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III. REVIEWS

Mahāmudrā: The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation.

Translated and annotated by Lobsang P. Lhalungpa, with a foreword by Chögyam Trungpa. Boston/London: Shambhala, 1986. xli + 488 pp. \$25.00 (paper).

I. The Book

Among the many exceptional achievements of Tibetan scholastic writing, a position of special distinction has long been accorded within the Bka'-brgyud' traditions to the *Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i sgom rim gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad zla ba'i 'od zer*, the *Moonlight of Mahāmudrā*, by the master Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal. Renowned as an encyclopedic summation of the theoretical and practical dimensions of the *mahāmudrā* ("Great Seal") teaching stemming from the *mahāsiddhas* of Buddhist India and their Tibetan adherents, the *Phyag chen zla zer*, as it is called for short, enjoys authority cutting across the various lines of Bka'-brgyud-pa sub-sectarian difference, and thus exceeds in its influence even such revered *mahāmudrā* texts as the *Phyag chen gan mdzod* of 'Brug-chen Padma dkar-po (1527–92), which is studied in the schools of the 'Brug-pa Bka'-brgyud order,² or the *Phyag-chen nges-don rgya-mtsho*, of Karma-pa IX Dbang-phyug rdo-rje (1554–1603), a primary meditational treatise of the Karma Bka'-brgyud.³ Lobsang P. Lhalungpa's superb translation of Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's masterwork, then, is to be celebrated by all students of Indo-Tibetan thought and contemplation. Indeed, the richness of this book recommends it to all readers who are seriously engaged in inquiry concerning systematic meditation, whether from a Buddhological, philosophical, psychological or practical standpoint.

The text is broadly divided into two books: a preliminary dissertation on the fundamental categories employed in the discussion of Buddhist meditation, namely, *śamatha* and *vipāśyana* (pp. 15–88); followed by a fully detailed exegesis of the system of the *mahāmudrā* in particular (pp. 92–414). The first of these clearly seeks to relate the work as a whole to the tradition of meditational theory stemming from Kamalaśīla, and represented in the three *Bhāvanākrama* and the *Bhāvanāyogāvatāra*, texts that are well-known to contemporary Buddhologists.⁴ The association is further reinforced by Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's use of the phrase *sgom-rim* (= *Bhāvanākrama*) in the full title of

his work. It is in the second book that the polemical significance of his appropriation of Kamalaśīla is fully felt, for here he directly attacks the charges, voiced most prominently by Sa-skyā Paṅḍita Kun-dga' rgyal-mtshan (1182–1251), that the *mahāmudrā* of the Bka'-brgyud schools is to be identified with the antinomian subitism attributed to Ho-shang Mahāyāna (pp. 104–9).

The polemical dimension of the work, however, is not its dominant trait. Its real interest derives from the thoroughness of its delineation of the theory and practice of the *mahāmudrā* as a distinctive system standing in a unique relationship to the major traditions of *sūtra* and *tantra* in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. Thus *mahāmudrā*, in a way reminiscent of the Rdzogs-chen as treated by many Rnying-ma-pa writers, is spoken of as “a separate path and independent of the *sūtras* and *tantras*” (p. 112). At the same time, *mahāmudrā* may skillfully employ practices taught in the *sūtras* and *tantras*, so that “it is not contradictory to regard *mahāmudrā* as identical to the common and profound path of the *sūtras* and *tantras*.” And theoretically, too, the “thatness” (*de-kho-na-nyid*) to be realized as the final intention of both finds its culmination in the *mahāmudrā* (pp. 112–16). The separateness of the *mahāmudrā* is thus tentatively posited, in a dialectical motion that seeks ultimately to determine not what is most distinctive but what is most universal within the varied scriptural traditions of Buddhist meditation. In effect Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal creates an on-going discussion among the traditions of *sūtra*, *tantra*, and *mahāmudrā* proper, in which the dialectical pattern just outlined is recapitulated with respect to the numerous particular topics he details.

To exemplify this procedure with respect to practice, we may point to his treatment of the role of breathing in meditation (pp. 154–7): the point of departure is a passage from the *mahāsiddha* Tilopā, Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's exposition of which involves consideration of the discussions of breathing found in the *Abhidharmakośa*, the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, and several *tantras*. Similarly, but in a more theoretical vein, the investigation of *vipaśyanā* in Chapter Four of Book Two (pp. 175ff) finds its conclusion in remarks on “The Blending of Insight with that of Other Systems” (pp. 209–12), where the main concern is to indicate the manner in which normative doctrinal presentation of the two sorts of selflessness (*nairātmya*, *bdag-med*) is to be understood in connection with the *mahāmudrā* teaching.

Lobsang P. Lhalungpa's outstanding translation of the abundant feast of *dharma* that we find here is both accurate and highly readable throughout, a formidable achievement when one considers the extreme difficulty of the text in question. The overall excellence of

his work leaves this reviewer with few bones to pick, and small ones at that: clear and accurate use of Sanskrit titles of cited works in some cases, for instance, alternates in others with altogether confusing use of very rough phoneticization of Tibetan translations of Sanskrit titles: e.g., “Sa’ingōshi” (p. 33) for *Sa-yi dngos-gzhi*, i.e., *Bhūmivastu*. And the entire treatment of the bibliography and index of citations (pp. 463–88) will not be regarded as meeting the standards of contemporary academic usage. Also, I would like to encourage readers of this review to do everything in their power to stamp out the neologism “sutric,” used throughout this and many other recent books on Tibetan Buddhism.⁹ None of this, however, distracts from this reviewer’s admiration for an exemplary and extremely important addition to the volume of Tibetan doctrinal literature now available in English translation.

There remains, however, one rather puzzling aspect of the book, the striking lack of information we find there about its author, Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal. The issues that may be raised in this connection take us beyond any questions explicitly raised in the book under review, and so will be addressed separately.

II. The Enigma of Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal

Given the clear importance of the *Phyag-chen zla-zer*, the enormity of its achievement, and the fact that its popularity as an instructional text within the Bka’-brgyud traditions demonstrates the high regard in which it was traditionally held, we should expect that, as seems often to be the case with the great names in Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal history, a great deal would be known of its author, Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal. Wrong. Next to nothing seems known of him, and, though I cannot claim to have turned every stone yet, the results of my search for reliable information about him have so far been remarkably disappointing. This presents something of a puzzle, but because that puzzle is itself in some sense illuminating, an account of it seems in place here.

Mr. Lhalungpa’s introduction (p. xxi) tells us that

In writing this work the great Tibetan teacher Tashi Namgyal (1512–87) made known many of the ancient secret oral teachings and published them as xylographic prints. Among other well-known treatises by the author are *The Resplendent Jewel: An Elucidation of the Buddhist Tantra* and *The Sunlight: An Elucidation of Hevajra-tantra*. In the course of his extensive studies and training Tashi Namgyal studied with some Sakyapa teachers and even acted as the abbot of Nālandā Sakyapa Monastery, north of Lhasa. During his later years he functioned as Gampopa’s regent and as chief abbot of the monastery of Dakla Gampo, in South Tibet.

The text itself contains little information regarding its author: even the opening praise-verses, for instance, omit specific reference to his personal teachers. It is only in the colophon that he situates himself for us (p. 411):

...I, Gampopa Tashi Namgyal, started composing this text at an auspicious time and completed it on an auspicious day of the third month of the Ox year, at the Nāgakoṭa retreat, below the glorious monastery of Taklha Gampo. The founding of this monastery was prophesied by the Buddha. The scribe was Thupden Palbar, who is himself a dedicated master of the Mantrayāna system.

A translator's note (p. 461) tells us that “[t]he Ox year could be either the Wood Ox year, 1566 C.E., or the Fire Ox year, 1578 C.E.”

We have before us, then, a number of substantive assertions regarding Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal, a few of which find some confirmation in the text's own colophon, the remainder being presented without textual support. In the absence of an available (auto)biography, or even of a substantial historical note in a synthetic history of Tibetan Buddhism or of one of its particular schools, it may be worthwhile to examine the assertions made here with some care. The absence of extensive written evidence is, of course, part of the puzzle, and I shall return to this question below. Let's first, however, examine the positive assertions in turn:

1. Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal was affiliated with Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po Monastery.

2. He lived from 1512 to 1587, had some connection with the Sa-skyapa school, and “even acted as abbot of Nālandā Sakyapa Monastery.”

3. He composed “other well-known treatises,” including the *Phyag-chen zla-zer*, which was written in an Ox year equivalent to either 1566 or 1578. Moreover, he was responsible for the xylographic publication of his own work.

1.

This is, of course, supported by the author's colophon. Confirmation of his monastic affiliation may be found elsewhere as well, for instance in the notes on Tibetan monastic institutions compiled by the patron of 19th century Tibetan Buddhist eclecticism, 'Jam-dbyangs Mkhyen-brtse'i dbang-po (1820–92):

As for Dwags-la sgam-po: It was founded by Dwags-po Rin-po-che Bsod-nams rin-chen [a.k.a. Sgam-po-pa]—the heart-like spiritual son of Mi-la Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje, the great pillar of the lineage of attainment following Lord Mar-pa—when he was in his forties. It became the source of all the Bka'-bryud-s [i.e., of the four great and eight lesser lineages stemming from Sgam-po-pa, *Bka'-bryud che-bzhi chung-bryad*], and was later preserved by Sgom-tshul Tshul-khrims snying-po and [Sgam-po-pa's] other nephews, and by the *all-knowing Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal* and other emanational rebirths, who came successively.⁶

Sgam-po-pa's monastic seat, then, appears to have been maintained by a familial line and by a line of *sprul-sku-s*, Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal having figured among the latter.

Histories of the Bka'-bryud schools sometimes include a brief discussion of Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po's beginnings and early succession immediately following the life of the founder: as the English version of *The Blue Annals* provides a readily available example, there is no need to repeat this material here.⁷ But the distinction of its founder notwithstanding, Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po and its traditions had lapsed into some obscurity within four centuries of its foundation. This is well-indicated by no less a Bka'-bryud historian than Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag phreng-ba, writing during the period 1545–65, who expresses uncertainty as to whether those in the line of Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po's hierarchs have formed a continuous master-disciple succession.⁸

2.

The dates, 1512–87, assigned to Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal by Mr. Lhalungpa are those that have been adopted by the U.S. Library of Congress, and are found in recent Tibetan chronologies as well.⁹ However, the reader who undertakes the tedious task of reading Tshe-tan Zhabs-drung's recent compendium of Tibetan chronologies in its entirety will find Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal entered with two conflicting sets of dates, the alternative being 1398–1458, the name given with the birth-year further qualified with the phrase *rong-ston-gyi slob-ma*, “disciple of Rong-ston.”¹⁰ Rong-ston is, of course, the famous Sa-skyapa scholar Rong-ston Shes-bya kun-gzigs/-rig (1367–1449), who founded the “Nālandā” (actually Nālendra) monastery in 1435–6. In the light of the assertion that the author of the *Phyag chen zla zer* had been abbot of this Sa-skyapa establishment, this matter clearly demands careful consideration. Were there two Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal-s, or just one? And if one, did he belong to the mid-sixteenth century or to the early fifteenth?

A summary of the life of Rong-ston may be found on pp. 1080–82 of the Roerich translation of *The Blue Annals*. On p. 1082 we find the following:

Before his passing into Nirvāṇa, he appointed to the Abbot's chair the Dharmasvāmin bKra-śis rnam-rgyal. This one also laboured extensively for the benefit of the Doctrine, preached, erected large images, etc. He was born in the Earth-Male-Tiger (sa-pho-stag—1398 A.D.) and passed away at the age of 61.

According to the Tibetan manner of calculating one's age, that would have been 1458.

We have therefore a *Chos-rje* Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal: he is not explicitly identified in *The Blue Annals* as *Dwags-po* Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal.¹¹ However, a recent account of Rong-ston's life and work does refer to him as “Dags-po-dbon Paṅ-chen Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal” and as “Dwags-po paṅ-chen Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal.”¹² The primary source cited is Gser-mdog Paṅ-chen Shākya-mchog-ldan's (1428–1507) biography of Rong-ston,¹³ where on plate 336, lines 5–6, we find one *Dags-po dbon-por grags-pa Pan[sic!]-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal*, “Paṅ-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal famed as the Dags-po nephews.” Not only does Rong-ston's disciple have the same name and titles similar to those of the author of the *Phyag chen zla zer*, but the addition here of the title *dbon-po* immediately calls to mind the *dbon-brgyud*, “nephews' line,” among Sgam-po-pa's successors, referred to above, where it was distinguished from the line of *sprul-sku-s* to which our subject belonged.

There are, however, better reasons to doubt the identification of the two, and to argue that the *mahāmudrā* master indeed belonged to the sixteenth century. To begin with, it seems odd that 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba, author of *The Blue Annals* and a scholar with powerful Bka'-brgyud affiliations, would have failed to mention that Rong-ston's successor had been the author of important and influential Bka'-brgyud treatises if that had indeed been the case. Less circumstantially, we have a record of the *mahāmudrā* master Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's lineage, known from two independent sources: Kaṅ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1698–1755),¹⁴ and 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul Blo-gros mtha'-yas (1813–99), who takes this up in the *dkar-chag* of his encyclopedic anthology of Tibetan Buddhist meditational traditions, the *Gdams ngag mdzod*.¹⁵ The former may, I believe, be considered particularly good testimony in this instance: Tshe-dbang nor-bu was a noted historian with strong Bka'-brgyud connections; coming, as he does, during the early eighteenth century it seems unlikely that he would place a mid-sixteenth century figure in the early fifteenth; and, significantly, Paṅ-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal appears to have

been a figure of special interest to him, for he concludes his summation of the lineage with the declaration that he has made great efforts to receive the transmission of his entire *Collected Works* (*Gsung 'bum yongs rdzogs*). Omitting here the Indian predecessors of Mar-pa, a composite of the lineage according to both sources (with dates supplied as reported in recent Tibetan chronologies) runs as follows:

1. Mar-pa (1012–97)
2. Mi-la ras-pa (1040–1123)
3. Sgam-po Lha-rje Bsod-nams rin-chen (1079–1153)
4. Dbon-sgom Tshul-khrims snying-po (1116–69)
5. La-yag-pa Byang-chub dngos-grub
6. Mkhan-chen Bye(d)-dkar-ba
7. Snyi-sgom chen-po
8. 'Bri-gung gling-pa mched
9. Dpal-ldan Lha-lung-pa
10. Mkhan-chen Lha-btsun-pa
11. Jo-sras Rdo-rje blo-gros [Tshe-dbang nor-bu runs this name together with the preceding.]
12. Spyian-snga Chos-kyi rgyal-mtshan
13. Chos-kyi seng-ge
14. Chos-kyi dbang-phyug
15. Mkhan-chen Rgyal-mtshan bzang-po
16. Spyian-snga Bsod-nams rgya-mtsho [Kong-sprul reads: rgyal-mtshan]
17. Rje Bsod-nams lhun-grub
18. Sgam-po Pañ-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal (1398–1458 or 1512/3–87?)
19. Spyian-snga Bsod-nams mtshan-can
20. Sprul-sku Nor-bu rgyan-pa (1588 or 1599–1633)
21. Spyian-snga Rin-chen rdo-rje
22. (Sprul-pa'i sku-mchog) Bzang-po rdo-rje [23a–24a complete Tshe-dbang nor-bu's version:]
- 23a. Grub-mchog 'Od-gsal dbang-po
- 24a. Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1698–1755) [23b–30 complete Kong-sprul's list:]
- 23b. Lhun-grub nges-don dbang-po
- 24b. Grub-chen Dam-chos dbang-phyug
25. Bstan-pa dar-rgyas
26. Grub-dbang Byang-chub rdo-rje
27. Byang-sems Kun-dga' snying-po
28. Rgyal-sras Gzhan-phan mtha'-yas (b. 1800)
29. Rdo-rje-'chang Mkhyen-brste'i dbang-po (1820–92)
30. Kong-sprul Blo-gros mtha'-yas (1813–99)

It will be immediately apparent that the absence of more precise information on the dates of most of these persons presents some obstacles to the use of these lists as evidence to decide the case of Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal. Given that five generations of teachers are reported as intervening between him and Tshe-dbang nor-bu, whose dates are quite well established, however, it does seem more plausible to assign Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal to the sixteenth century, assuming an average of roughly thirty years per generation, a figure nearly consistent with the distribution of the list overall. And certainly, the dates assigned to Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's grand-disciple Nor-bu rgyan-pa appear to clinch the matter.

About this last point, however, we must exercise some caution, for Nor-bu rgyan-pa's dates are known from just the same very recent sources as Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's, and, because he belongs to the same lineage, may be subject to similar possibilities of error. What we must do, then, is determine just what sources the recent chronologists have utilized. Earlier chronological documents, combined with the evidence of the lineage lists, would do much to bolster the argument.

Fortunately, we can be fairly certain regarding the identity of the immediate sources of contemporary Tibetan chronologies in the case with which we are here concerned: the chronology of Tshe-dbang nor-bu himself;¹⁶ and that of Sum-pa Mkhan-po Ye-shes dpal-'byor (1704–87).¹⁷ Both concur in assigning the birth of Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal to 1513 (Water Bird, Ninth Rab-byung), and Sum-pa gives the year of his death as 1587 (Fire Pig, Tenth Rab-byung). Both concur in assigning the birth of Sgam-po-pa Nor-bu rgyan-pa to 1588 (Earth Rat, Tenth Rab-byung), and Sum-pa specifies 1633 (Water Bird, Eleventh Rab-byung) as the year of decease. It seems very unlikely that both of these eighteenth century historians, writing in different parts of Tibet and adhering to different traditions, would be similarly wrong about *all* of this. Moreover, the occurrence of the name of Sgam-po-pa Nor-bu rgyan-pa among the circle of Rnying-ma-pa and Bka'-brgyud-pa luminaries gathering around Rig-'dzin 'Ja'-tshon-snying-po (1585–1656) offers further confirmation of the general accuracy of these dates. We must, I believe, accept the conclusion that there were two Dwags-po Paṅ-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal-s, one a fifteenth century Sa-skyapa, the other a sixteenth century Bka'-brgyud-pa.

One further puzzle must be raised in this connection: Sman-dsong mtshams-pa Rin-po-che, in his history of the successive Karma-pas, mentions as a disciple of Karma-pa IX Dbang-phyug rdo-rje (1554–1603) a certain "Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal-gyi

sprul-sku," an "incarnation" of Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal.¹⁸ Was this Sgam-po-pa Nor-bu rgyan-pa, who, if born in 1588, the year following Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's passing, was possibly recognized as the latter's rebirth? Or was there an otherwise unknown incarnation? Or does it refer to Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal himself, as an incarnation of Rong-ston's successor? (His seniority with respect to the Karma-pa would not have precluded his being considered the latter's disciple.) Regrettably, the available evidence as we now know it does not contribute to the resolution of this question.

3.

Among contemporary Bka'-brgyud-pa scholars, the *Phyag chen zla zer* is often spoken of as one of three texts by Dwags-po Bkra-shis 'od-zer, together referred to as the "Trilogy of Light Rays," *'Od zer skor gsum*. As noted above, Mr. Lhalungpa has mentioned these works briefly in his introduction. Also attributed to the same author are several short texts found in the section on the Dwags-po tradition in the Mar-pa Bka'-brgyud volume(s) of the *Gdams ngag mdzod*. The author's colophons in all of these works are similar, and I summarize the information given in them here with the titles and brief descriptive notes:

1. *Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i sgom rim gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad zla ba'i 'od zer*. Recent (circa 1940s or 1950s) xylographic edition from Śrī Sne'u-steng, Rtsib-ri, near Ding-ri. 379 folios. This is the edition used for the Lhalungpa translation. It has been reproduced under the full title in Delhi: Karma chos 'phel, 1974.

2. *Sngags kyi spyi don nor bu'i 'od zer*. An old xylographic edition apparently from Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po itself [see below]. 74 folios. The left-hand margin recto of each folio bears the letter *tsa*, indicating this to be the 17th text of a series. Reproduced by DKC, 1974. A general dissertation on Mantrayāna Buddhism, emphasizing the *anuttarayogatantras* of the "new translation" (*gsar-ma*) schools in the tradition of Sgam-po-pa. The author's colophon (73b) indicates it to have been composed at Dags-lha sgam-po during the first half of the fifth month of a Bird year by "one named Sgam-po-pa Maṃ-ga-la [= Bkra-shis]."

3. *Dpal kye'i rdo rje zhes bya ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po'i 'grel pa legs bshad nyi ma'i 'od zer*. An old xylographic edition apparently from Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po itself [see below]. 284 folios. Reproduced by DKC, 1974. This is a very thorough commentary on the *Hevajratantra*. The author's colophon (283a) tells us that it was written, with many disciples providing scribal assistance, at the Nāgakoṭa retreat below Dwags-lha sgam-po during the third month of a Dragon year by "one named Sgam-po-pa Maṃ-ga-la." This work and the two preceding comprise the so-called "Trilogy of Light Rays" (*'od zer skor gsum*).

4. *Sngon 'gro'i khrid yig thun bzhi'i rnal 'byor du bya ba*. Xylograph included in the Dpal-spungs (Sde-dge) edition of the *Gdams ngag mdzod*. 6 folios. Reproduced in *Gdams nag mdzod*, vol. V, plates 547–58. An account of the preliminary practices to be undertaken at the commencement of each of the four daily meditation sessions during strict retreat. The author's colophon (558) tells us that it was written, as requested by his disciples, at the Sgam-po'i sgrub-sde ("retreat center") by "one named Sgam-po-pa Mam-ga-la."

5. *Zab lam chos drug gi khrid yig chen mo gsang chen gyi de nyid gsal ba*. Xylograph included in the Dpal-spungs (Sde-dge) edition of the *Gdams ngag mdzod*. 46 folios. Reproduced in *Gdams nag mdzod*, vol. V, plates 559–650. Detailed guidance on the practice of the "six doctrines" of Nāropā. The author's colophon (650) tells us that it was written, with Dge-slong Blo-gros-mchog providing scribal assistance, at the retreat of Dwags-lha sgam-po during the fourth month of a Bird year by "one named Sgam-po-pa Mam-ga-la." The work had been requested by Rgya-ston Nam-mkha' rdo-rje and Slob-dpon Nyi-ma-grags.

6. *Phyag rgya chen po'i khrid yig chen mo gnyug ma'i de nyid gsal ba*. Xylograph included in the Dpal-spungs (Sde-dge) edition of the *Gdams ngag mdzod*. 26 folios. Reproduced in *Gdams nag mdzod*, vol. V, plates 651–702. Practical guidance on meditation according to the traditions of the *mahāmudrā*. The author's colophon (702) tells us that it was written, with Bkra-shis don-grub providing scribal assistance, at the retreat of Dwags-lha sgam-po during the fourth month of a Sheep year by "one named Sgam-po-pa Mam-ga-la."

7. *Sgam po pa bkra shis rnam rgyal gyis mdzad pa sgrub pa'i zhal bskos*. Xylograph included in the Dpal-spungs (Sde-dge) edition of the *Gdams ngag mdzod*. 3 folios. Reproduced in *Gdams nag mdzod*, vol. V, plates 707–12. A discussion of general principles and regulations that are to be adhered to by retreatants. There is no author's colophon, but simply the ascription of authorship on the title-page (707).

Besides these works, Tshe-dbang nor-bu, as reported above, has mentioned a set of *Complete Works*, and has specifically referred in the same breath to a tradition at Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po of instruction on Cakrasaṃvara. The fact that the second work listed above appears to have been the seventeenth of a series further suggests that the available texts represent only a portion of Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's erudition.

The colophon information summarized above seems to indicate that Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's preferred and possibly sole place of residence was Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po, where his scholarly activity was undertaken on behalf of the disciples who had gathered there for intensive practice of the main Bka'-brgyud meditational and yogic traditions, i.e., the "six yogas" and the *mahāmudrā*,

in prolonged retreat. Because he had the unfortunate habit of noting years only by animal sign, without reference to element or cycle, we cannot take Mr. Lhalungpa's attempt to identify the Ox year in question above too seriously. These are mature writings, to be sure, but they could have been composed in any appropriate years after the author was, say, roughly twenty, and prior to his death.

Finally, there is the fascinating question raised by the assertion that Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal undertook to xylographically publish his own writings. The only materials I have seen that might provide any evidence about this are the second and third titles listed above. These are reproduced from old prints; that much is certain. My superficial impression is that the style of the carving is consonant with other southern Tibetan prints executed during the sixteenth century, e.g., the Lho-brag edition of Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag phreng-ba's *Chos-byung mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston*. The printer's colophon of no. 2 (folios 73b-74a) clearly states that publication has been undertaken by the author's disciples. Indeed, it is Nyi-ma-grags, who requested the composition of this text and of both nos. 3 and 5 above, who is named as correcting the final version of the blocks. The case of no. 3, however, is much less clear. The long printer's colophon (283a-284a), while specifying the donors, carvers, etc., never clearly identifies itself, as does the printer's colophon of no. 2, as the work of disciples: it could be the work of Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal himself. The sole indication is a verse of homage to Sgam-po-pa (283a7-283b1), which, if addressed to Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal and not to Mi-la ras-pa's famous disciple, would resolve the matter. Indeed, in the printer's colophon of no. 2, Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal is addressed unambiguously as "Sgam-po-pa," and I believe that to be the case here as well. It would appear, then, that we can securely attribute the xylographic publication of Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's writings not to the author, but to his immediate disciples.

The foregoing observations establish both that Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal was an eminent sixteenth century Bka'-brgyud scholar and that precious little else is known of him, besides what we can gather from his erudition. How could it have come to pass that Tibetan Buddhist historians let *this* one fall through the cracks? The situation would be quite different, of course, if his complete works were now available—they might, after all, include a biography—or if there were a *gdan-rabs* of Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po to which we had access. But that is the point exactly: Tibetan religious history was largely a matter of lineage records, and Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po, though a hallowed Bka'-brgyud shrine, played little major role in the transmission of the dominant Bka'-brgyud lineages. Notable scholar

though he may have been, Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal swam in a backwater.

There is, I think, a moral here for those involved in Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal and religious studies, at least as presently practiced in the English-speaking world. It has become too often the case that we permit epithetic characterizations—"great scholar," "enlightened master," and the like—to stand in place of substantive historical research. By themselves, such descriptions are hollow and uninformative; they are a lazy way to avoid finding out who these people really were. Sometimes the inquiry, as in the present instance, will yield less than we might have hoped for, even throwing aspects of the record into doubt. No matter. In gaining a clear sense of the areas of darkness, we perceive more distinctly the pockets of light. Given the present tenuous conditions for the preservation of Tibetan culture and learning, the small gains won in this fashion seem not to be without value.

NOTES

1. Throughout the present review, "Bka'-brgyud" will be used, as is often the case, to refer collectively to the Mar-pa Bka'-brgyud traditions, the lineages stemming from the translator Mar-pa Chos-kyi blo-gros (1012–97), and not to such traditions as the Shangs-pa Bka'-brgyud that, despite the common name, must be historically distinguished.

2. See *Collected Works (Gsun[sic!]-'bum) of Kun-mkhyen Padma-dkar-po* (Darjeeling: Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang, 1973), vol. 21, pp. 7–370.

3. The text is available in a modern xylographic edition from Rum-btegs, Sikkim. It is not without interest to note that the two works just mentioned belong to the same historical period as the text whose translation is here reviewed.

4. This is not the place to repeat the now extensive bibliography of Kamalaśīla, the "Bsam-yas debate," and related topics. The 1987 *Louis H. Jordan Lectures* (University of London) by David S. Ruegg represent the most recent and thorough attempt at synthesis. The *Bhāvanāyogāvatāra* does not appear to be directly referred to by Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal; its relationship with the three *Bhāvanākrama* has been rightly insisted upon by Luis O. Gómez, "El Bhāvanāyogāvatāra de Kamalaśīla," *Estudios de Asia y Africa XIV* (1979), pp. 110–37.

5. This verbal monstrosity is, of course, formed on analogy to "tantric," which is itself an Anglicization of Sanskrit *tāntrika*, "pertaining to the tantras," a term perhaps not used in Buddhist texts, but sufficiently well-known from other Sanskrit traditions to warrant its adoption. But there can be no such word in Sanskrit as **sūtrika*; the grammatically correct form would be *sautrika*, a term

attested, so far as I know, to refer only to weavers and textures, i.e., persons and things “pertaining to thread.” So please, dear reader, don’t suture the *sūtras* unless you’re a binder.

6. *Mkhyen-brtse on the History of the Dharma*, Smarntsis Shesrig Spendzod, vol. 39 (Leh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1972), plate 121: *de la dwags la sgam po ni / mnga’ bdag mar pa’i sgrub brgyud kyi ka chen mi la bzhad pa’i rdo rje’i thugs sras nyi ma lta bu dwags po rin po che bsod nams rin chen gyis dgung lo bzhi bcu grangs dus btab / bka’ brgyud thams cad kyi ’byung khungs su gyur phyis sgom tshul tshul khrims snying po sogs dbon dang / kun mkhyen bkra shis rnam rgyal sogs skye sprul rim byon gyis skyong / /*

7. George N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), pp. 462–8. For Padma dkar-po’s account, see Lokesh Chandra, ed., *Tibetan Chronicle of Padma-dkar-po* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1968), plates 518–25. Dpa’-bo Gtsug-lag phreng-ba’s will be found in his *Chos-byung mkhas-pa’i dga’-ston* (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Chodhey Gyalwa Sungrab Partun Khang [DKC hereinafter], n.d.), vol. 1, plates 813–7.

8. *Chos-byung mkhas-pa’i dga’-ston*, vol. 1, plate 820: *’di thams cad phyi mas snga ma la chos gsan par ma nges so*. Cf. also his remarks on Mkhan-chen Shākya bzang-po (vol. 2, p. 363), who was invited to Dwags-lha sgam-po “when the teaching had declined there.” Though undated, this is reported immediately before the life of Karma-pa VIII Mi-bskyod rdo-rje (1507–54), and so would seem to refer to circumstances obtaining in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. Is this Mkhan-chen Shākya bzang-po to be identified with the Mkhan-chen Rgyal-mtshan bzang-po listed in the lineages given below?

9. E.g., T.G. Dhongthog Rinpoche, *Important Events in Tibetan History* (Delhi: T.G. Dhongthog, 1968), p. 31; Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdre Yeshe Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, trans. by Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (London: Wisdom Publications, 1990), vol. 1, p. 955; Tshe-tan Zhabs-drung, *Bstan rtsis kun las btus pa* (Xining, Qinghai: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1982), pp. 228, 238. The first two cited give 1512 (Water Monkey of the Ninth Rab-byung) as the year of birth, without providing a death-date. The latter gives 1513 (Water Bird)–1587 (Fire Pig of the Tenth Rab-byung).

10. Tshe-tan Zhabs-drung, *op. cit.*, p. 210, 221.

11. The accuracy of Roerich’s rendering is confirmed by reference to the Tibetan text: *Deb ther sngon po* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984), vol. 2, p. 1260.

12. David P. Jackson, in collaboration with Shunzo Onoda, eds., *Rong-ston on the Prajñāpāramitā Philosophy of the Abhisamayālamkāra* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1988), pp. vii & xi.

13. *Rje btsun thams cad mkhyen pa bshes gnyen shākya rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar ngo mtshar dad pa’i rol mtsho*, in *The Complete Works (Gsun ’Bum) of Gser-mdog Pañchen Sākya-mchog-ldan* (Thimphu, Bhutan: Kunzang Tobgey, 1975), vol. 16, plates 299–378.

14. *Lha rje Mnyam med Zla ’od gzhon nu’i bka’ brgyud Phyag chen gdams pa ji tsaṃ nod pa’i rtogs brjod legs bshad rin chen ’byung khungs*, in *The Collected Works (Gsun ’bum) of Kaḥ-thog Rig-’dzin chen-po Tshe-dbañ-nor-bu* (Dalhousie, H. P., 1976), vol. II, plates 155–243. The lineage reproduced here is given on plates 195–6.

15. *Gdams nag mdzod* (Delhi: N. Lungtok and N. Gyaltsan, 1971) vol. XII, plates 736–7.

16. *Sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa rin po che ji ltar gnas gyur dus kyi nges pa rjes su dran pa bskyed pa legs bshad sa bon tsam smos pa nyung ngu don gsal rin po che'i sgron me*, in *The Collected Works (Gsun 'bum) of Kah-thog Rig-'dzin chen-po Tshe-dban-nor-bu* (Dalhousie, H. P., 1977), vol. IV, plates 103–161. Plates 157–8 are those that concern us here.

17. Lokesh Chandra, ed., *Dpag-bsam-ljon-bzan, part III* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1959). The data relevant here will be found on pp. 55–68.

18. *The Collected Works of Sman-sdon Mtshams-pa Rin-po-che Karma-nes-don-bstan-rgyas* (Bir, H.P.: D. Tsondu Senghe, 1976), plate 331. This work was written in 1897.

Les Tamang du Népal: Usages et religion, religion de l'usage

by Brigitte Steinmann

Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1987. 310 pp., photographs, maps, index, references, glossaries, appendix. 159 francs (paper).

Les Tamang du Népal: Usages et religion, religion de l'usage is focused on the customary practices of everyday life among a group of eastern Tamang, the largest Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic group of Nepal. Although Tamang have historically been in communication with greater Tibetan Buddhist culture, Brigitte Steinmann avoids a common inclination in studies of religion in the Himalayas to reconstruct cultures, like that of the Tamang, as pale or degraded expressions of putatively purer forms, forms generally abstracted from textual sources. She grounds her study in the immediate world of village Tamang whom she sees as “steeped in a magico-religious ambiance” (227) and reconstructs their religious world in local idiom. She provides the most detailed ethnographic accounting of everyday life we have of an eastern Tamang community, and the book is a major contribution to our knowledge of Tamang, Nepal, and Tibet. Each chapter contains a wealth of finely grained and fascinating ethnography. We learn of everything from the details of house construction and notions of space to Tamang theories of souls and shamanic cures. This detail is not only intriguing in its own right; it is of extensive comparative interest to other specialists of Nepal and Tibet.

Her primary concern is to situate Tamang ritual practices and religious consciousness in the everyday exigencies of a harsh life in the midhills of the Himalayas. For Steinmann, villagers are tied inex-