‘FLOW OF THE RIVER GANGĀ’:
THE GSAN-YIG OF THE FIFTH DALAI BLA-MA AND
ITS LITERARY SOURCES*

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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been observed that from the eleventh century onwards one main concern of Tibetan authors was to determine the authenticity of the Buddhist texts received from India and thereby establish different lineages of transmission, by which means they were able to trace back any specific teaching either to the historical Buddha or to such representatives of Buddhahood as Vajradhāra or Samantabhadra. These efforts resulted in a specific literary genre known as the “record [of teachings] heard” (gsan yig) or “record [of teachings] obtained” (thob yig). The term gsan-yig seems to have made its appearance in the thirteenth century.

One crucial source for an investigation into these lines of transmission is the enormous gsan-yig of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho (1617-1682), consisting of four volumes from among his collected writings. Besides the great number of individual texts and lineages it mentions, this work is of particular importance for its references to earlier texts of the same genre and its discussion of divergent views on specific textual transmissions. The Great Fifth was thus actively engaged in what has been called “comparative gsan yig-ology.” 1 In the following I shall give an overview of the structure and content of this fascinating work of Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho, and then look into the literary sources he used for its composition. My special interest is the treatment of the rNying-ma-pa school and the transmission of the Tantra collection known as rNyin ma rgyud ’bum.

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2. THE MAIN SECTIONS

The two main sections of the work, which bears the title “Flow of the River Gangāi” (gangā'i chu rgyun), are concerned with the “stream of prātimokṣa vows, [which are] a door for entering into the Buddhist doctrine” (bstan par ’jug pa’i sgo so thar pa’i sdom rgyun) and the “cycle of the knowledge of the five objects which are to be heard and reflected on after entering [the Buddhist doctrine]” (zhugs nas thos bsam bya ba gnas inga rig pa’i skor).

The second section is subdivided into a treatment of the “common objects of knowledge” (thun mong pa’i rig pa’i gnas) and a treatment of the “uncommon inner knowledge” (thun mong ma yin pa nang gi rig pa); the former deals with texts and lineages concerning the subjects of grammar, logic, medicine and Buddhist craftsmanship, and the latter with the philosophical and spiritual traditions of the Buddhist doctrine as such. The gsan-yig of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma is thus structured for the most part around the principle of the “five objects of knowledge” (rig gnas inga).²

The comprehensive chapter devoted to Buddhist teachings as such is made up of three parts: a presentation of the “vehicle of the cause” (rgyu mtshan nyid kyi theg pa), the “vehicle of the mantras [which is] the result” (bras bu sngags kyi theg pa), and the “cycle of the complete translations of the words of the Mahāmuni which are the root of all these [teachings]” (de dag kun gyi rtsa bar gyur pa thub pa chen po’i bka’ ‘gyur ro cog gi skor).

Looking first into the third part, dealing with the collections of texts regarded as the translated pronouncements of the Buddha Śākyamuni himself, we see that the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma provides a useful sketch of the traditional view of the development of the Buddhist scriptural canon. This sketch places the first appearance of texts at the time of the mythical king lHa Tho-tho-ri, and then follows the two phases of the earlier and later translation periods up to the compilation of the first manuscript bka’-‘gyur in dPal sNar-thang and a catalogue of it by bCom-lDan Rig-pa’i ral-gri (1227-1305).³

After delineating the further history of the collection along with the version of it produced by the Tshal-pa lords of Central Tibet in the fourteenth century and the rGyal-rtse Them-spang-ma edition of 1431, that is, the two lines of transmission called by modern Kanjur research “common Kanjurs”,⁴ the Dalai Bla-ma then points to the Sa-skya-pa scholar Kun-dga’ rnam-rgyal (1432-1496) from Gong-dkar rdo-rje gdan as an important link in the transmission of the “[reading-]authorization” (lung) of the collection.

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Particularly worth noting are the remarks of Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho on the different ways the reading of this huge collection was actually performed. The transmission reached the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma through his teacher Khra-tshang-pa, also known as sMan-lung-pa Blo-gros mchog rdo-rje (1607-1671).

3. THE TANTRA COLLECTIONS

After further discussion of this scriptural canon and its central writings in relation to the Three Turnings of the Wheel of the Doctrine, the final part of this section—and of the gsan-yig as a whole—treats the different collections of Tantras, the so-called rgyud 'bum. These collections bear the qualification of “having reached the very peak of all the vehicles” (theg pa thams cad kyi yang rtser son pa). They are divided into the “Tantras of the Early Translations” (snga 'gyur gyi rgyud) and the “Tantras of the Later Translations” (phyi 'gyur gyi rgyud).

The section on the first group of Tantras is introduced by elaborating on the authenticity of these works, which had been approved by scholars like 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba gZhon-nu dpal (1392-1481), Khrims-khang Lo-tsā-ba bSod-nams rgya-mtsho (1424-1482), and the Fourth Zhva-dmar-pa Chos-kyi grags-pa (1453-1524).

Concerning the collection of Tantras of the Early Translations known as rNying ma rgyud 'bum, Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho states that it had consisted originally of texts belonging to the bKa' ma transmission, a great number of gter-ma texts being only added for the edition produced at lHun-grub pho-brang by the “treasure-discoverer” (gter ston) Ratna gling-pa (1403-1478). He quotes in this respect the gsan-yig of the Third Pad-gling gsung-sprul Tshul-khrims rdo-rje (1598-1669), a person occupying a central position in the transmission of this version of the rNying ma rgyud 'bum. Tshul-khrims rdo-rje gave readings of the collection to the previously mentioned sMan-lung-pa Blo-gros mchog rdo-rje and to Gong-ra Lo-chen gZhan-phan rdo-rje (1594-1654); the latter teacher was responsible for transmitting the rNying ma rgyud 'bum to the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma.5

As it is a worthwhile endeavour to look into the list of the gsan yig and further literature of the rNying-ma-pa school quoted at the beginning of the section of the different cycles of the Tantras of the Early Translations, I shall present this introduction in appendix I.

The following section, on the Tantras of the Later Translations, is also introduced by a note, albeit a quite short one. The Fifth Dalai Bla-ma makes the point that the transmission of this rgyud 'bum collection follows for the greater part the “Tradition of Ngor” (ngor lugs), the source for the authenticity of these texts being the rGyud

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‘bum gyi dkar chag of Bu-ston Rin-chen grub (1290-1364). The section ends with a presentation of the different cycles of the Tantras of the Later Translations.

4. THE bKA’-gdams-pa LINEAGES AND FURTHER COLLECTIONS

We have now to return to the first part of the comprehensive chapter on the Buddhist doctrine, the one dealing with the “vehicle of the cause”, that is, with the exoteric texts and their transmission lineages. Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho uses here the scheme of the “Six Ornaments” (rgyan drug) and the “Two Excellent Ones” (mchog gnyis) to sketch the teachings of the most outstanding masters of Indian Buddhism. The notion of the “Two Excellent Ones” refers to the Vinaya teachers Gunaprabha and Śākyaprabha, and the metaphor of the Six Ornaments stands for Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, and Dignāga and Dharmakīrti; their names being associated respectively with the basic texts of the Madhyamaka, Abhidharma and Pramāṇa traditions. It has already been observed that the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma replaced the broken Abhidharmakośa lineage with the Abhidharmasamuccaya lineage – an intriguing case which shows that these lineage lists are not just passive historical sources, but “texts” with interesting histories of their own to tell. 65

Reading through this part of the gsan-yig soon makes it obvious that the transmission lineages pass in a great number of cases through teachers of the bKa’-gdams-pa school. We are thus provided with an instructive picture of the Tibetan traditions and scriptures which adapted the basic Indian sources (for example, in the form of the blo-sbyong and lam-rim teachings).

The Fifth Dalai Bla-ma refers on several occasions when dealing with these lineages to the gsan-yig of one of the Lo-pa spyan-snga—this title of the abbots of Lo-dgon-pa, which was founded in 1095 by sPyan-snga-pa Tshul-khrims ’bar (1038-1103), one of the three well-known disciples of ‘Brom-ston rGyal-ba’i byung-gnas (1005-1064); the important role of the 20th to 22nd throneholders of Lo-dgon-pa in transmitting the teachings of Po-to-ba (1027/31)—another of the three disciples—has already been noted on the basis of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma’s work.7 The last section of this part of the work is mainly concerned with the “Hundred-some Small Teachings of Lord [Atiśa]” (jo bo’i chos chung brya brtse), among which we find the Bodhisattvamāṇḍāvalī, the main literary work of the bKa’gdams glegs bam collection of texts. Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho twice critiques the gsan-yig of the Second dPa’bo sPrul-sku gTsug-lag phreng-ba (1504-1566) with regard to this work; these remarks are given in interlinear notes to the main text.8

8 F.-K. Ehrhard: “The Transmission of the Thig-le bcu-drug and the bKa’ gdams glegs bam”.

The second part of the comprehensive chapter on the Buddhist doctrine has as its subject the “Vehicle of the Mantras [which is] the Result”. It is divided into the “Secret Mantras Translated Later” (gsang sngags phyi ‘gyur) and the “Secret Mantras Translated Earlier” (gsang sngags snga ‘gyur). The first section has again three subdivisions, called “Pronouncements Set Apart” (zur bka’), “General Pronouncements” (spyi bka’) and “Supplement” (zhar byung). The first of these subdivisions deals with the texts and lineages of the four Tantra classes codified by the new translations, namely the Kriya-, Cārya-, Yoga- and Anuttarayogatantras; it takes up most of the first volume of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma’s “record [of teachings] heard”.

The second subdivision is by comparison quite short, describing compilations of Indian tantric teachings and how they were transmitted to Tibet. It begins with the so-called “three cycles” (skor gsum) of Abhayākaragupta (11th/12th cent.)—Vajrāvalī, Jyotirmāñjarī and Nīṣpanṇayogāvalī—and continues with collections like the sGrub thabs bsdus pa, sGrub thabs brgya rtsa and sNar thang brgya rtsa. The final teachings are those of the “direct instructions” (dmar khrid) of Mahākarunika.

The third subdivision is mainly concerned with the transmission of the “Collected Writings” (gsung ’bum) of Tibetan teachers, including the “Five Superior Ones” (gong ma lnga) of the Sā-skya-pa school and rGyal-sras Thogs-med bzang-po (1295-1369), a teacher of the late bKa’-gdams-pa school. In it we also find lists of the contents of the writings of Bla-ma Zhang g.Yu-brag-pa (1123-1193) and the works of Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang grags-pa (1357-1419). The section ends with the writings of ’Khon-ston dPal’byor lhun-grub (1561-1637), which had reached the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma through the rNying-ma-pa master Zur Chos-dbyings rang-grol (1610-1657).

5. THE rNying-ma-pa Teachings

By far the longest part of the gsan-yig of Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho is made up of teachings and lineages of the “Secret Mantras Translated Earlier”. This part is structured according to the distinction between “Continuous [Transmission of the] Pronouncements” (bka’ ma) and the “Rediscovered [Teachings]” (gter ma). The first section contains interesting investigations into the Ati- and Anuyoga traditions, the Guhyagarbhatantra, and the bKa’ brgyad and Phur pa cycles. It also contains details concerning the g.Yu thog snying thig of g.Yu-thog Yon-tan mgon-po (1127-1203) and the Bye ba ring bsrel of Zur mKhar-ba mNyam-nyid rdo-rje (1439-1475), two influential teaching lineages of the Tibetan medical tradition, which the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma was part of.9

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The section concerning the *gter-ma* teachings is a veritable gold mine for future research on the contents and history of the cycles of individual treasure-discoverers, and the evaluation of this wealth of material has just begun. I may here just refer to the lineage of the Mahākārulkṣṇa teachings of the cycle *Thugs rje chen po ’gro ’dul yid bzhin nor bu* of mNga’-bdag Nyang-ral Nyi-ma’i ’od-zer (1124-1196), which played an important role in the history of the *Mani bka’ ’bum* collection; the *gsan-yig* of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma explicitly states that this lineage was kept alive by members of the Bo-dong-pa school.10

Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho remarks at the beginning of this section that he used a prayer by one of the exponents of this tradition as a literary source for the presentation of their *treasure-discoverers* and their “teaching [and] birth lineages” (*chos skye brgyud*). This is the *sPrul sku gter ston grangs nges kyi gsol ’debs*, written by Byang-bdag bKra-shis stobs-rgyal (1550-1602). There also exists a commentary on this prayer with the short title *gTer ston chos ’byung*; it is a composition of Karma Mi’gyur dbang-gi rgyal-po, one of the teachers of sMan-lung-pa Blo-gros mchog rdo-rje.11

An overview of the complete *gsan-yig* and its individual chapters and subdivisions is presented in appendix II; particular emphasis is laid on the large section concerning the *gter-ma* teachings and the different treasurer-discoverers of the rNying-ma-pa school. The structure of later section should be compared with the prayer of Byang-bdag bKra-shis stobs-rgyal.

6. THE COLOPHON AND THE LITERARY SOURCES

The colophon of the *gsan-yig* of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma informs us that the work was written between the years 1665 and 1670 in the Potala palace, and it provides an exhaustive list of further literary sources used by Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho for its composition. Primarily he relied on the “records [of teachings] heard” of six persons, their bearing qualifying them as “noble mentors” (*yongs ’dzin dam pa*). These were rDo-rje ’chang-pa Pha-bong kha-pa [= ’Khon-ston dPal-’byor lhun-grub], Zur Thams-cad mkhyen-pa [= Zur Chos-dbyings rang-grol], Khyab-bdag gNas-gsar chen-po [= mGon-po bSod-nams mchog-lidan (1603-1659)], ’Khor-lo’i mgon-po Zhva-lu mKhan-ch’en [= Rin-ch’en bSod-nams mchog-grub (1602-1681)], mKhas-grub chen-po Khra-tshang-pa [= sMan-lung-pa Blo-mchog rdo-rje] and Chos-rgyal gTer-bdag gling-pa [= Padma Gar-dbang ’Gyur-med rdo-rje (1646-1714)].

These teachers belong to the dGe-lugs-pa, the rNying-ma-pa and the Sa-skya-pa school of Tibetan Buddhism, a prominent place being taken by ‘Khon-ston dpal-

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'byor lhun-grub, who was holding both teaching lineages of the rNying-ma-pa and dGe-lugs-pa schools and had acted as abbot of Se-ra monastery.\textsuperscript{12}

Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho must have been well acquainted with their writings, having composed biographies of five of them, namely the dGe-lugs-pa master, 'Khon-ston dpal-'byor lhun-grub, the Sa-skya-pa masters mGon-po bSod-nams mchog-idan and Rin-chen bSod-nams mchog-grub (both of whom held the oral transmission of the Tshar-chen tradition), and the rNying-ma-pa masters Zur Chos-dbyings rang-grol and sMan-lung-pa Blo-mchog rdo-rje. Up to now, apparently, only the gsan-yig of gTer-bdag gling-pa has surfaced.

As “auxiliary material” (khol bu) for the composition of the gsan-yig, the corresponding works of eight persons were used. This list starts with Bu-ston Rin-chen grub and Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang grags-pa and contains, besides a certain Phag-mo-gru mKhan-po 'Bum-ram-pa Kun-dga' Chos-dbang lhun-grub, the names of other well-known teachers of the Sa-skya-pa school. These are Ngor-pa rDo-rje 'chang Kun-dga' bzang-po (1382-1456), the previously mentioned Kun-dga’ mam-rgyal—also known as Kun-mkhyen rDo-rje gdan-pa ’Jigs-med dpa’-bo—Zhva-lu sKu-zhang mKhyen-rab Chos-rje [= Rin-chen mKhyen-rab mchog-grub (1436-1497)], rDo-ring Rin-po-che [= Kun-spang Kun-bzang Chos-kyi nyi-ma (1449-1524)] and Tshar-chen [= Chos-rje Blo-gsal rgya-mtsho (1502-1566)].

The longest list of names of authors whose “records [of teachings] heard” the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma used concerns works “analyzed in detail” (zhib mor dpyad pa). Here we find, for example, Thams-cad mkhyen-pa mKhyen-btse dbang-phug (1524-1568), another member of the Tshar-chen tradition of the Sa-skya-pa school, and rJe Kun-dga’ grol-mchog (1507-1566), an important figure of the Jo-nang-pa school, whose gsan-yig is available and bears the title Dam pa’i chos kyi thob yig bstan pa’i nor rdzas.\textsuperscript{13} This list comprises twenty persons in all, but I will concentrate in the following only on widely known representatives of the rNying-ma-pa school.

The list begins with the name of Ratna gling-pa, the “treasure-discoverer [who is] an incarnation” (sprul pa’i gter ston), and ends with the names of Pad-gling gsung-sprul Tshul-khrims rdo-rje and Dar-sdings Rig’dzin ’Phrin-las lhun-grub (1611-1662). We encountered the first two persons earlier in the context of the transmission of the rNying ma rgyud ’bum, the gsan-yig of these lineage-holders being among those discussed by Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho at the beginning of the presentation of the different cycles of the Tantras of the Early Translations; the one of Pad-gling gsung-sprul is known at least by title: dKar chag snga ‘gyur bstan pa’i nub pa’i rgyal mtshan.\textsuperscript{14}

The work of Dar-sdings Rig-'dzin 'Phrin-las lhun-grub is compared with that of Gong-ra Lo-chen gZhan-phan rdo-rje; this suggests a relationship between these two masters, and indeed the latter is known to have been the teacher of the former. Also figuring in this line of transmission is Chos-rgyal gTer-bdag gling-pa, whose gsan-yig is among those quoted in this section. In treating the different cycles of the doctrine of the “Great Perfection” (rdzogs chen), the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma in the end bases his classification on the gsan-yig of the treasure-discoverer Ratna gling-pa, whom he quotes under his alternative name, Zhig-po gling-pa Rin-chen dpal-bzang.

In this interesting section are further mentioned the gsan-yig of mNga’-ris Pān-chen Padma dbang-rgyal rdo-rje (1487-1542) and his younger brother Rig-’dzin Legs-ladan bKra-shis stobs-rgyal are also to be found in the list of twenty persons whose works have been “analyzed in detail”. All three figures belong to the tradition of the “Northern Treasures” (byang gter), which can be described as the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma’s preferred lineage among the treasure-cycles of the rNying-ma-pa school. One link in this tradition is Glo-bo dzar-pa sNgags-’chang Chos-rgyal bsod-nams (1442-1509); his name turns up in the mentioned list immediately after that of the treasure-discoverer Ratna gling-pa.

A fourth list of persons contains authors to whose gsan-yig the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma had no direct access at the time he composed his work. Here we find two members of the 'Bri-khung-pa and two members of the Sa-skya-pa school; these are 'Bri-khung Chos-rgyal Rin-chen phun-tshogs (1509-1557), 'Bri-khung Chos-kyi grags-pa (1595-1661), rTse-gdong Khri-chen Kun-dga’ bsod-nams lhun-grub (1571-1642) and Sa-skya Khri-chen Ngag-dbang Kun-dga’ bsod-nams (1597-1659). The list is rounded out by a certain 'Dar-nag Rig-’dzin rGyal-sras bDe-ba bzang-po.

As the gsan-yig of Ngag-dbang Kun-dga’ bsod-nams (the renowned Sa-skya-pa master and historian generally known under his short name A-mes zhabs) has been discovered recently, it is now possible to investigate in detail the transmissions he was part of, and use them, for example, as source material for bibliographical studies. The twelve lists of teaching lineages given in this particular gsan-yig from the 17th century contain transmissions which A-mes zhabs had received from the rTse-gdong Khri-chen Kun-dga’ bsod-nams lhun-grub.\(^{15}\)

In the case of Ngag-dbang Kun-dga’ bsod-nams the stylistic peculiarities in the presentation of the names of individual teachers have already been investigated, and it has been noted that there exist several ways of “ornamenting” a whole lineage by giving all names in Sanskrit.\(^{16}\) These kind of stylistic observations could also be

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applied to the work of Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtso, an author known for his interest in the Sanskrit language.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Let me close this general survey of the gsan-yig of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma and its literary sources with a note on sNgags-’chang Chos-rgyal bsod-nams, another teacher belonging to the tradition of the Northern Treasures. His name turns up in a quite prominent place in the list of works “analyzed in detail,” where he is styled as Glo-bo dzar-pa. He was thus a native of Southern “Mustang” (glo bo) in present-day Nepal, the village of Dzar being located in the Muktināth valley.

There exists biographical material on him which provides some insight into his life. He travelled extensively after his initial training in the remote Himālayas, visiting first the Kathmandu Valley in 1464, where he met Vanaratna (1384-1468), the famous Buddhist Pāṇḍita from Chittagong. One year later, in 1465, he received in Central Tibet the name Chos-rgyal bSod-nams from Rin-chen dpal bzang-po (1421/22-1467), the head of the 'Bri-khung-pa school at the time. In 1467 he reached the sacred site of Ri-bo bkra-bzang in La-stod Byang, and there obtained from a teacher called Sangs-rgyas byams-bzang or Sangs-rgyas dpal-bzang the transmissions of the Northern Treasures. Soon afterwards he arrived in rDo-rje gdan, that is, Bodhgāya, in India. Information that he spent one year in China at the famous pilgrimage site Ri-bo rtse-lnga also survives.17

The above examples should be ample proof that the enormous seventeenth-century “record [of teachings] heard” composed by the religious and political head of Tibet can shed a good deal of light on rather obscure persons and lineages if supplemented by additional historical sources. In order to get an overview of the whole text and to facilitate further research the internal structure of the complete gsan-yig is given in Appendix II.

It has been noted that this work “has some bibliographical importance as it gives the titles of a very large number of works along with the names of their authors and sometimes even the circumstances under which they were compiled”, accompanied by the statement that “despite the large number of historical personnages mentioned, this extensive work has little historical significance, for it gives nothing more than mere names of these persons.”18 These observations can be seen to reflect a particular period in the development of Tibetan and Buddhist studies, when the literary sources the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma used for the composition of his work were not yet available.

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Although we are still far away from the point in time when all these gsan-yig will be before us simultaneously, we can at least try to track down the different literary traditions and find out more about the authors and textual transmissions they promulgated. We may be said to be following the example of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma himself and engaging in “comparative gsan yig-ology”.

APPENDIX I

_Zab pa dang rgya che ba’i dam pa’i chos kyi thob yig gang gā’i chu rgyun_, in “The Collected Works (Gsung-’bum) of Vth Dalai Lama Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho“, vol. 4, Gangtok: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1992, pp. 411.1-412.5:

“The identification to which [section] the individual tantras belong, not only that [they belong] in general to the Great Perfection [teaching], [there exist] many different opinions of the individual ācāryas at the time of [the classification] the three yogas [i.e. Mahā-, Anu- and Atiyoga]. Also concerning the Great Perfection [teaching] there exist in the registers, historical works, records of teachings heard and so forth of the previous masters many expositions of conflicting positions; although they are in reality not contradictory, it is on a provisional level difficult to bring all the different ways of explanation into one agreeing opinion.

Even if these days the textual transmission and the doctrinal transmission, [these] two, [of the teachings contained] in the old historical works and the records of teachings heard of the Pan-chen brothers [i.e. mNga’-ris Pan-chen Padma dbang-rgyal rdo-rje and Legs-ltan bDud-’joms rdo-rje] are declining [and] even if a clarification of what had been mixed up by the existence of several [opinions] is beyond an object to be judged by the [ordinary] mind, I have analyzed in detail the _Grub mtha’ mdzod_ of the All-Knowing Dharmarāja Klong-chen Rab-’byams[-pa], the _Chos ‘byung rin chen gter mdzod_ of rGyal-sras Thugs-mchog rdo-rje rtsal, the stream of the record of teachings received of the great treasure[-discoverer], the Dharmarāja Ratna gling-pa, and the records of teachings heard of mNga’-ris Pan-chen Padma dbang-rgyal rdo-rje, the embodiment of the lord, the ruler Khri Srong-lde[’u] btsan, and his younger brother, the highest incarnation Legs-ltan bDud-’joms rdo-rje.

In the record of teachings heard of the all-encompassing master, the great sMan-lung-pa Blo-gros mchog-gi rdo-rje, at the very beginning it is aimed to analyse in detail [the contents of the Collected Tantras of the Early Translations], but through the activities of teaching, hearring, meditating [and] realizing [the Buddhist doctrine] he left [in the end the task alone] by becoming completely inattentive [to it], following verbatim the unchanged record of teachings obtained of Gong-ra Lo-tsā-ba [gZhan-phan rdo-rje]. And also the records of techings heard of Rig-’dzin ’Phrin-las lhun-grub, the one from Dar-rgyas chos-ldings [in Grva-nang], aside from the introduction
and the lineage of the teachers it seems something which left unchanged just that [work] of the one from Gong-ra [= gZhan-phun rdo-rje]. In this [work] of the one from Gong-ra there is no clarification to which section some of the tantras belong and [there are] little conventions for identifying [them] besides many unnecessary words, like in [the case of] some of the tantras of the Mental Class [of the Great Perfection teaching]: “not sufficient [to be included and thus] left out”, and in [the case of] some [others tantras]: “where do you originate from?”, and “I do not know to tell if most of it should be contained here”, and “in this part of the tantra it is said that these [are] sealed [chapters]” and so forth; and on the occasion of the transmission saying: “whatever transmission among [them]”, by mentioning [only] the name of just each tantra. Having quoted [these statements] it appears as a very great mistake without a reason of pointing a finger [in the sense of] such a teaching and transmission.

The actual record of teachings heard of gSung-sprul Tshul-khrims rdo-rje, although it exists in a pure manner based [on the fact] that on a variety of clear and unclear [things], including the marks and the distinctions of the individual groups in the teaching section above, the transmissions are enumerated all in one below, and thus there exist a variety of unrecognized teachings and transmissions of the cycle of the Great Perfection [teaching].

Therefore, not being enough that the Vidyādhara Ratna gling-pa is in general an unerring great treasure-discoverer, as he has performed something like rekindling in a proper way the ashes and bringing to life again the teachings of the Collected Tantras of the Early Translations, I have based myself on the stream of the records of teachings heard of the treasure discoverer Zhig-po gling-pa Rin-chen dpal-bzang and have brought about [the following chapter] also in accordance with the historical works and other authentic records of teachings heard.”
Next to the gsan-yig literature two works are especially noted by the Fifth Dalai Lama for his assessment of the teachings of the rNyin-ma-pa school. The Grub mtha’ mdzod of Klong-chen Rab-byams-pa and the Chos byung rin chen gter mdzod of rGyal-sras Thugs-mchog rtsal; this statement makes clear that these two teachers are not identical and that Klong-chen Rab-byams-pa is not the author of the latter work. Recent research has tackled this problem once again, coming to the result that the Chos byung rin chen gter mdzod must have been composed in the year 1422 and that rGyal-sras Thugs-mchog rtsal figures as an important teacher of a Great Perfection doctrine known as “cycle of the six lamps of the clear light” (’od gsal sgron ma drug pa’i skor).19

The gsan-yig of Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho offers a description of this cycle, based on several writings of rGyal-sras Thugs-mchog rtsal; see the text (as above), vol. 3, pp.208.4-215.2. The name is given in this section as Ri-phug rGyal-sras rDo-rje Thugs-mchog rtsal, which suggests an association of this teacher with [Zhva-lu] Ri-phug/Ri-sbug in gTsang. The Fifth Dalai Bla-ma had received this transmission from his teacher sMan-lung-pa Blo-gros mchog gi rdo-rje, who was holding this particular lineage through his teacher Ngag-dbang don-grub rgyal-mtshan; this is mentioned in the biography of sMan-lung-pa Blo-gros mchog gi rdo-rje, written by Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho in the year 1676; see Nyang ston khra tshang pa blo gros mchog gi rdo rje’i rtogs pa brjod pa nyung ngu rnam gsal, in “The Collected Works (Gsung-bum) of Vth Dalai Lama Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho”, vol. 9, Gangtok: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology”, 1992, p.

307.1-2: “... the complete empowerment and [reading-] authorization of the secret cycle of the Great Perfection as transmitted from rDo-rje Thugs-mchog rtsal, the Jinaputra from Ri-sbug” (.... ri sbug pa'i rdzogs chen gsang skor gyi dbang lung yongs rdzogs).

This biography contains further comparative materials, including details on the gsan-yig of sMan-lung-pa Blo-gros mchog-gi rdo-rje and the transmission of the rNyIng ma rgyud 'bum as received by him. We are thus informed that the record of teachings heard of Blo-gros mchog-gi rdo-rje was the only volume of his writings, executed by a disciple and close attendant who acted as head of the monastery Gong-ra Ngag-gsang rdo-rje gling in gTsang after sMan-lung-pa’s death. See the text of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma (as above), p. 252.4-5: “Although the resident teacher sMar Ngag-dbang thub-bstan had stayed a long time as an attendant [in the company of Blo-gros mchog-gi rdo-rje], aside from the plan of just a great paper [in the form] of a letter [which was] the seed [of a biography], [such a task] did not enter his mind and there came about only the volume of the record of the teachings heard [of the master].” (... gdan sa ba smar ngag dbang thub bstan gyis sa bon 'phrin shog che ba tsam gyis rtsis las zhabs phyir yun ring bsad kyang blor ma 'jags tshul dang gsan yig gi glegs bam las ma byung ...).

Concerning the transmission of the rNyIng ma rgyud 'bum associated with the names of sMan-lung-pa Blo-gros mchog gi rdo-rje and Gong-ra Lo-tsā-ba gZhan-phan rdo-rje it is stated that they had received the reading authorization from gSung-sprul Tshul-khrims rdo-rje with the addition of ten volumes as transmitted by a teacher from the monastery of Yon-po do in Yar-'brog. See the text of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma (as above), p. 294.2-3: “In the presence of Tshul-khrims rdo-rje, the speech incarnation of [Rig-'dzin Padma gling-pa], he obtained the pronouncement of the Buddhist doctrine including the reading[-authorization] of the Collected Tantras of the Old Ones, which was a close transmission from the Dharmarāja Ratna gling-pa, and [the treasure cycle] Nor bu rgya mtsho of [Rig-'dzin] Padma gling-pa. And at the time when he heard together with Gong-ra Lo-chen [gZhan-phan rdo-rje] the reading[-authorization] of the remaining ten volumes of the Collected Tantras [of the Old Ones] from the great teacher bKra-shis lhun grub, the one from Yon-po do in Yar-'brog ....” (pad gling gsung sprul tshul khrims rdo rje'i drung du choses rgyal ratna gling pa nas nye bar brgyud pa'i rnying ma rgyud 'bum gyi lung dang padma gling pa'i nor bu rgya mtsho sog kyi chos bka' nod par mdzad / yar 'brog yon po do pa bla chen bkra shis lhun grub la rgyud 'bumpo ti bceu lhag gi lung gong ra lo chen dang chabs gcig par gsan pa'i dus).

It is known that this later edition of the Collected Tantras of the Early Translations had been produced by mDo-sngags 'byung-gnas, regarded as an embodiment of the treasure-discoverer Rig-'dzin mChog-Ildan mgon-po.20

Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho himself obtained the transmission from Blo-gros mchog-gi rdo-rje during one of the latter’s sojourns in the Potala palace which took place on a yearly basis during the period from 1660-1666; see the text of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma (as above), p. 328.3: “I requested the incomparable kindness of the noble doctrine [from Blo-gros mchog gi rdo-rje] exemplified by the complete bKa’-’gyur—except of some volumes of the Collected Tantras of the New Mantras which I had obtained earlier—and some volumes of the Collected Tantras of the Old Ones.” (sngags gsar ma’i rgyud ’bum sngar thob pa’i po ti ’ga’ zhig ma gtogs bka’ ’gyur yongs rdzogs / rnying ma rgyud ’bum po ti kha yar gyis mtshon dam pa’i chos kyi bka’ ’drin zla med pa zhus ....).

**APPENDIX II**

In an informative list with the title “‘Tibetan Transmission Records (gsan-yig and thob-yig)”’ Dan Martin and Bryan J. Cuevas have collected a fair amount of records of teachings heard of different Tibetan authors and provided in some cases also an overview of the contents of the texts. This list includes the gsan-yig of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma, making use of the xylograph edition of the four volumes published by Nechung and Lhakar in Delhi in the year 1970. The following table of contents provides the internal structure of the text and is based on the xylograph edition of the four volumes published by the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok in the years 1991-1992. In order to document the great number of persons listed in the chapter on the treasure tradition I have also noted treasure discoverers, when only their names are mentioned, although the actual transmission had not reached Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho.

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