the Nepal Valley, he received the *sādhana* of Amṛtaprabha and the clear realization (*mngon rtogs*) of Ekajaṭi from the glorious lord Painḍapā. One night, he had a dream where he saw the great lord Maitrīpā riding a lion and crossing the sky. [Mar-pa] bowed to him and prayed with devotion. [Maitrīpā] came forward in the sky in front of him and made the gesture that points to birthlessness, taught a Dharma without letters, and [Mar-pa] realized the ineffable meaning. In his dream he had an experience that had never arisen before, then he woke up. Remembering the guru, he thought that he could not take his eyes off the lord and that he should definitely go back to India. After that, he made a small offering to pray the guru and, during a *gaṇacakra*, composed for Painḍapā the song that shows the signs.⁸⁶³

⁸⁶³ This corresponds to the song called *mshan ltas zlos pa'i mgur*, the “song that relates

Then he left. One night he reached Ling-sho-gar-ri and two brahmin girls appeared in his dream; a brahmin cord was tied around their heads, they were carrying flower garlands in their hands and reciting the Vedas.

“Go to Śrīparvata in the south to receive the teaching of the glorious Śavari!”

“But I cannot make that journey!”

“You need not make an effort, brother, we will escort you there!”

The two women carried him in a palanquin [99] until they reached Śrīparvata in the south. The glorious Śavari was in a forest of *laksha* (*glag sha*) trees, naked and adorned with the charnel ornaments; his matted hair was gathered in a bun on the top of his head and he was leaning on the two consorts at his sides. He introduced him to the Mahāmudrā and gave him empowerments and blessings; [Mar-pa] had signs [of success]. Later, he told this to Mar-pa Mgo'-yags in a song.

At the same time, the one called Mar-pa Mgo-legs, who was very committed to [Mar-pa] (*dam tshig pa*) thought: “My Lama has still not arrived. I wonder whether he has died in India or, if not, whether he is coming!” He went to welcome [Mar-pa] and met him when he reached Rong-bu, then they left and proceeded to Tibet. They went to Lo-skya-ston-pa 'Byung-rgyal's place in Gtsang. During the *ganacakra*, [Mar-pa] sang the *doha* about the visionary dream of his meeting with Śavari.

Next they went to Nyang-ro, to the Kongs-dkar-po fortress (*sdzongs kyi 'khar kongs dkar po*), where Mar-pa Mgo-legs's wealthy grandfather lived and had founded a religious institute. At that time, [Mar-pa's] disciples eagerly asked him how he had met the guru during his travels to India, if he had obtained instructions, what special practices he had received, etc. He then sang the song of how he had met Nāropā and received instructions, etc.⁸⁶⁴

the interpretation of signs” in Gtsang-smyon (Tsangnyön 1982, p. 123) or Dpa'-bo II (p. 81). It is a song in three parts which, according to Gtsang-smyon, was transmitted in Tibet only to Mi-la-ras-pa and Mgo-legs, who themselves gave it to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa Byang-chub-rgyal-po. It symbolically describes the Mahāmudrā as Maitrīpā taught it to Mar-pa in a dream. The first part sums up the events of the last return from India, from the Ganges crossing until the dream about Maitrīpā, as they are told here by Bodhirāja. The second part is Painḍapā's praise of Mar-pa and his instructions on how to relate to the guru. In the last, Mar-pa describes the realization he achieved in his dream.

⁸⁶⁴ It is difficult to identify this song as there are three (two of which are counted among the eight great songs) which narrate the quest and meeting with Nāropā during the last journey. The three versions differ, and only one, called *bla ma dang mjal tshul ngo mtsbar ltas brgyad kyi mgur* by Gtsang-smyon (Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 108–111, Gtsang-smyon, p. 120) relates all the events narrated by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa, pp. 92–95. This song is

Then he quickly proceeded to his valley but did not establish his power until much later. It was at that time that he married and had children. Later, many important disciples arrived, for example Rngog Gzhung-pa, Mes Mtshon-po, Mtshur Dbang-nge, and others, and his fortune increased. Even though he appeared to be ordinary in all of his activities and did not seem to practice, [100] he was actually a hidden yogi. Outwardly, he was striving (*bdeg thogs?*) for power and wealth, and people said he was establishing his worth. Everyone thought highly of him and respected him, but no more than that.⁸⁶⁵ At one point, Ba-reng ston-gzi' set up a study place in Lho-la-yag and invited the lama, who went there. On the way, there was a farmer ploughing. The lama said:

“Everyone says I do not meditate. But see whether I have cultivated *bodhicitta* or not!”

A multitude of ants was under a stone in a ploughed area. The master held the palm of his hands out, and it is said that the ants crowded into them.

He did the practice of entering another's body four times, three times in Tibet and once in India. As for how the three times took place in Tibet, one day, the master and his son led a yak to the bottom of a valley that was always green in order to cut some grass. When they reached the meadow, the yak died and they had no [means of bringing back the grass]. The son thought that if there was no way to carry the grass, it was pointless to cut it. The father told him to make hay; he would bring something to carry it. The son cut a bag and Mar-pa said:

“Fool! Carry on cutting until you have a yak's load!”

[The son] then cut a big bag, one yak's load. The father said:

“I will faint and that yak will rise up and come. When that happens, load it up!”

They say that after a while the dead yak suddenly rose. [The son] loaded it and walked in front of it. The load was lopsided, so he balanced it with a stone and carried on. They went down, reached home, and the yak died.

dedicated to Painḍapā. A shorter song (Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 119–121) is dedicated to the Ramadoli charnel ground's yogins, and the last, which Gtsang-smyon calls *mdzad spyod rdzu 'phrul yon tan ngo mtshar can gyi mgur*, “Song of miraculous behavior and marvelous qualities” (Tsangnyön 1982, p. 137, Gtsang-smyon, p. 149, Gtsug-lag, p. 86) is dedicated to Mgo-legs.

⁸⁶⁵ These two sentences are very unclear to me in the Tibetan, and this is only a tentative translation. DRNT, p. 170, repeats the words before and after these sentences but drops these two.

[101] Late that night, the lord Mar-pa came back sweating. He told his son that he had done well to balance the load, but that adding that stone had exhausted him. Another time, while he was teaching on Catuspīṭha, the lama said:

“As the secret mantra is a path of dependent origination, a sign must appear right now! I will show you something today. Do not cause any harm to my body!”

He entered the corpse of a sparrow, which flew away towards the village. An unruly child was whirling a bucket tied to a rope. It distressed the sparrow, which fell to the floor. The monks ran after it, covered it with a cloth and brought it back. After a while, [Mar-pa] stood up, the sparrow collapsed and died. He said that entering a lower vessel could be an obstacle to one's life.

Another time, as [the disciples] took turns at offering maṇḍalas during a teaching, it became a young monk's turn. He was listening to the teaching near the shrine that he was shielding from birds. He threw a stone at a pigeon that came to eat some barley and the pigeon died. The monk was ashamed, and the lama asked him whether it was dead or not. He replied that it had died, so [Mar-pa] announced that he would now show them something. He introduced his consciousness into the pigeon's corpse and his own head fell forward. The bird took off immediately and after a while, like before, [Mar-pa] re-entered his body. He was exhausted and said that when one's consciousness enters a lower support, it is difficult to get it back out.

In general, he is said to be an emanation of Ḍombiheruka. [102] How do we know this? A man called La-chings Yon-tan-'bar⁸⁶⁶ had gone to India in order to learn translation and was being held by some bandits in a wild place. They had beat him until he was wounded⁸⁶⁷ and were about to kill him. A woman riding on a leather carpet (*ko ting*) came and conjured a special gaze that paralyzed the bandits. He thanked her, and she said:

“I came when I saw that the time of your death had come. Where are you from?”

“I come from Tibet and I'm on my way to India to learn translation.”

“My brother Ḍombiheruka has emanated there under the form of Mar-pa Lo-tsa[-ba] to accomplish the welfare of beings. Do you know him?”

“I've heard of him but have not met him.”

⁸⁶⁶ See above, pp. 196–197.

⁸⁶⁷ This is unclear.

The woman gave him white and black pebbles, told him to throw them whenever something frightening happened, and disappeared dancing. Lachings thought that if this Mar-pa Lo-tsā-ba really was an emanation, he had no choice but to go see him, and he turned back. He said that the two met before [Mar-pa] died.⁸⁶⁸ In truth, [Mar-pa] really was an emanation.

To recapitulate, the great master Lo-tsā-ba received explanations on the Secret Mantrayana from wisdom *dākinīs* as well as from *vīrinīs* (*dpa' mo*). He had visions of the maṇḍala of his meditation deity in a bucket of water and in an open fruit. Inwardly, he mastered the skill of luminosity, and had the signs of perfection for entering his consciousness into another's body and transferring it, etc. He was endowed with many special and extraordinary qualities. Despite all this, he remained a hidden yogin and behaved according to how ordinary individuals perceived him. Though from his opponents' point of view [he valued] the five sense-pleasures and the eight worldly concerns, he [actually] acted for the benefit of worthy disciples: individuals with whom he had karmic links, who had made wishes, and were fortunate enough. After having shown that his body of ripening was completely conquered,⁸⁶⁹ he left for the land of Akaniṣṭa, [103] [one of] the celestial mansions.⁸⁷⁰

These songs and story of Mar-pa were given to the lord [Mi-la-]ras-pa and to the 'Phan-yul master [Mar-pa Mgo-legs] but to none other. I, the lay Tibetan Bodhirāja, have long remained at the lotus feet of these two venerable ones and have well pleased them. I have lavished the Guru and the three jewels with maṇḍalas and offerings, have offered maṇḍalas and *gaṇacakras* to *dākinīs* and dharma protectors, and have received [their teachings] as they should be received. The Master joyfully gave [me the permission to write this]; I have in no way written it of my own account. As the Venerable [Mi-la-]ras-pa said, if this [story] spreads beyond those who consider this lineage as their own, as well as to one or two meditators who have reached certainty in their practice, then the punishment of the *dākinīs* will occur. This is not because of stinginess with the Dharma, but rather because a root downfall

⁸⁶⁸ The sentence seems to say both that Mar-pa died and that the two men met. DRNT, p. 138, omits this detail.

⁸⁶⁹ It is very difficult to decipher this sentence: *rnam smin gyi lus rgya ltul? ba'i tshul bstan nas*. The word *ltul* does not make sense; it may be read as *btul*, "conquered," or maybe *'drul*, "rotten."

⁸⁷⁰ Akaniṣṭa (*'og min*) is one of the eight celestial mansions (*mkha' spyod gyi gnas brgyad*), one of three groups among the twenty-four tantric places. See for example Snellgrove 1959, p. 70, for an enumeration of the twenty-four places according to the *Hevajratantra*.

[of *samaya*] occurs if those who are not worthy recipients see it. Nowadays, people mock, exaggerate, denigrate, and doubt, so I have written this down with a good deal of restraint.

This completes the story of the lord Mar-pa Lo-tsā-ba, the unequalled body of emanation.

The lord 'Bar-ra-ba sums it up as follows:

With no attachment towards his body or his life, he endured hardships for the sake of Dharma. He was accepted by the master, received initiations and saw the truth. In this land of snows, he ripened and liberated worthy disciples: I pray to the feet of Mar-ston Chos-[kyi]-blo-[gros].

The lord Mon-rtse-pa also said:

He is the heart-son of many learned and accomplished Indians. The man from Lho-brag, treasure trove of Aural Transmission instructions, is like a lamp that dispels the darkness of the snowy land. I prostrate to the feet of Mar-pa Lo-tsā-ba! Thus this was established according to the truth! Śubham!

Appendix 3

Translation of Rngog Mdo-sde's Biography of Mar-pa

["Rje mar pa'i rnam thar." In: *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod las rje mar pa'i bka' 'bum*, in: DK-DZO, vol. ca, pp. 167–188 (W00JW501203, pp. 170–191).]

The Hagiography of Mar-pa

I prostrate to the precious authentic masters!

He accomplishes the benefit of beings through the supreme blessing
That [comes] from the nature of an unlimited enlightened mind.

I bow down at the feet of the supreme being Mar-pa Lo-tshā-ba,
Who matured, became liberated, and conquered through the Vajrayāna.

This emanation of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra became Ḍombiheruka, the great ācārya who obtained the supreme accomplishments of Mahāmudrā, and then went to the Snowy Land in the north when the time had come in order to tame beings of the degenerate times through the unsurpassable secret of the great vehicle. This is the unfathomable hagiography of the great venerable, Mar-pa Lo-tstsha-ba, [168] who has ultimate kindness. Here it is taught briefly in eight points:

1. The qualities of awakening to his potential and going to India;
2. The qualities of perfecting the practice of hardships;
3. The great Lord Nāropā's declaration on the spontaneous Aural Transmission;
4. The revelation that sūtras and tantras are the path of methods;
5. The qualities of fame of the lineage's strength based on following an enlightened guru;
6. The qualities of the introduction to Mahāmudrā by glorious blessing;
7. The qualities of showing that thanks to meditative absorption powered by control over his mind he is unimpeded regarding appearances;⁸⁷¹
8. The qualities of mastery over entering another's body through power over the pathways and winds.

⁸⁷¹ MKNT, pp. 168, l. 2–3: *sems la dbang thob pas dbang bsgyur ba ting nge 'dzin gyi snang ba la thog rdugs med par shar ba'i yon tan*. The title is spelled differently on p. 186 and has been amended accordingly here: *ting nge 'dzin gyis snang ba thog gdugs med par bstan pa*.

1. *The qualities of awakening to his potential and going to India*

It is said that his grandfather was Phyug-po-dkon-mchog, the main sovereign of Dpe-gsar, in Chung-khyer, in the Lho-brag valley. He was born the son of his father Mar-ston Dbang-phyug-'od-zer and his mother Rgya-mo-'od-de. It is said that their wealth was great and that they owned two or three valleys.

When this Lord Mar-pa was young, he loved beer and enjoyed fighting with everyone. His father thought that sending him to study would calm him down, and so, at Myu-gu-lung, in Mang-mkhar, in La-stod in the Rtsang [region], he received the teachings of lama 'Brog-mi Lo-tstsha-ba when the latter had just returned from India. To receive even the *Hevajrasādhana* by Saroruhapāda, one had to offer a 'bri and a *ganacakra* each time. So Mar-pa thought that rather than being subjected to such difficulties, [169] he would do better to go south to Nepal. He learned a language or two, exchanged all he had for gold, and went to the Teacher Lo-skya's [place] in Dgyer-phu, La-stod.

Then, he traveled to Nepal where he met the guru Pham-'thing-pa from whom he heard many teachings on Vajracatuṣpīṭha, Hevajra, and so on. He met guru Dpen-da-ba and received many teachings from him. He stayed three years there, then returned to Tibet where, in Mang-yul, supplies were sent to him. He went back and offered five measures of gold to Guru Penta-pa who was greatly pleased and said that he had a guru in India, a master who was like a second Buddha, and that he could introduce [Mar-pa] to him.

Soon [Mar-pa] went to India, enduring innumerable hardships. At Glorious Nālandā there were four great paṇḍits, [formerly of] Vikramaśīla, that were the guardians of the four gates. At the East Gate was Śāntipa, at the South Vāgīśvarakīrti (*Ngag gi dbang phyug grags pa*), at the West Gate Prajñākaragupta (*Shes rab 'byung gnas sbas pa*), and at the North Gate the very one from Phullahari. [Mar-pa] asked who among these paṇḍits was the greatest, and was told that none could compare with Lord Nāropā. So he went to Phullahari, before the great Lord Nāropā. He offered him a golden maṇḍala and requested his teaching. It is said that [Nāropā] asked him his name at that time and was very pleased. He conferred empowerments and blessings on him. During six years, [Mar-pa] received many teachings from him belonging to the mahāyoga and yoginītantras of the great vehicle's secret mantrayāna.

At that point, he went east to the peak of the Mountain Burning like Fire, near the banks of the river Ganges, in the presence of Maitrīpā, the Sovereign Son of the Victorious. He received many instructions on essential meaning (*snying po don*), such as the Cycle on the Essential [Meaning]

(*snying po'i skor*), the Seven Texts on Accomplishments (*grub pa sde bdun*),⁸⁷² and so on. [170]

In the West, in La-khe-tra, he received many [teachings] on the cycle of the Nobles⁸⁷³ from a supporter of the Svantātrika Madhyamaka, the Glorious Jñānagarbha. Other gurus lived there, such as the glorious Sinhalese guru, the greater and lesser Ku-su-li-ba and others.

Next, Mar-pa decided to return to Tibet to search for gold in order to make offerings at all the special places such as the Glorious Bodhgayā, to perform *gaṇacakras* with accomplished gurus, to hand them gold, to worship them, and so on. With that in mind, he returned to Tibet and composed a *vajradohā* song at the Teacher Lo-skya from Dgyer-phu's place in La-stod.

Then he journeyed home through the north⁸⁷⁴ in search of gold; he toured the north until Nag-shod. At 'Phan-yul dar-yul steng-khang,⁸⁷⁵ he met Mar-pa Mgo-legs who had come for trade. The latter invited him to Tsam-klungs, where he provided him with twelve measures of gold; he also found forty measures of gold there. At that time, while dreaming one night, the great Lord Nāropā came into his dream and showed him symbols on the essential key-points:

Born on a sky-flower,
The son of a barren woman rides a horse
Wielding the tortoise hair whip of realization.
With the dagger of a hare's horn
He kills his enemy in the space of *dharmatā*.
The mute speaks, the blind sees.

⁸⁷² These two cycles of teachings are found in the first of three volumes of Indian Mahāmudrā Works (*Phyag chen rgya gzhung*, TBRC no. W23447) collected by the 7th Karma-pa Chos-grags-rgya-mtsho (1454–1506). The first set belongs to the *rgyud 'grel* section of the *Bstan 'gyur* and is said to contain the work of various masters from Uḍḍiyāna. The second set is comprised of Saraha's *Dohākośagīti* and other texts and is the subject of Adam Krug's forthcoming dissertation at the University of California. For details see Mathes 2011, pp. 93–95.

⁸⁷³ See Wedemeyer 2007 for a presentation of the tantric tradition of the Guhyasamājā Noble Tradition (*gsang 'dus 'phags lugs*).

⁸⁷⁴ MKNT, p. 170, l. 3: *de nas yul du byon par byang ngos 'drims nas gser btsal te*. This is clarified by MPSB, vol. 1, p. 3: *de nas yul du ma phyin nas/ byang ngos 'grim 'grim nas gser btsal te*. "Then, without going home, he traveled throughout the north in search for gold."

⁸⁷⁵ This is the name of a place recorded in the TBRC (G1240). In the text, it appears as *'phan yul kyī dar yul sogṣ khang*. The *sogṣ* instead of *steng* might be an indication that this version has been copied from a cursive manuscript.

The deaf hears, the cripple runs.
 On the sun and moon, dancers blow conches.
 The little child turns the wheel.

Then the *dākinīs* unraveled these symbols:

The *dākinī* is the sky-flower.
 The barren woman's [son] riding a horse is the Aural Transmission.
 He wields the tortoise hair whip of the inexpressible. [171]
 The dagger of a hare's horn is the unborn,
 Which kills mental fabrications in the space of *dharmatā*.
 Tilopā is the mute, beyond word, thought, and expression.
 Nāropā is the blind, liberated in seeing the meaning of the meaningless.
 Nāropā is the deaf on the *dharmakāya* mountain of *dharmatā*.
 [Mar-pa] Blo-gros is the cripple who runs on luminosity without coming or going.
 On the sun and moon of the Bhagavan Hevajra
 The dancers' many movements are of one taste.
 The conches proclaim his fame in the ten directions:⁸⁷⁶
 They are blown for worthy human vessels of their sound.
 The teaching of the wheel is the Glorious Cakrasaṃvara;
 The little child of the Aural Transmission which is like a wishfulfilling gem turns it without attachment.

Once the meaning of the symbols was unraveled, he integrated it.

2. *The qualities of perfecting the practice of hardships*

To write very briefly about that period: when [Mar-pa] was departing from Rtsang, at Mkhar-gong-dkar-po in Nyang-stod,⁸⁷⁷ he met the unique deity, Jo-bo Rje [Atiśa], who was going to Dbus, and recognized him. It is said that the Jo-bo himself told [Mar-pa] that he had first been blessed by a disciple of Lord Nāropā, Guru Ldom-bhi-ba, and that he had later become Lord Nāropā's direct disciple. He was that handsome man who had introduced himself as a paṇḍit of royal caste and who had sometimes come before

⁸⁷⁶ The text reads "in one direction" (*phyogs cig*) but I've emended it to "ten directions," as found in the KSTC-1, p. 170, for example.

⁸⁷⁷ MKNT, p. 171, l. 3–4: *nyang stod bzhengs kyis mkhar gong dkar po bya ba*. The name of this place is to be compared with that of Mar-pa Mgo-legs's grandfather's place described in Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's narrative (see Mon-rtse-pa, p. 99). The meaning of *bzhengs kyis* is unclear to me.

Lord Nāropā in order to receive instructions. Then [Mar-pa] received from the Jo-bo the Rin-chen-tsa-kra empowerment in the Nyan-tshong place.⁸⁷⁸

Lord Mar-pa accompanied Snyos 'Byung-po who was on his way to learn translation,⁸⁷⁹ and they reached Nepal. Then, Bsnyos left for India beforehand, and Lord Mar-pa offered flowers to Guru 'Pham-thing-pa, Pen-ta-ba and so on. Performing many *ganacakras*, he prayed to them. [172] He went to India,⁸⁸⁰ where he offered maṇḍalas of gold to the victorious Maitrīpā, the glorious Jñānagarbha, and his other gurus.

When he reached Phullahari, he was told that Lord Nāropā had entered the practice and was no longer present. Before that, Lord Nāropā had been practicing four sessions and teaching in-between sessions, but then he had left behind all [practice] supports and books. He had set aside the Lo-tstsha-ba's share—a *thang-ka* of Hevajra, the three root-tantras of Guhyasamāja, Hevajra, and Cakrasaṃvara, one *kapala*, one *tsakli*, and an umbrella—, saying that they should be given to the Tibetan lo-tstsha-ba who would be coming, and he left.

Lord Nāropā himself had taken black cotton shorts,⁸⁸¹ a fine black antelope skin to cover his legs, a hand drum, the five symbolic ornaments, and a skull,⁸⁸² and was engaging in the practice. He would only direct *ganacakras* offered by his old disciples, answer their questions on difficult teachings and bless them, but apart from that, he maintained the practice of a beggar. He told everyone: “Bhe he ya! Give! Give!” At one point, he met a group of bandits. When he begged from them, they gave him four sharp razors which he placed in the skull. It is said that they melted like butter in a hot iron

⁸⁷⁸ MKNT, p. 171, l. 5: *der jo bo la dbang nyan tshong gnas su rin chen tsa kra zhus nas*. It is written in very small script and seems to have been added afterwards. It is not clear which initiation is meant. According to the *Lho rong chos 'byung* and Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag-phreng-ba, Mar-pa received from Atiśa an initiation called *rin chen phreng ba*, Ratnavali. The name of the place, *nyan tshong gnas*, is unclear to me but as Atiśa gave an empowerment there, it probably does not refer to a *smad 'tshong gnas*, a brothel.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171, l. 5: The phrase is not clear: *rje mar pas snyos 'byung po da [?] bzod [?] lo tsa slob du 'gro ba dang 'grog nas*. The first part of the sentence is written in the same right letters as the part on Atiśa's empowerment.

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171, l. 6.: Here is the same word as found in the line above, *bzod rgya gar du byon*, which does not make sense to me.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172, l. 3: *rje na ro pa nyid ras kyi ang ka reg nag po cig dang! khri gnyan sa le'i lpags pa smad bkris cig bsnams*. This part is not completely clear. The first portion however can be clarified on the basis of Rngog-1, p. 4, which says: *nā ro pa rang gis ras kyi ang rag nag po gcig gyon nas...*

⁸⁸² These are the various attributes a yogin carries when he engages in the practice. See Lodrö Thayé 2010, p. 185.

pan; when they had completely become liquid nectar, he drank it. On another occasion, he begged from a yogin who gave him a hand drum and a curved knife. He again placed them in the skull. They melted immediately and he drank them.

When Lord Mar-pa Lo-tstsha-ba arrived, [Nāropā] was engaging in practice in the twenty-four charnel grounds and his whereabouts were unclear. [173] His attendant, the novice Prajñāsīmha, handed over [to Mar-pa] his share of the endowment, and [Mar-pa] went to search for him accompanied by Lord Pen-ta-pa. They met him at Śrī Parvata in South India and [again] in O-te-bi-shi, one of the secondary [power] places. At that time, he gave them teachings on the Glorious Guhyasamāja and on the Advayasamatāvijayamahākālparājā in 3,500 verses.⁸⁸³ [Mar-pa] wrote them down in Lakhe-tra with the Glorious Jñānagarbha and the Glorious Sinhalese One. They say that he translated them at that time. He then visited the Glorious Maitripā and received many teachings.

During that period, Snyos 'Byung-po received many teachings from a guru from glorious Nālandā called Balyācārya, who had attained the accomplishments of the *balin* and had met face to face with Kṛṣṇayamāri (*gshin rje gshed nag po*). Mar-pa then went to Bengal in eastern India to visit the temple of the self-arisen Khasarpaṇi. He met Snyos 'Byung-po and wished to have a discussion. In a copari house,⁸⁸⁴ he bought a large quantity of food with some of his money, presented it to [Snyos]⁸⁸⁵ and asked him what he had been up to. [Snyos] was not much more learned as far as all the other [tantras] were concerned, but he happened to be a bit stronger on Mahāmāya.

Later, [Mar-pa] repeatedly asked Lord Nāropā about Mahāmāya. The latter said he was not available for explanations, but that in the south, in a *lakśa* forest on an island in a noxious lake, there was a man called Śāntibhadra whose lineage was closely [related] to the glorious Kurukulle, and that he should ask him. Moreover, he was a very ugly fellow. To protect [Mar-pa] from the dangers of the road, [Nāropā] summoned a young brahmin called The One with a Golden Rosary and the two yogins blessed [Mar-pa]

⁸⁸³ This text is an explanatory tantra of the Guhyasamāja. It was translated by Bu-ston in the 14th century and Mar-pa's transmission of it is an object of controversy. See BA, p. 417, n. 4, and the various references to that entry in Dan Martin's *Tibskrit*.

⁸⁸⁴ Robert 2007, p. 164, quotes Charles Ramble, who says that a *copara* is a Newar word for a simple building with a roof of grass or reed, and Hubert Decler, who states that this word is still used in Urdu for a simple straw hut. Roberts found this word, under the form *copari*, in Ras-chung-pa's life within *The Life and Songs of Shepay Dorje* (the *Buchen bcu gnyis*), which is also attributed to Ngam-rdzong ston-pa.

⁸⁸⁵ It is not clear whether it is Mar-pa offering food to Gnyos or the reverse.

[174], one so that he would not be poisoned, the other so that he would not be bothered by ghosts. Then [Mar-pa] left. [Śāntibhadra] gave him complete empowerments and instructions during a fortnight.

Then, regarding the Noble tradition of Guhyasamāja, [Mar-pa] concluded [his study] of the teachings on the *Illumination of the Lamp* and so on according to the vast traditions of Jñānagarbha, Singalingpa, and Lord Nāropā. He received from Lord Nāropā the great empowerment of the Condensed Family of the Extensive Glorious Guhyasamāja (*dpal gsang ba 'dus pa rgyas par rigs bsdus pa'i dbang*), as well as other initiations and blessing permissions; many instructions on King Indrabūthi's lineages of the Glorious Māya and Saṃvara; and on the tradition of the Glorious Saraha's lineage of the *Buddhakapālatantra*. He also listened to the four scrolls of instructions,⁸⁸⁶ and heard instructions on the four-transmission lineage (*bka' bzhi brgyud pa*), the three mixings of the path (*lam bsre ba gsum*) and many key instructions on integrating afflictions on the path. Then, wishing to return to Tibet, he prostrated to the guru in farewell.

While [Mar-pa] was crossing the River Ganges on a boat with Snyos 'Byung-po, Snyos threw the Glorious Guhyasamāja cycles into the water by mistake. As he was in the wrong, he said: "You are welcome to copy my texts!" Mar-pa, thinking he was trustworthy, answered that he would copy them in Nepal, but [Gnyos] replied: "Do it when we reach Tibet!" They went on and reached Kha-rag. There, [Snyos] gave him a horse-saddle as well as a lot of gold and turquoise, and told him: "Now, don't teach that! Expound the yoginītantras! If you teach the mahāyogatantras, who will come and listen to me?" And he did not lend [his texts].

[175] Then [Mar-pa] reached Lho-brag. He did not stay home for very long, however, as he felt uneasy about not having the texts on the Glorious Guhyasamāja Noble Tradition. He gathered a good deal of gold and set off again for India.

They say that at that time, the gurus from Pharphing (*pham thing pa*) were the five brothers of Sahajavajra.⁸⁸⁷ The eldest was the guru Spyi-therpa, then after him was the monk Abhayakīrti (*'jigs med grags pa*), after him the Newar Thang-chung-pa, then the fourth Prajñābhadrā (*shes rab bzang po*) and the fifth Vāgīśvarakīrti (*ngag gi dbang phyug grags pa, ba gi shwa ra*).

⁸⁸⁶ "Rje btsun lho brag pa'i khyad par gyi gdams pa snyan gyi shog dril bzhi'i lo rgyus gzhung lhan thabs dang bcas pa." In: *Gdams ngag mdzod*, vol. 8, pp. 203–233.

⁸⁸⁷ Sahajavajra was a disciple of Maitrīpā. It is not clear why the Pharphing brothers, usually seen as disciples of Nāropā, should now be portrayed as brothers of Sahajavajra, i.e. Maitrīpā's disciples. For more on these masters, see Lo Bue 1997 and *Tibskrit* for bibliographical references.

These brothers were staying there, and [Mar-pa] offered *gaṇacakras* to the younger ones. He offered many *gaṇacakras* to Lord Pen-ta-pa and supplicated him. [Pen-ta-pa] saw in a dream that [Mar-pa] would meet [Nāropā] and that made them feel cheerful. [Mar-pa] told him he would go to search for Nāropā, so Lord Pen-ta-pa replied:

“Now his movements are pure, he is invisible! His body has become rainbow-like and you may not find him. Nonetheless, if you go I’ll accompany you!”

So [Mar-pa] went to India and questioned his gurus, Maitrīpā and the others, as well as his special dharma siblings. They said that there was no certainty that he would find [Nāropā] even if he looked, but that he should pray. So he made *gaṇacakras* and offerings, and prayed. He supplicated each of his close friends and acquaintances, and consulted their dreams: the dreams were good and each friend prophesized that he would meet [Nāropā]. First, his friends Prajñāraksita, Prajñākara and Ākarasiddhi from Kashmir, [176] and Prajñākara from the east said:⁸⁸⁸

A dancing girl looked at a mirror out of the corner of her eye:
Riding a *garuda*, someone was flying to the north,
And a captain was sailing a ship:
You will meet the glorious Nāropā!

He made *gaṇacakras* with the guru Maitrīpā for one month, who said:

There is a *dākinī* looking in a mirror:
Riding a bird, Nāro is brandishing a victory banner.
I dreamt that the bird’s head was teaching [in] Tibet:
It is certain that you will meet the glorious Nāropā!

Then he offered *gaṇacakras* to the Ācārya glorious Śāntibhadra, the guru from whom he had received Mahāmāya, who said:

I dreamt of the venerable, glorious Nāropā,
Gazing like an elephant,
With sunrays and moon beams shining forth from his eyes to
Tibet.
You will meet the glorious Nāropā
And receive some extraordinary instructions!

⁸⁸⁸ This stanza is attributed to Maitrīpā in most other biographies, with the second verse greatly changed. The name of Prajñākara from Kashmir is illegible and has been reconstructed on the basis of other versions.

Then [Mar-pa] offered 108 *gaṇacakras* to the *dākinī* who had taught him the *Vajracatuspīṭha*, Chu-shing-gi-nye-ma-can (Cluster of Banana Trees), who said:

I dreamt of a conch sounding from the mountain peak;
 Of a road leading from the three junctions of the valley;
 And of a lamp blazing in a vase
 That illuminated the whole world:
 You will meet the glorious Nāropā!

He offered *gaṇacakras* to the attendant Prajñāsiṃha for a month, who said:

I dreamt that on the great plain of misery
 I was leading a blind man; I entrusted him to someone else
 Who cured him of his eye disease
 And showed him in the mirror of the mind.
 It is certain that you will meet the glorious Nāropā!

In a previous life, Lord Nāropā was the Ācārya Bhadrāpā (*bzang po zhabs*) and Mar-pa Dharmarāja of noble lineage. [Nāropā] was the master at that time [177] and took the ruler along with the Brahmins Kalyāṇa and Bhadra as witnesses that he would accept [Mar-pa as a disciple] in all later lives. At present the latter two were Riripa and Kasoripa, who knew this through their heightened perception. They predicted that on all accounts [Mar-pa] would see [Nāropā's] face. Then [Mar-pa] offered *gaṇacakras* to Riripa for a month, who said:

In a previous life, the Brahmin Bhadrāpā
 Was supplicated by Dharmarāja of noble lineage
 In the presence of the witnesses Kalyāṇa and Bhadra:
 The fruit will come, there will be a meeting.

He offered *gaṇacakras* to guru Kasoripa for a month, who said:

Through the pure maṇḍala of the moon,
 The *dharmakāya* mirror of the mind
 Will be shown by Nāropā
 At immovable Phullahari.

Then one evening [Mar-pa] went to the Hermitage of Flowers (Phullahari) and saw Nāropā flying in the sky. He was riding a lion with a woman to either side, the two *mūdras* Mnye-na-ma-ti-si-ri and Ghu-na-ma-ti-si-ri on whom he was leaning. He prayed to him. A sound was heard from the sky:

I, Nāropā, am non-dual union.
 I am leaning on two consorts,
 Who are the symbols of methods and wisdom.

I ride a lion,
Sing and dance on the sun and moon.
Are you not deceived by the confusion of the dream?

Then, on the [next] day, [Mar-pa] looked at the sky, which was suddenly illuminated by the rainbow of [Nāropā's] form *kāya*, and supplicated him. [Nāropā said]:

If the horse of continual devotion
Is not urged on by the whip of diligence,
Is the deer of duality
Not caught in the trap of reality?

[178] Then he left, and even though [Mar-pa] ran after him, he could not reach him. Even when he caught sight of him, [Nāropā] would not stay. Completely exhausted, [Mar-pa] addressed the Venerable with a lamentation:

Oh, Venerable! Won't you consider me with compassion?
You disappeared and [left me] unprotected: why have you
abandoned me?
My life, I offer it to you, Guru!
See how I am blinded by ignorance!

Then he prayed. When he looked again, he had a direct vision of the guru walking on a black mountain peak, so he went there. When he entered a rocky defile, his body and everything else felt like an illusion.

One who has not recognized luminosity and emptiness
Grasps his own mind as real and so is confused.
But it is of relative nature!⁸⁸⁹

Once, when the guru was flying like a bird, [Mar-pa] saw him and wondered whether it was a bird. Again, the Venerable said:⁸⁹⁰

A footprint is like a bird's trail.
If you do not recognize this while remaining free from grasping,
Won't you stray into the abyss of futility
Like a dog chasing the shadow of a flying bird?

⁸⁸⁹ This part cannot be found in later versions.

⁸⁹⁰ The verse can be found *verbatim* in later versions, but the introduction is generally very different so that it fits with the context, which it is not really the case here.

So he said and retreated into the sky. [Mar-pa] ran but could not reach him; even when he saw him, he could not make him stay. He was gone like the vision of a deer in a mirage.

All phenomena are relative.
If you don't see these reflection-like phenomena
As the truth of cause and effect,
You won't properly see the ultimate.

Then [Mar-pa] wondered: "Did I come here?" As he was not sure, he wondered in which direction he should search. Again, a sound was heard from the sky:

If you do not untie the snake-knot of doubt
About mind itself, about the true nature, about the *dharmakāya*—
That which is always unborn—[179]
You are a double-pointed needle which cannot accomplish its purpose.

Another time, [Nāropā] moved forward dancing and the sky was illuminated by his form *kāya*. Filled with joy, [Mar-pa] supplicated him, and again Nāropā said:

An attachment-free body is like a rainbow.
If you do not see it in the invisible state,
You are like a blind man watching a spectacle.
How could knowledge of the truth arise?

And he left. Next [Mar-pa] went to a dark mountain, where he saw a footprint of the guru on a wonderful crystal boulder. Then he was carried away to a dam where he saw a white vajra made of sandalwood on the surface of a rock made of hard, precious stones. On a leafy tree, he saw a self-arisen red lotus. In a grassy meadow [irrigated] by several brooks, he saw glowing self-arisen lotuses. He regarded these vajras and mature lotuses as marvelous supports. These three wonderful traces are called the imprints of triple suchness (*de nyid gsum po'i rjes*).⁸⁹¹

He then went to a mountain peak where there was a square flat stone. He prayed seven feet from it, and on the morning of the seventh day, [Nāropā] came in person. [Mar-pa] made long prostrations and exulted. He supplicated him and offered a *gaṇacakra*: [Nāropā] used a rib-ladle to churn the nectar in a skull. He partook of it and presented the rest [to Mar-pa] who ate it and found that it had a hundred excellent tastes. The guru said:

⁸⁹¹ The part with all these visions cannot be found in later versions.

In the great vessel of great bliss,
 Great bliss and enjoyment are pure in equal taste.
 If you do not enjoy this as great bliss,
 Enjoyment of nectar will not arise.⁸⁹²

[Mar-pa] then offered a maṇḍala of gold to the guru, and again the Venerable Nāropā said:

Since that which appears to exist is primordially pure,
 If you offer this maṇḍala of precious metal to which you are attached,
 Instead of offering the maṇḍala of *dharmatā* [180]
 Are you not bound by the eight worldly dharmas?

And he did not accept it. [Mar-pa] insisted that he take it, and [Nāropā], voicing a dedication to the guru and the three jewels, scattered it into the sky. [Mar-pa] was taken aback for an instant, so [Nāropā] said that he could have it back if he wished: he opened the palms of his hands and what had been there before reappeared undiminished. [Mar-pa] threw it again towards the guru's body and one part landed in his hair and the other in his skull-cup. It melted in the nectar and [Nāropā] told [Mar-pa] to eat it. It seems that then he proclaimed that everything was a land of gold, stood up, and stamped his foot: everything he touched became a golden ground.

It was at that time that “the eight wonderful visions in Nāropā's presence” and other things took place. [Mar-pa] received the mind quintessence of [Nāropā's] instructions on Hevajra (*dgyes pa rdo rje'i gdams pa bshad pa thugs kyi nying khu*), the core guidance (*dmar khrid*) on the Pañcakrama, the detailed and condensed Precious Secret (*gsang ba rin po che*),⁸⁹³ as well as the

⁸⁹² This is exactly what can be found in later versions, except that in the last verse most write *bde chen longs spyod 'byung mi 'gyur* instead of *bdud rtsi'i long spyod 'byung mi 'gyur*. (Rngog-1: p. 7; Dpa'-bo II: p. 53)

⁸⁹³ Two texts might correspond to the transmission mentioned here: the *Gubhyaratna-cintāmaṇi* (*Dpal gsang ba rin po che yid bzhin nor bu*, Tōh. no. 1524, Derge *Bstan 'gyur*, vol. za, f. 79a1–82b6), translated by the author, Nāropā, and Mar-pa Chos-kyi-blo-gros; and the *Gubhyaratna* (*Gsang ba rin po che*, Tōh. no. 1525, Derge *Bstan 'gyur*, vol. za, f. 82b6–83b2), translated by the author, Akṣobhyavajra (*Mi bskyod rdo rje*), and Mar-pa Chos-kyi-blo-gros. According to *Tibskrit*, Akṣobhyavajra, the author of the second text as well as of other works in the *Bstan 'gyur*, might be identified as Buddhajñānapāda or Jñānapāda (late 8th century). However, if the colophon is exact, it is likely that this short text on Cakrasaṃvara and Caṇḍālī was composed by Nāropā. This transmission is not referred to in most later biographies (even Rngog-1, which is essentially a summary of this version, does not mention these transmissions, but only the fact that Nāropā did not teach), except by Don-mo-ri-pa (DRNT, p. 162: *gsang ba rin po che'i dbang*).

Coemergent Lady (*jo mo lhan cig skyes ma*). Then, as Lord Nāropā was not teaching, he told [Mar-pa] to study the Dharma at Mi-tri-pa's place; it is said that [Mar-pa] listened to the glorious Mi-tri-pa and worked on his texts. This is why now all tantras and instructions come from both Lord Nāropā and Mi-tri-pa.

Then when [Mar-pa] had completed all the texts, he supplicated again and offered a *ganacakra*. He went to search for the guru and met him in a thick acacia forest (*seng ldeng*). [Nāropā] reportedly said: "You must understand your own mind and speech as the manifestation of the guru's appearance. There is no coming from anywhere [181] and no going anywhere," which he explained:

In *dharmatā*, luminosity and non-action,
 There is neither coming nor going. If you do not know that,
 You are like a deer pursuing a mirage,
 Are you not wandering on the plain of futility?⁸⁹⁴

[Mar-pa] then prostrated and circumambulated him. Placing his head at Nāropā's feet, he asked for his blessing, so [Nāropā] blessed him:

With the sun of self-liberated wisdom,
 At the monastery of Phullahari
 The one who bears the name "Intelligence" (*blo gros*)
 Will dispel the darkness of Tibet's ignorance
 And make the light of wisdom prevail.
 Thus said the guru Tilopā.
 As there is this prediction
 Proclaimed by the Buddha-[like] guru, I [also] affirm it!

While Master Mar-pa Lo-tstsha-ba and Lord Nāropā were on their way to Phullahari, many worldly *dākinīs* arrived. They created obstacles because Mar-pa Lo-tstsha-ba was leaving for Tibet and taking along many teachings which were the profound heart-essence, the complete quintessence of the *dākinīs*. As Lord Nāropā himself was unable to dispel these obstructions, he supplicated Lord Tilopā:

My son predicted by the Guru,
 The worthy vessel Mar-pa Blo-gros,
 Encounters the obstacles of *māras*:
 O Venerable Protector, protect him!

⁸⁹⁴ This verse is quite unclear in this version and has been modified variously in later texts: see KSTC, p. 186; Rngog-1, p. 8; DRNT, p. 159–160; "U-rgyan-pa," p. 137. It is the KSTC's version, followed by "U-rgyan-pa," that was favored by Gtsang-smyon, see Tsangnyön 1982, p. 84.

Tilopā emanated in the midst of space as innumerable wrathful and fearful [deities] carrying weapons. They proclaimed furious and terrifying shouts of laughter. All the *dākinīs* bowed down to them with dread and awe, and said:

This terrifying body with terrifying speech
 Is well-armed with terrifying weapons.
 In this body of great terror, we take refuge. [182]
 We will do no harm!
 In the morning, when seven months will have passed,
 We will place the Venerable, Glorious Nāropā,
 On the horse of a great chariot.
 From Phullahari's canopy⁸⁹⁵
 To the self-arisen palace of Oḍḍiyāna,
 The *dākinīs* of the prophecy will welcome the self-liberated
 one!

Thus they requested forgiveness, saying that after seven months they would invite Lord Nāropā and accompany him from Phullahari to the glorious Oḍḍiyāna with a chariot.

The wrathful armies then receded and transformed into rainbow lights. In the midst of these were banks of clouds within which Lord Mar-pa saw what was left of the Venerable Tilopā's body. He said that he heard only a fourth of [Tilopā's] Dharma words. The *dākinīs* bowed again in dread and awe.

Next they reached Phullahari. During seven months, with no one else noticing, Mar-pa received the complete tradition of the explanatory Guhyasamāja tantra (that is the instructions of the Nobles, father and son), the key-instructions on the meditation which completes the Five Stages in one session, the meaning of the Glorious Guhyasamāja and of the Great Supreme Glory (*dpal mchog chen po*). He fully received the four empowerments with an emanated maṇḍala. In particular, [Nāropā] gave him the instructions on the three aspects of the precious Aural Transmission of the Secret Mantra and many extraordinary Dharma key-points and instructions on mixing (*bsre ba*). He gave him the initiation of the Glorious Heruka of the Precious Secret (*dpal gsang ba rin po che'i he ru ka*); the blessing of the Vajrawisdom of the Rje-btsun-ma's Secret Sindhura (*rje btsun ma'i gsang ba sin dhu ra rdo rje ye shes*); and the four initiations of the symbolic empowerment of the *dākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro ma'i brda' dbang gi dbang bzhi po*).⁸⁹⁶ He transmit-

⁸⁹⁵ MKNT, p. 182, reads *lding kha*. DRNT, p. 162, which is the only text adopting this version, has *lding khang*.

⁸⁹⁶ According to Gtsang-smyon's version (Gtsang-smyon, p. 99, Tsangnyön 1982, p.

ted them together with the blessing of the quintessential Cakrasaṃvara Aural Transmission. When the seven months drew to an end, [Nāropā], his body invisible in the sky, orally gave him [183] five out of the nine instructions of the secret bodiless *dākinīs*. The master said that he had given the missing four to Kasoripa.

At that time, Mar-pa prostrated and circumambulated [Nāropā]. Placing his head at his feet, he asked for a footprint, and [Nāropā] blessed him:

The yogin seeing the primordial meaning
 Holds the jewel of a universal monarch.
 Your family lineage will disappear like a sky-flower
 But your religious lineage, with the continuity of a river,
 Will be uninterrupted.
 The five stages in one session are in the sphere of unique such-
 ness:
 Even the vajra-drawing of attachment
 Will disappear in the water-drawing of *saṃsāra*.⁸⁹⁷

Then, when you, Lo-tstsha-ba, will transfer, I will come with many *dākinīs*, and will lead you to Khecara. You, in the future, will be born miraculously on a lotus on Ha-ri-ka-pa's Island in the East of India. You will meet me at Śrī Parvata in the South. Under the name *Abhediyaguptavajra (*mi phyed sbas pa'i rdo rje*), through the instructions on practice you will reach supreme attainments during that lifetime. Your disciples and their disciples will go to Khecara for thirteen generations.

After this prediction, it is said that the glorious Nāropā entered the practice. Then, on his way back to Tibet, [Mar-pa] made many offerings to his gurus and to the *dākinīs* in Nepal. He prayed at the Sosaka Vihāra (*so sa ka bhi ha ri*) and at the Rin-chen-tshul Vihāra (*rin chen tshul gyis gtsug lag khang*). When he reached Mang-yul at the Nepal–Tibet border, he met Mar-pa Mgo-yags who had come to welcome him. He gave him Lord Nāropā's rosary of 108 [beads] and the vajra and bell of the Sovereign Lord [Maitrīpā] [184]. [The master]⁸⁹⁸ said that he had transmitted the innermost

90), this corresponds to three empowerments in the Aural transmission given on the basis of a sand maṇḍala, a maṇḍala of *sindhura* and the maṇḍala of the body, speech, and mind of the guru. See Torricelli 1998, p. 416, for details concerning these transmissions.

⁸⁹⁷ This part is quite unclear in this version. See DRNT's amendments on p. 163.

⁸⁹⁸ Mar-pa? Mar-pa Mgo-yags? Rngog Chos-rdor? The verb is an honorific *gsung*, indicating that the source of the information is someone important.

vajra song of the six doctrines as well as many instructions marked with the seal of command.

3. The quality of having the Venerable Nāropā foretell his worthiness

The wish-fulfilling gem of the Secret Mantra,
The Profound Aural Transmission, secret of the *ḍākinīs*,
Shows symbolically the indivisibility of the three *kāyas*,
Whose meaning is spontaneous.

The meaning of this is that the great Lord Lo-tstsha-ba developed extraordinary devotion towards the guru, was presented a prediction by the Venerable Tilopā, and was appointed as the regent who would tame the land of snow in the North. To this end, he received empowerments and blessings, and he realized and integrated the self-liberated true nature of Mahāmudrā. This was experienced continuously as a transmission of enlightened mind transmitted from mind to mind, as an aural transmission transmitted from ear to ear, and as a concrete transmission transmitted from mouth to mouth. This fully blossomed blessing transmission did not go to more than two Indian lineages. This is why he obtained the prophecy of being a worthy vessel.

4. The revelation that sūtras and tantras are the paths of methods

As the Glorious Nāropā said:

The vehicle of characteristics of the perfections—of provisional meaning, definitive meaning and essential meaning—and the meaning of Mahāmudrā—the great bliss of the fruit—are all only intended as methods. Understand them as gold-transforming nectar-like methods!

This means that the various perfection vehicles and the secret mantra vehicle are both merely the Buddha's methods, [185] and should therefore be understood as the path of methods.

5. Fame of the lineage's strength based on following an enlightened guru

Generally speaking, [Mar-pa] spent nineteen or twenty entire years in India. After that, he returned home to Lho-brag and thus he remained there, reaching perfection through the strength of his meditative absorption and gaining particularly exalted realizations and qualities. When some friends questioned him, he replied:⁸⁹⁹

⁸⁹⁹ See other versions in Rngog-1, p. 10; DRNT, p. 171; KSTC, pp. 192–193; “U-rgyan-pa,” p. 169; Tsangnyön 1982, pp. 195–196; Dpa'-bo II, p. 96.

I was predicted by many accomplished gurus and obtained
their permission.

I was blessed by many *ḍākinīs*

And I possess a distinguished realization

So that the strength of my lineage is famous.

How could my lineage not be famous

When it is endowed with the spiritual vision of *ḍākinīs*?

How could my forefather not be famous

When he is Tilo, the one and only Buddha?

How could my guru not be famous

When he is Nāro who possesses the eye of Dharma?

How could I not be famous

When I am Nāro's only heart-son?

How could my instructions not be famous

When they are three wish-fulfilling gems?

How could my special teachings not be famous

When they are the mixing and transference which no one else
has

And the aural transmission that no one else owns?

6. *The quality of the introduction to Mahāmudrā by glorious blessings*

Although everyone has a lineage,

If one has the *ḍākinī*'s, that is it.

Although everyone has forefathers,

If one has Tilopā, that is definitely it.

Although everyone has a guru,

If one has Nāropā, that is it.

Although everyone has instructions,

If one has the Aural Transmission, that is definitely it.

Although everyone reaches buddhahood by meditating,

Enlightenment without meditation, that is definitely enlight-
enment.

Being accomplished because of one's effort is no marvel,

But self-arisen accomplishment, that is wonderful!

Although everyone who looks for buddhahood finds it, [186]

Finding it without searching, that is definitely finding!⁹⁰⁰

⁹⁰⁰ This verse can usually be found just after the previous one in all biographies where it is present.

7. *Showing that thanks to meditative absorption he is unimpeded regarding appearances*

In the stable pathways, wind moves.
 There, the horse⁹⁰¹ of *bodhicitta* is placed
 And is urged on by the whip of equal taste.
 Luminosity gallops free from coming and going.

Also:

The characteristic of a guru is to hold a lineage.
 The characteristic of *samsāra* is to be baseless and rootless.
 The characteristic of appearances is to be birthless.
 The characteristic of mind is to be in union.

Also:

Luminosity remains continuously.
 Surely, I will not see the city of the intermediate state.
 The welfare of others occurs through *rūpakāya*'s appearances;
 The *dharmakāya* is unborn, free from elaboration.

8. *Accomplishing entering another's body through power over the pathways and winds*

Once he entered the corpse of a pigeon that was tethered to an iron peg.
 The pigeon tried to fly into the sky. Then [Mar-pa] said:

In the bird's nest of the illusory body
 The small bird of the mind,
 Endowed with the wings of union,
 Exerts itself
 So that the mother bird comes down and meets her son.⁹⁰²

⁹⁰¹ MKNT, p. 186, l. 1 says *brda*. As all other versions say *rta* and as the metaphor is that of a horse running, it has been amended to read *rta*. (See Rngog-1, p. 10; KSTC, pp. 195–196; “U-rgyan-pa,” p. 171; Tsangnyön 1982, p. 197; Dpa’-bo II, p. 125). The spelling *rta* is found at the end of p. 186 where the verse appears again. It is noteworthy that Gtsang-smyon is the only author who adds a fifth verse: *skal ldan skyes bus sna tshogs mthong*.

⁹⁰² MKNT, p. 186, l. 5: *bya smad ma dang bu ru phrad*. The meaning of *bya smad* is unclear to me. This passage can also be found in e.g. DRNT, p. 174 with interlinear notes. It says that the mother and son in question are mind's true nature (*sems nyid ma bu*). In KSTC, p. 197, the verse is commented: “in the nest of my illusory body, the little bird of mind endowed with the wings of the union (“of experience” acc. to DRNT) exerts itself. Up there, the place where it goes is the bird's mother, down here recognition is the little bird. The mother descends (*smad*) and meets her son.”

Also, an old 'bri had died at a steep-sided source. He entered its body, brought it to the door and said:

In the stable pathways, wind moves.
 There, the horse of bodhicitta is placed
 And is urged on by the whip of equal taste
 So that the 'bri is freed from the frightening abyss.⁹⁰³

On another occasion, he found the corpse of a deer that had been killed by some hunters. He entered its body, brought it home and said: [187]

By putting into practice the authentic instructions
 Uttered by the excellent guru
 I found the wish-fulfilling deer
 That accomplishes all one's needs.

Another time, he entered the corpse of a dead lamb at a patron's home. The lamb ran around for a short while,⁹⁰⁴ and he said:

All buddhas of the three times
 Extracted the essence of the nectar of immortality
 And formed the medicinal compound of the holy Dharma's
 medicine
 Which revives the dead lamb and makes it dance.

Thus, the great Lord Mar-pa Lo-tstsha-ba had visions of innumerable meditation deities. Bearing future disciples in mind, he adjusted to the mental levels of these worthy vessels and taught them the Dharma; he also made assertive revelations. [While remaining] in the state of bliss, emptiness, and luminosity of coexistent wisdom, in the sphere where there is no duality between equipoise and post[-attainment], he completely developed the wisdom which knows clearly and distinctly all things to be known in the three times and the ten directions. He is the one whose conduct eschews the eight worldly dharmas; the one who behaves as if participating in an illusion-like dance; the one who repeatedly obtained Tilo's prophecy that Nāropā would take him as his disciple. When that master departed from his body, the great Guru Nāropā came and told him to prepare offerings. Then, having reached his 88th year, he made transference as if he were simply changing his body. When the sun rose over the mountains on the 14th day of the horse month

⁹⁰³ This is the second occurrence of this stanza (see the first on p. 185); the last verse has been changed to fit the meaning of this part.

⁹⁰⁴ MKNT, p. 187, l. 2: *kyu phreng phreng*. The meaning of this passage is unclear to me. It is spelled *skyas brengs brengs* in DRNT, p. 175, which is not much clearer.

in the bird year, he performed the transference of true luminosity (*'od gsal de kbo na nyid kyi 'pho ba*). Innumerable lights and sounds manifested, the earth trembled, [188] and he realized the three *kāyas*.

Thus, the lord Mar-pa Lo-tstsha-ba,
Endowed with true kindness,
Appeared as the glory of beings.
Having revealed a few of his qualities,
This hagiography unraveled the significance of symbols,
Just as a precious lamp dispels doubts.

Appendix 4

Chart of Mar-pa's Songs in the Biographies

This chart gives the pages numbers of Mar-pa's and some of his masters' songs in the biographies that either cite or quote them. The biography used as a base for the order is the one by Gtsang-smyon He-ru-ka. The page number for that version is the English translation by the Nālandā Translation Committee, as it is the most widespread and easiest to access. Songs from the *Rain of Wisdom* from the Rumtek xylographed edition are also included;⁹⁰⁵ they are generally excerpted from Gtsang-smyon's *rnam thar* of Mar-pa, except for the song of the four pillars, which, in that version, originates from Mar-pa's dream rather than Mi-la-ras-pa's.⁹⁰⁶ Songs in a darker shade in the left column (i.e. nos. 6, 9, 17, 18, 23, 26, 27 and 33) are those that Gtsang-smyon referred to as the "eight great songs" (*mgur chen brgyad*).

The twenty-five song collection that closes the first of the two *Mar pa bka' bum* volumes in the DK-DZO⁹⁰⁷ and the biography of Dpa'-bo II contain songs that do not appear in Gtsang-smyon's version, or which are so different from others that it is difficult to identify them. These are the following:

Additional songs in MK25

- p. 433: Variant of the *Long Song of the Journey* (*lam glu ring mo*), which is also quoted in MK25, p. 430.
- p. 468: Short song for his disciples where Mar-pa mentions three of his root gurus (Nāropā, Maitrīpā and Lam-ston) and four of his disciples (Glog[-skya]-ston, Mgo-yag, Mes, and Rngog), as well as Mid-la Rdo-rje-rgyal-mtshan.
- p. 469: Short song on the six doctrines (*rdeng tshad drug gi 'gur*).
- p. 473: Song of sadness at Mdo-sde's death (*mdo sde grongs pa'i dus kyi 'gur*).
- p. 474: Doctrinal song at Khum-bu in La-stod (*la stod khum bur 'gur*).
- p. 476: Doctrinal song.
- p. 477: Song of the thirteen kinds of mental bliss (*blo bde bcu gsum gyi 'gur*).

Additional songs in Dpa'-bo II

- p. 33: Song of the red *dākinī*

⁹⁰⁵ *Bka' brgyud mgur mtsho*, pp. 94–144 (*Rain of Wisdom*, pp. 129–164). Songs included in the *Mgur mtsho* are called "great songs" but do not exactly match Gtsang-smyon's "eight great songs." It is only these latter eight that have a melody attached to them.

⁹⁰⁶ See above, p. 142, n. 451.

⁹⁰⁷ MK25, vol. *ca.* pp. 430–482.

p. 35: Song of the black *dākinī*

p. 36: Song of the three *dākinīs* together.

Dpa'-bo II said he found in Sras-mkhar the palm leaves containing these songs on Mar-pa's encounter with *dākinīs* in India.⁹⁰⁸

p. 38: Sanskrit song of *dākas* and *dākinīs*.

p. 69: Song with 40 *yoginīs* and paṇḍits at the end of the last journey.

These two were sung by Mar-pa during *ganacakras* in India.

p. 126: Song for Mi-la-ras-pa.

p. 127: Bdag-med-ma's song for Mi-la-ras-pa.

p. 127: Song for Mi-la-ras-pa.

These three are excerpted from Gtsang-smyon's *Life of Mi-la-ras-pa*.

Many of the stanzas included in the biographies concern Mar-pa's gurus' predictions that he would meet Nāropā and his teachings after entering another's body. They are not included here, but the correspondence with other versions is indicated in the above translation of Mdo-sde's biography of Mar-pa.

Topic/setting of the song	Gtsang-smyon (<i>Life</i>)	<i>Mgur mtsho</i>	Ngam-dzong ston-pa	MK25	<i>Rwa-lung Rosary</i>	Rngog-2	"U-rgyan-pa"	KWNG	Dpa'-bo II
1. Song for Jñānagarbha	14								8
2. Song for Śāntibhadra	20							14	11
3. Song for Śāntibhadra	22							15	12
4. Song for Maitrīpā	26							19	14
5. Song for Maitrīpā	28, 31							21 (59)	15
6. Song for Nāropā (<i>dbyangs ring tam bu ra'i khongs rgyud gyi skad</i>)	34	97		435	148	18 ⁹⁰⁹	139	53	18
7. Song of shame to Gnyos	37								19
8. Song for Spyi-ther-pa and Ha-du dkar-po	39								21

⁹⁰⁸ Dpa'-bo II, p. 37.

⁹⁰⁹ Song in which Mar-pa offers his realization to the guru and *dākinīs*. First verse quoted, then declaration that it figures among the "eight songs" (*mgur bryad na yod*).

Topic/setting of the song	Gtsang-smyon (Life)	Mgur mtsbo	Ngam-dzong ston-pa	MK25	Rwa-lung Rosary	Rngog-2	"U-rgyan-pa"	KWNG	Dpa'-bo II
9. Song of Saraha's dream (<i>khyung chen gyi gshog rgyangs lding ba'i skad</i>)	43	102	99 ⁹¹⁰	454	143		110	29	23
10. Song for his disciples ⁹¹¹	53		89 ⁹¹²	464			164	93	30
11. Three songs on Maitripā at Śrībhadrā's request	58, 60, 61							65, 66, 67	38, 39, 40
12. Song for Dar-ma-mdo-sde	68								42
13. Auspicious song	69						166 ₉₁₃		43
14. Song of the three maidens deciphering Nāropā's coded verse	72								44
15. Song of going to India	75	109							46
16. Nāropā's song on the six doctrines and prophecy	95, 100	114						55, 56	55, 59, 61
17. Long song of the Journey for Nāropā (<i>bung ba rgyang ring du 'phur 'gro ba'i sgra</i>)	102	116	97 ⁹¹⁴	430			144	62	65

⁹¹⁰ These songs are cited in Ngam-rdzong ston-pa's text, but not quoted. The titles do not always match those in later biographies but can be identified on the basis of their content, which Ngam-rdzong ston-pa uses in his narrative. The name of the song mentioned here by Ngam-rdzong ston-pa (Mon-rtse-pa: p. 99) is *dpal ri kbrod pa dang mjal ba'i rmis luas mgur*.

⁹¹¹ Song translated in the introduction.

⁹¹² Mon-rtse-pa, p. 89: *Ngo mtshar can gyi mthong brtags rnam's mgur*.

⁹¹³ Version very different from the one in Gtsang-smyon and Dpa'-bo II.

⁹¹⁴ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 97: *lam mgur ring mo*.

Topic/setting of the song	Gtsang-smyon (Life)	Mgur mtsbo	Ngam-dzong ston-pa	MK25	Rwa-lung Rosary	Rngog-2	“U-rgyan-pa”	KWNG	Dpa’-bo II
18. Song for Painḍapa (<i>chos skyong gi bshugs glu’i skad</i>)	108	122	99 ⁹¹⁵	438			149	74	71
19. Song for Abhaya-kīrti	112	126		436			147	72	73
20. Song for Atulyavajra	114	129		441			152	77	75
21. Song on his gurus for Atulyavajra	116	131	glossed	442				78	76
22. Song at the Ramadoli charnel ground	119		glossed			24			78
23. Songs for Painḍapa at Rin-chen-tshul Vihara (<i>chu lcag zil pa can gyi skad</i>)	123, 125, 128	135, 138, 140	98 ⁹¹⁶	445, 447, 448			155, 157, 160	81, 83, 84	80, 82, 83
24. Song for Mes-ston on <i>ganacakra</i>	132			481				107	91
25. Melodious praise of the guru for Mes-ston	134								85
26. Song for Mgo-legs (<i>snang ba zil gyis gnon pa dpa’ bo snang grub gyur pa’i skad</i>)	137		99	460, 463	150	18	161	89	86
27. Song of hardships for his disciples (<i>mnyam gzhag ’phro rgod ’thor ba sdud par byd pal rig pa sems kyil lcags kyul mkha’ ’gro’i smre sngags la rta drangs</i>)	142			466			167	96	89
28. Song for Mar-pa Bya-se	149								99

⁹¹⁵ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 99: *dpal nā ro pa dang mjal lugs dang gdams ngag zhus lugs la sogs pa mgur du bzhes*. The song is dedicated to Mgo-legs in Ngam-dzong ston-pa’s version and may therefore actually correspond to the song quoted in Tsangnyön 1982, p. 137.

⁹¹⁶ Mon-rtse-pa, p. 98: *mtshan ma bshad pa’i mgur*.

Topic/setting of the song	Gtsang-smyon (<i>Life</i>)	<i>Mgur mtsbo</i>	Ngam-dzong ston-pa	MK25	<i>Rwa-lung Rosary</i>	Rngog-2	"U-rgyan-pa"	KWNG	Dpa'-bo II
29. Song for his disciples (on the six doctrines)	150								100
30. Song of realization	153								101 ⁹¹⁷
31. Mdo-sde's death: Mar-pa and Bdag-med-ma's songs	165, 167, 169			470, 472				114, 115, 116	105, 106, 107
32. Song for Bdag-med-ma	178								114
33. Song of the four pillars (<i>rnga sgra rgyal po'i skad</i>)	182, 185	148 ⁹¹⁸		479 ⁹¹⁹					119, 121
34. Song for Mes-ston	189								117
35. Song for Mes-ston	192								117
36. Song on the fame of the lineage ⁹²⁰	195				155		169	105- 106	96, 97

⁹¹⁷ The version of Dpa'-bo II has 19 more verses than Gtsang-smyon's.

⁹¹⁸ The song figures in Mi-la-ras-pa's section rather than in Mar-pa's. The dream and its interpretation are both Mar-pa's, unlike in Gtsang-smyon's and Dpa'-bo II's versions where it is Mi-la-ras-pa's dream and Mar-pa's interpretation. Initially, the song comes from Mi-la-ras-pa's biographical tradition (*Bu chen bcu gnyis*).

⁹¹⁹ Version from the *Mgur mtsbo* (*Rain of Wisdom*, pp. 169–171). It is preceded by Mi-la-ras-pa's song stating that he is going home now that he has received all of Mar-pa's instructions (p. 478).

⁹²⁰ Strictly speaking this is not a *mgur*, but rather verses attributed to Mar-pa and quoted in most biographies, with some modifications. Evocative of Mar-pa's self-confidence and his devotion for his masters, it is the verse I chose to begin building this book.

Appendix 5

Mar-pa's Dates

Text	Year of birth	Year of death
Ngam-rdzong ston-pa	Ø	Ø
Rngog Mdo-sde	Ø	88, <i>bya'i lo, rta'i zla ba'i tshes bcu bzhi pa</i>
Sgam-po-pa	Ø	Ø
<i>Mdo-chen Rosary</i>	Ø	Ø
Rngog-1	Ø	Ø
Rngog-2	Ø	80, <i>bya yi lo rta yi zla ba brgyad ba'i tshes bcu bzhi'i nyi ma rtse shar</i>
Bla-ma Zhang	Ø	Ø
KSTC	Ø	Ø
Don-mo-ri-pa	Ø	88, <i>bya lo rta zla ba'i tshes bcu bzhi</i>
“U-rgyan-pa”	Ø	ms: 84, <i>bya lo rta zla'i tshes bcu bzhi'i nyi ma shar</i>
Rgyal-thang-pa	Ø	80, <i>bya'i lo dpyid zla dang po'i tshes bcu</i>
<i>Rwa-lung Rosary</i>	Ø	80, <i>dpyid zla ra ba stag gi zla ba'i yar tshes bcu bzhi</i>
<i>Deb ther dmar po</i>	<i>bya lo</i>	88 (= <i>byi</i>)
Mkha'-spyod-dbang-po	Ø	80, <i>bya'i lo rta'i zla'i yar tshes 3</i>
<i>Rosary of Jewels</i>	<i>bya lo</i>	89, <i>glang lo yos kyi zla ba'i tshes bcu bzhi bya'i nyi ma</i>
<i>Opening Eyes</i>	<i>shing pho byi</i> (1024)	84, <i>me phag gi lo</i> (1107)
<i>Lho rong chos 'byung</i>	<i>me mo bya</i> (997)	87, <i>shing mo glang</i> (1085)
Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje	Ø	88
Kun-dga'-dpal-'byor	<i>shing pho byi</i> (1024)	84, <i>me phag gi lo</i> (1107)
<i>Deb ther sngon po</i>	<i>chu pho byi</i> (1012)	86, <i>me mo glang</i> (1097)
Gtsang-smyon Heruka	Ø	88, <i>bya'i lo rta'i zla ba'i tshes pa bco lnga</i>
Rgod-tshang-ras-pa	Ø	80, <i>bya yi lo rta pa'i zla ba'i tshes bcu bzhi</i>
Kun-dga'-rin-chen	Ø	<i>bya'i lo rta'i zla ba'i tshes pa bcu bzhi</i>
Byang-chub-bzang-po	<i>chu pho byi</i> (1012)	84, <i>shing lo phag</i> (1095)
Dpa'-bo II	<i>lcags byi</i> (1000)	86, <i>shing mo glang</i> (1085)
<i>Mtshur phu gdung rabs</i>	[Ø]	89, <i>sa pho 'brug</i> (1088)
Padma-dkar-po		88
<i>Stag lung chos 'byung</i>	<i>chu pho byi</i> (1012)	86, <i>me mo glang</i> (1097)
Tshe-dbang-nor-bu	<i>lcags byi</i> (1000)	82, <i>lcags bya</i> (1081)
<i>Rosary of Crystal Gems</i>	<i>lcags byi</i> (1000)	82, <i>lcags mo bya</i> (1081)

As evidenced in the previous chart and as was made clear in the above discussion on each individual biography, to definitely settle the matter of Mar-pa's dates of birth and death seems to be an illusory quest since none of the biographies agree on the subject and no outside information can help us ascertain which is correct. Andrew Quintman studied the similar puzzle presented by Mi-la-ras-pa's dates in his 2015 article entitled "Wrinkles in Time: On the Problem of Mi la ras pa's Dates."⁹²¹ He concluded that Tibetan biographers and historians, on the basis of widely diverging primary sources, eventually formulated three main traditions: 1028–1111, 1040–1123 and 1052–1135. Most Bka'-brgyud biographers chose the early tradition; the *Lho rong chos 'byung* and *Deb ther sngon po* preferred the middle one (followed by most Western scholars); and the late tradition was introduced by the *Opening Eyes* and adopted by Gtsang-smyon.

The dates of Mar-pa's birth and death can pretty much be classified along similar lines: 1000–1081; 1012–1097 and 1024–1107, although the texts formulating these traditions are not the same. It must be remarked that it was not until the 14th and especially 15th century, first in the *Rosary of Jewel Ornaments* and then in the *Opening Eyes*, that an element was added to the animal of the year in order to precise it. Until that point, almost all biographies state that Mar-pa died in a bird year, that is to say 1081, 1093 or 1105, whether in his 80th or 88th year. Later versions, trying to be more precise, started to diverge on the death year and proposed an ox year (1085 or 1097), or, more rarely (the *Opening Eyes* and those which follow it), a pig year (1107).

The "early tradition" starts with the Rngog rosaries and the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, where the dates 997–1085 are provided. The "late version" (1024–1107) comes from the *Opening Eyes*, and the "middle way" (1012–1097) is followed mainly by the *Deb ther sngon po*. Later Tibetan historians generally chose the early tradition, with some variation. Thus, the 2nd Dpa'-bo indicates 1000–1085, and Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu (followed by 'Be-lo) advances the death by a few years, in 1081, in order to fit with the bird year claimed in early biographies.

In keeping with what most late Bka'-brgyud historians eventually settled on, I tend to prefer the earlier tradition, that is to say the one that considers that Mar-pa was born around the millennium and died in the early to mid-1080s. This, I believe, fits with the alleged lifetime of the masters who interacted with Mar-pa, though it must be said that the dates of most personages of that period are very uncertain and in most cases only relative. In what

⁹²¹ See Quintman 2015, in particular his conclusion on pp. 13–14.

follows, I will therefore present relevant sources that led me to this choice and shortly try these favored dates on masters who interacted with Mar-pa.

Most later sources, starting with the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, and then Dpa'-bo and 'Be-lo, justified their favoring of an early date by relying on what they call the "Rngog tradition," and especially the *Rnam thar rim bzhi pa*, composed by Rngog Rin-chen-bzang-po, currently unavailable. Details about Mar-pa from this biography are nonetheless available in two 14th and 15th-century Rngog rosaries. The later one, the *Rosary of Jewels* states:⁹²²

When [Rngog Mdo-sde] reached his eighth year, the Venerable Mar-pa (as a bird-year native) passed away at 89, (on the 14th day of the hare month of an ox year) (on the day of the bird).

The date of Mar-pa's death provided by the two rosaries is quite precise. According to them, it was an ox year, when Mdo-sde was eight. As Mdo-sde is said to be born in 1078 (by the *Lho rong chos 'byung*) or 1090 (by the *Deb sngon*), this can either be 1085 or 1097. The hare month is the second month in the calendar, so the 14th day of that month would be either 10 March 1085 or 2 March 1097. If he was in his 89th year at that time, then he may be born in 996 or 1008.⁹²³

The *Rosaries* never provide the year elements of early characters. Later sources on the Rngog clan such as the *Lho rong chos 'byung* and the *Deb ther sngon po*, which are almost exclusively based on these accounts, specified the exact year, the former generally choosing one cycle earlier than the latter. In almost all Rngog cases, the *Lho rong chos 'byung*'s dates seemed preferable.⁹²⁴ Thus, in relative chronology, choosing early dates for Chos-rdor and Rngog Mdo-sde meant to also choose early dates for Mar-pa, who is supposed to die when Mdo-sde is in his eighth year. This is why the *Lho rong chos 'byung* considers that Mar-pa was born in 997 (choosing a life-span of 88 years rather 89), and died in 1085.⁹²⁵ That same text later allows some leeway,

⁹²² *Rosary of Jewels*, p. 36: *gung lo brygad lon tsa nal rje btsun mar pa rgya bcu rtsa dgu la (gung snying bya lo glang lo yos kyi zla ba'i tshes bcu bzhi bya'i nyi ma) gshegs sol* The earlier *Rosary of Precious Ornaments*, p. 11, gives the same information. See above, pp. 124–126 for details. See MKNT, pp. 187–188, for Mdo-sde's version, and Rngog-2, p. 27, for Chos-rdor's version. Both give a bird year, but in Mar-pa's 88th year for Mdo-sde and 80th year for Chos-rdor.

⁹²³ According to Dpa'-bo II, p. 4, "89" is a mistaken reading of the *rNam thar rim bzhi pa*, which has 86. Accordingly, he favors the years 1000–1085.

⁹²⁴ See my forthcoming dissertation for details.

⁹²⁵ *Lho rong*, p. 31: "He was born in 997 (*me mo bya*) as the son of Mar-pa Dbang-phyug-'od-zer and Skal-ldan-skyid."

stating that the birth dates could be postponed by two to five years,⁹²⁶ and justifies its choice by the accounts found in biographies and songs.⁹²⁷ Thus, if we choose to follow the Rngog accounts and the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, which is what most later Bka'-brgyud historians did, we can consider that Mar-pa was born at the turn of the millennium (between 997 and 1002), and died in 1085, or 1081 if we give credit to the bird year claimed in early biographies.

Let us now correlate these dates to the masters who interacted with Mar-pa, first those who met him as a youth, Gnyos Lo-tśā-ba and 'Brog-mi Lo-tśā-ba. Their lifetimes are not known for certain, thus it is difficult to be assertive on this basis. Gnyos' date of birth (973) is generally calculated on the basis of Mar-pa's dates from the *Deb sngon* (1012) and on the two men's alleged 39-year age gap indicated by the Gnyos family account. Although the reliability of this account is questionable as it states that Gnyos died in his 140th year,⁹²⁸ we could consider that he lived from around 961 to 1100. Whether we choose these early dates or one cycle later, Mar-pa can have interacted with him.

The problem is more acute as regards Mar-pa's relationship with 'Brog-mi, whom he is supposed to meet as a teen upon 'Brog-mi's return from Nepal and India. 'Brog-mi Lo-tśā-ba's generally recognized dates, 993–1077, were only specified rather late, in Mang-thos Klu-grub-rgya-mtsho's late 16th-century account.⁹²⁹ According to Davidson, it is likely that we will never reach certainty in this matter but he thinks that 'Brog-mi may have been conducting his studies in the first quarter of the 11th century, was teaching from the second quarter onward and did not live very far into the third quarter of that century. It is by taking this into consideration that Davidson chose the later tradition of Mar-pa's date of birth from the *Open-*

⁹²⁶ *Lho rong*, p. 49: “We may also examine the possibility that this Venerable was either born two years later, in 999 (*sa mo phag*) and died in his 86th year, or that he was born five years later, in 1002 (*chu pho rtag*), and died in his 84th year, in 1085 (*shing mo glang*). The *Opening Eyes* says that he was born in 1024 (*shing pho byi*) and that he died in his 84th year, in 1107 (*me mo phag*). If lord Mar-pa died in that year, Mi-la was then in his 68th year and Rngog Mdo-sde in his 31st year, which does not fit.” The *Lho rong chos 'byung* argues with the *Opening Eyes* as this text is acknowledged as the main source, although it is clear that with regards to Mar-pa and the Rngogs, Tshe-dbang-rgyal favored the Rngog accounts over that of Glangs-lha-gzigs Ras-pa.

⁹²⁷ *Lho rong*, p. 50: “That Mar-pa was 40 when he last returned to Tibet and that when he died Mdo-sde was 8 is clear in both biographies and songs”.

⁹²⁸ “Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs khyad par 'phags pa,” p. 16.

⁹²⁹ Davidson 2005, pp. 163–165.

ing Eyes,⁹³⁰ and the same may explain why 'Go Lo-tsā-ba chose the unattested year of 1012.⁹³¹ If, on the contrary, we chose the early tradition, then it would mean that Mar-pa went to Myu-gu-lung around 1015, and 'Brog-mi's dates should be advanced by at least one cycle. Thus, it is difficult to reach certainty, especially as Myu-gu-lung is sometimes claimed to have been founded in 1043.⁹³²

If Mar-pa was born around the millennium, it would mean that he was in his early to mid-forties when Nāropā died in 1040.⁹³³ This date is among the rare ones where there is some "certainty" as it derives from Nag-tsho's account of Atiśa's arrival in Tibet with some of Nāropā's relics, which were enshrined in a stūpa in Atiśa's Sgrol-ma-lha-khang in Snye-thang.⁹³⁴ In one of his most famous songs, the one sung for Painḍapa at the Rin-chen-tshul Temple,⁹³⁵ Mar-pa states—just before his final return to Tibet—that he spent two-thirds of his life in India, identifying the previous year as a serpent one. Biographies that chose the early tradition generally use this song to consider that Mar-pa returned to Tibet definitely in 1042 and identified the serpent year as 1041. 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba modified quite deeply this general progression, by referring to two journeys only and by placing the beginning of the second one at the point when Nāropā enters the practice (which should probably be considered his death in this case), that is to say in the early 1040s. This journey then lasts at least ten years, and Mar-pa returns to Tibet in 1053, at the age of 41. While this cannot be ruled out, it makes it necessary to modify more deeply the general presentation given in the biographies as well as the fact that it is stated in Mar-pa's song that the serpent year was the previous one.⁹³⁶

⁹³⁰ Davidson 2005, pp. 143 and 402, n. 84, for a list of the sources on Mar-pa's life used by Davidson. It must be noted that in this discussion, Davidson mistranslates the *Lhorong chos 'byung*, which gives *me mo bya* as birth year (p. 31) and proposes further choices later in the text (p. 49, as translated in n. 926 above). Davidson took the latter to be the actual dates.

⁹³¹ *Deb sngon*, p. 483.

⁹³² Davidson 2005, p. 164. This date may be one cycle late according to Davidson, but maybe more if earlier dates for Mar-pa are accepted. It is also possible that Mar-pa came to 'Brog-mi's place before its official founding.

⁹³³ Wylie 1984; Harding 2010.

⁹³⁴ See above, pp. 224–225, for bibliographical sources.

⁹³⁵ See Tsangnyön 1982, p. 123, for a translation and above, p. 298, for correspondences in other biographies.

⁹³⁶ For instance, "U-rgyan-pa," p. 156: *dus na ning gdub ba <gdug pa> sprul gyi lo*, "last year, the dangerous snake year."

Finally, as regards Mi-la-ras-pa's relationship with Mar-pa, Gtsang-smyon states that the yogi met Mar-pa before his last journey to India and that he played an instrumental role therein by requesting Mar-pa to go to India in order to receive some missing teachings of the Aural Transmission.⁹³⁷ This is difficult to account for even if we chose the early tradition of Mi-la-ras-pa's dates (1028–1111). The origin of this account is unclear, but it is not widespread in the biographies. It is possible that it was a later narrative that developed within the Aural Transmission and that Gtsang-smyon included it in order to reinforce Mi-la-ras-pa's role in his master's life.

From this short presentation it can be concluded that—although we do not have conclusive data—it is possible to accept that Mar-pa was born around the millennium and died in the early to mid 1080s. Exact dates are out of question since it is unlikely that Mar-pa himself knew exactly when he was born as his birth took place before the introduction of the Kālacakra calendar and the beginning of the first *rab 'byung* cycle in 1027. It is possible, however, that the Rngog clan did keep a good track of their early history, and thus that Mar-pa indeed died when Rngog Mdo-sde was in his eighth year. Thus, taking this into account as well as the general concordance of biographies and songs with an early dating, it seems reasonable to favor this early tradition.

⁹³⁷ One must note that this account cannot be completely dismissed as it is in line with the introduction to the “Rje btsun lho brag pa'i khyad par gyi gdams pa snyan gyi shog dril bzhi'i lo rgyus gzhung lhan thabs dang bcas pa” found in the *Gdams ngag mdzod*, vol. 8, p. 204. See Mei 2009, pp. 29–36 for a study of this collection. According to her (p. 34), the compiler lived in the late 13th century.

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