

# JIABS

Journal of the International  
Association of Buddhist Studies

Volume 24 Number 2 2001

## *Buddhist Nuns*

Peter SKILLING <i>Eṣā agrā: Images of Nuns in (Mūla-)Sarvāstivādin Literature .....</i>	135
Ivette M. VARGAS-O'BRIAN <i>The Life of dGe slong ma dPal mo: The Experience of a Leper, Founder of a Fasting Ritual, a Transmitter of Buddhist Teachings on Suffering and Renunciation in Tibetan Religious History.....</i>	157
Kim GUTSCHOW <i>What Makes a Nun? Apprenticeship and Ritual Passage in Zanskar, North India.....</i>	187
Sarah LEVINE <i>The Finances of a Twentieth Century Buddhist Mission: Building Support for the Theravāda Nuns' Order of Nepal.....</i>	217
Peter SKILLING <i>Nuns, Laywomen, Donors, Goddesses Female Roles in Early Indian Buddhism .....</i>	241
Ann HEIRMAN <i>Chinese Nuns and their Ordination in Fifth Century China .....</i>	275
Notes on the Contributors.....	305

THE LIFE OF DGE SLONG MA DPAL MO:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF A LEPER, FOUNDER OF  
A FASTING RITUAL AND TRANSMITTER OF BUDDHIST  
TEACHINGS ON SUFFERING AND RENUNCIATION IN TIBETAN  
RELIGIOUS HISTORY\*

IVETTE M. VARGAS-O'BRYAN

We humans are fragmented and divided beings, at odds with ourselves and our surrounding world. We suffer from our ongoing fragmentation and yearn for a wholeness whose presence we somehow sense as the driving force in our quest for its recovery.

Herbert Guenther<sup>1</sup>

One of the ways in which the Tibetan Buddhist tradition was able to project central Buddhist teachings on suffering and renunciation was through the lens of the profound and painful experiences of its influential practitioners. When these practitioners experienced devastating illness, for example, it was one of the most direct ways in which suffering became a central concern, values were called into question, healing was desperately sought for the immediate circumstances, and the ultimate achievement of *Buddhahood* sometimes became a goal. The overall Buddhist tradition's affinity with medicine on many different levels affects this view as well. As a doctrine and path of salvation, the eradication of disease becomes a metaphor for liberation from the endless cycle of rebirths<sup>2</sup>. But the connections go deeper, for the problem of suffering and the goal of renunciation were at the heart of Buddhist teachings from the start and were continued in the Tibetan tradition throughout many

\* I would like to thank Professors Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp, Charles Hallisey, and Kimberley Patton for their helpful comments on an early draft of this paper and my dissertation.

<sup>1</sup> H. Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity: Saraha's Three Cycles of Dohā* (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, 1993), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> K.G. Zysk, Kenneth, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); R. Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha* (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications, 1979).

centuries. In the following case study focusing on the life of one individual, the Kashmiri Buddhist nun and former leper called dGe slong ma dPal mo<sup>3</sup> (Gelongma Palmo<sup>4</sup>, “Nun Palmo”), certain questions emerge about Tibetan Buddhism’s transmission of its central concern: How can one overcome the limitations of physicality? What is the relationship between illness and renunciation? What does this relationship stress in terms of central Buddhist concerns for suffering and its eradication through detachment? How can biographical literature reinforce fundamental Buddhist teachings in Tibetan Buddhist communities? This study will fill a gap in previous scholarship by examining written versions of the hagiographies of Gelongma Palmo: specifically, the teachings on the hermeneutics of suffering<sup>5</sup> and renunciation through her illness experiences of leprosy. These texts have provided a powerful religious model for female and afflicted practitioners in Tibetan communities from the eleventh century to the present day.

The stories of Gelongma Palmo’s life are diverse but there is a thread in both oral and written versions that holds them together, that is, the descriptions of a woman whose fortitude healed her from a devastating illness and propelled her to become the founder of a lineage of fasting (*smyung gnas* “nyungnay”) revealed by her tutelary deity Avalokiteśvara. As texts, the stories are part of a larger corpus according to the Gelongma Palmo system<sup>6</sup>. Western scholarship has, for the most part,

<sup>3</sup> Also commonly known by the Sanskrit name Bhikṣuṇī Lakṣmī.

<sup>4</sup> Hereafter spelled as Gelongma Palmo.

<sup>5</sup> *sdug bsngal*, that is *sdug pa* “to be afflicted” and *bsngal ba* “to be faint, exhausted”.

<sup>6</sup> Although it is widely transmitted in oral and written form, no one has done a comprehensive study of the vast written corpus of texts that are found as individual works and in collections. This corpus of texts includes diverse genres such as the hagiographies (*rnam thar, lo rgyus*) of Gelongma Palmo and that of her lineage descendants, “ritual prescriptions” or manuals (*cho ga-s*) for the fasting ritual itself, rituals of propitiation or literally, means for the spiritual realization of a deity (*sgrub thabs*, Sanskrit. *sādhana*), as well as other genres like prayers (*smon lam*) and hymns of praise (*bstod pa*). The texts date approximately from the 11th century to the present day. The texts even contain information about Tibetan, Nepalese, and Indian teachers and practitioners. They are preserved and used by present day Tibetan and non-Tibetan Buddhist communities in Tibet, Nepal, and India. There also exist Nepali versions of the hagiographies and the ritual of propitiation used in Newar communities in Nepal, and translations of some of these genres in English and other Western languages. The Nepali version of the Gelongma Palmo hagiography was translated orally for me by a Tamang practitioner in the spring of 1998 during a research

taken notice of the impact of this corpus of material in Tibetan culture, focusing mostly on the significance of the fasting ritual and limited oral versions of Gelongma Palmo's life extracted from present-day Tibetan communities. This has generated useful sociological and religious insights<sup>7</sup>. What is unique about this study is a focused attention on what

study of the fasting ritual in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Nepali version of a nyungnay text entitled: *Śrīmātī Bhikṣuṇī Kamalāko Upoṣādhā (nyuṅgne) Grantha* used by Newars was sent to me from Patan, Nepal in the spring 2000 by Min Bahadur Shakya, the Director of the Nāgārjuna Institute of Exact Methods.

The ritual of propitiation by Blo bzang bskal bzang rgya mtsho, the Dalai Lama VII (1708-1757), was translated by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche and Churinoff 1995 and is readily available. On pages 193-96 is a short synopsis of Gelongma Palmo's life derived from Ye shes rgyal mtshan, written in 1760, in his commentary of the sādhana of the Great Compassionate One found in the *Collected Works Tshe Mchog gling Yongs 'dzin Ye shes rgyal mtshan*. Vol 9 (New Delhi: Tibet House, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Scholars in the fields of anthropology and religious studies and outside of academia from the late 1960s to the present have focused exclusively on the fasting ritual as a single study (apart from the story of its founder) or have focused on the link between the ritual in its performative context and oral versions of the life of Gelongma Palmo for their religious and ethnographic significance in terms of lay and monastic relations, the agency of nuns, and purification techniques. Perhaps one of the earliest mentions of the fasting ritual was Emil Schlagintweit's 1863 work, *Buddhism in Tibet* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1863), pp. 95, 240-42. Other studies from the 1960s to the present include: C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, *The Sherpas of Nepal: Buddhist Highlanders* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), pp. 150, 153, 180-5, 211, 224; S. Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 4, 25, 57, 82, 111-13, 116; S. Ortner, *Sherpas through their Rituals* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); R. Jackson, "A Fasting Ritual," in *Religions of Tibet in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 271-292; R. Jackson and J. Makransky, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); M. Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 126-130. Most recently, anthropologist Kim Gutschow's research on nuns in Zangskar, Ladakh presented useful findings on nuns and celibacy. See K. Gutschow, "The Women Who Refuse to be Exchanged: Celibacy and Sexuality at a Nunnery in Zangskar, Northwest India," in *Celibacy, Culture, and Society: The Anthropology of Sexual Abstinence* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 2000).

Along these lines of thought, my own research findings while engaging in participant-observation of the fasting ritual in nunneries and monasteries in Kathmandu, Nepal and in Lhasa, Tibet in 1998 led me to think that the fasting ritual according to the Gelongma Palmo system is very much a gendered ritual since women outnumbered men in this practice, was unusually performed in nunneries or primarily prepared by nuns, and often called a "woman's practice" by both genders.

has been neglected about the life of the figure behind such an influential fasting ritual: specifically, Gelongma Palmo's illness experience as a graphic example of Buddhist teachings on suffering and renunciation and how this contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the role of the fasting ritual in these texts<sup>8</sup>.

This study will mainly focus on select written hagiographies of Gelongma Palmo dating from the medieval and modern periods because of their comparative value and their diverse presentation of Buddhist teachings representing a wide range of historical periods<sup>9</sup> as well as some discussion of evidence from other historical sources. The three

<sup>8</sup> This study presupposes that it is not an accident that the title of one of the *rnam thar*s includes the term *nges 'byung*, which can be defined as "giving rise to aversion," a close equivalent to renunciation.

<sup>9</sup> Tibetan texts are translated by me in this study unless otherwise indicated. Perhaps one of the earliest extant hagiographies in this study is by Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po (1341-1433) entitled: *Smyung gnas bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*. Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po, *Smyung gnas bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar* (Lhasa: Dpal Idan Par khang: 199?), 107 folios. This medieval version is contained in a collection of texts 107 folios long that includes the hagiography of Gelongma Palmo, a biography of the author by his student Bsod nams dar (1385-1444), a biography of Bsod nams dar by one Btsun pa chos kyi grags pa, and hagiographies of Gelongma Palmo lineage descendants, Tibetan and Nepali. Only the first 60 folios are by Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po. The Gelongma Palmo hagiography itself is very brief, 7 folios long with a publisher's colophon on a separate folio. The author was a compiler of previous hagiographies on Gelongma Palmo with intriguing affiliations with the lineage of Śākyaśrībhadra (?-?1225), a key figure in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist history. For more information on the possible identity of this author and his link with a strict ascetic practice, see L. van der Kuijp, "On the Lives of Śākyaśrībhadra (?-?1225)," in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114.4 (oct.-dec. 1994), pp. 599-616; D. Jackson, *Two Biographies of Śākyaśrībhadra: The Eulogy by Khro phu lo tsa ba and its Commentary by Bsod nams dpal bzang po* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990).

The second *rnam thar* in this study is by a Bhutanese individual, Bla ma Rab brtan, entitled: *dGe slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar nges 'byung rgyud la skye ba'i chos gnam*. Bla ma Rab brtan, *dGe slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar nges 'byung rgyud la skye ba'i chos gnam* (added English title: *The Biography of Kamala Bhikshuni, Princess of King Dharma Pal, an Ancient King of Kashmir, India*) (Kalinpong: Tibet Mirror Press, pp. 1-21; rpt. 1963[1953]), pp. 1-21. The text is 21 pages (not folios), long, including the publisher's colophon, describing detailed narrative accounts of Gelongma Palmo's religious development and that of her servant. Information on the identity of the author of this, perhaps the latest written version of the Gelongma Palmo story, is problematic since no outside sources are available except for what is provided by the publisher's colophon. No author's colophon is included. The publisher's colophon, provided by G. Tharchin in Kalimpong, informs the reader that the text was published in 1953 to honor the bequest of a late

main texts are: Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po's (1341-1433) *The Sacred Biography of the Lineage Gurus of the State of Fasting*, 'Od dpag rdo rje's (?late 14th-?15th century), *The Sacred Biography of Gelongma Palmo*, and 'Brug pa Bla ma Rab brtan's modern text, *The Liberation Story of Gelongma Palmo: A Religious Discourse for Generating Renunciation in the Mind Stream* (pub. 1953). These selections and other historical sources will highlight the historical value of Gelongma Palmo as a key figure in Tibetan religious history, the historiographic value of the Gelongma Palmo textual tradition, and the impact of this study for future scholarship.

Bhutanese Lama Rab brtan. This lama, while hospitalized in Kalimpong leprosy hospital, made a request to have this version of the life story of Gelongma Palmo published for future generations. Although ethnographic data is not available, we can speculate based on the urgency of this plea and the benefit the author hopes to bestow on others, that the author of this text was a leper perhaps seeking solace and who believed in the meritorious value of the printing of this text on himself and others. Publisher's colophon pages 21.4-13: DE YANG PAR BSKRUN ZHUS MA THAG PA'I RNAM THAR 'DI BZHIN 'DI NAS LO MANG SNGON KA SPUG MDZE NAD SMAN KHANG DU SMAN BCOS CHED DU PHEBS PA MKHAS DBANG 'BRUG PA BLA MA RAB BRTAN DAM PA DE NYID SMAN KHANG DU BZHUGS SKABS DGE SLONG MA DPAL MO'I RNAM THAR MDOR BSDUS 'DI NYID PHYI RABS SKYE 'GRO RNAMS LA SMAN SLAD DU GSAR 'GYUR BYED POR PAR BRKO ZHIG NGES PAR YOD PA ZHES PHEBS DON LTAR / DA LAM BLA MA DAM PA DE NYID GYI DRAN GSO'I SLAD DU PAR BRKOS ZHUS ZIN PA 'DIS RNAM THAR KLOG MKHAN RNAMS LA PHAN PA'I RGYUR GYUR CIG / KA SPUG BOD YIG ME LONG PAR KHANG DU RAB BYUNG BCU DRUG PA'I CHU SPRUL HOR ZLA BDUN PA'I TSHES DRUG SPYI ZLA BRGYAD PA'I TSHES BCO LNGA STON PA YE SHU'I 'DAS LO 1953 NYIN PAR DU BSKRUN PA'O //

The third version of the Gelongma Palmo story in this study is by the rNying ma scholar 'Od dpag rdo rje (?late 14th-?early 15th century) entitled: *Thugs rje chen po bcu gciz zhal gyi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*. 'Od dpag rdo rje, *Thugs rje chen po bcu gciz zhal gyi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar no bu 'i phreng ba* contained in *Instructions for the Practice of the Gso Sbyong and Smyung gnas Focussing Upon the Invocation of Avalokiteśvara in the Eleven-faced Form* (Thimphu: Dorji Namgyal, 1985), folios 1-233, with the *dGe slong ma dpal mo rnam thar* contained in folios 20-50. The *rnam thar* is written in *dbu med* script and contained in folios 20-50. Although a more extended version, many passages in this text parallel what is contained in Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po's version. The dating and background information of this author is problematic: see D. Martin, *Tibetan Histories: A Bibliography of Tibetan-Language Historical Works* (London: Serindia Publications, 1997), p. 66. His name appears in the *Blue Annals* as a chief abbot (*mahā upadhyāya*) who advocated fasting as a life-preserving ceremony. G.N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), p. 1016. He is also known as the author of 15 works in the Tibetan rNying ma tradition: L. Bradburn, et al. *Masters of the Nyingma Lineage* (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1995), p. 441.

*Background of Gelongma Palmo's Life and Past Scholarship on Texts About Her*

Who was this Gelongma Palmo and why did so many practice *her* ritual? And even more poignant to this study, what is it about this woman's experiences that have held people's attention for so many centuries beyond the practice of self-denial? Often in modern-day Tibetan communities in Tibet and in diaspora, particularly during the holiest time of the year, *Sa ga zla ba* (Sagadawa), the holiday dedicated to the birth, *nirvāṇa*, and *parinirvāṇa* of the historical Buddha, one comes across women and groups from all Tibetan sects retelling the story of the former leper Gelongma Palmo and undertaking her fasting ritual, not fully knowing this nun's identity or understanding the full religious and historiographic value of her voluminous corpus of texts<sup>10</sup>.

So far, it is unclear whether or not Gelongma Palmo was an historical person since no systematic study has been done on her life or on her extensive textual corpus. We have to therefore rely on the little information available from a variety of sources to extract the identity of this nun and the value of her teachings.

First, the only textual historical source that establishes the dates for Gelongma Palmo's possible historical existence in a particular time period is the *Blue Annals*<sup>11</sup> (1476-1478) which links this nun with Avalokiteśvara and with imparting a fasting lineage, and gives details about her impressive lineage of fasting descendants:

The Degree of propitiating Ārya Avalokiteśvara by performing the rite of fasting was preached by the Nun Lakṣmī (dPal mo) personally blessed by Ārya Avalokiteśvara. She taught it to the paṇḍita Ye shes bzang po (Jñānabhadra), blessed by her. He to Bal po (the Nepalese) Peñaba, blessed by him. They were all saints (siddhas)....

<sup>10</sup> Although there are numerous extant fasting texts in the Tibetan tradition dedicated to various deities, the fasting ritual according to the Gelongma Palmo system is by far the most popular, based on the number of texts found at present and what was used in the practices of past (as described in texts) and present-day Tibetan practitioners.

<sup>11</sup> See G.N. Roerich 1976, pp. 1007-8, 1044, and 1008-18 for information on her lineal descendants. For a discussion of the etymological significance of the title of this work, see L. van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Historiography," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. Ithaca, New York, 1996), p. 44 and D. Martin 1997, pp. 14-15.

Also there existed a Lineage of the *dmar-khrid* (detailed exposition) of the Cycle of the Great Merciful One (Mahākaruṇika). The Nun Lakṣmī (dGe-slong ma dPal mo) imparted it to dPal gyi bzang po (Śrībhadra). The latter to Rin chen bzang po who imparted it to Atiśa....

The Chapter on the Lineage of the system of dPal mo (Lakṣmī) of the Cycle of Avalokiteśvara<sup>12</sup>.

The text also notes that even teachers of the bKa' gdams pa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism surround Avalokiteśvara in a vision<sup>13</sup>, showing that this early lineage dating back to the 11th century was closely associated with this deity and the Gelongma Palmo practice<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, because of her association with key figures in Tibetan Buddhist history like Atiśa (?982-?1054), Rin chen bzang po (958-1055), and others, Gelongma Palmo is placed in the 10th to 11th century.

In addition, although relics do not firmly establish historical existence, they help to illuminate Gelongma Palmo as a figure of religious historical importance. Documents in Zhwa lu monastery in Tibet record the existence of the relics of Gelongma Palmo on its premises, one of her liver (*sku mchin*) inside an image of a Thugs chen rgyal ba rgya mtsho and the other inside a medicine image (*sman sku*) of Avalokiteśvara<sup>15</sup>. This latter detail of her relic found in a medicine image of this particular type of bodhisattva is relevant to this study because of Gelongma Palmo's life experiences of disease and healing.

Besides these materials, the hagiographies (*rnam thar* "namthar" and *lo rgyus* "logyu") of Gelongma Palmo are the main sources relied upon in this study for joint historical and extra-historical value. While both terms imply a narrative account, the term *namthar*, meaning literally, "full liberation" [story] implies that the protagonist reached full

<sup>12</sup> G.N. Roerich 1976, pp. 1007-8, 1044, 1018.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 1976, p. 1015.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to this text, the Tibetan canon also contains a Gelongma Palmo text attributed to Atiśa.

<sup>15</sup> Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *Gangs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do* (An Account of a Pilgrimage to Central Tibet During the Years 1918 to 1920 being the text of Gangs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do). Photographically reproduced from the original Tibetan xylograph by Khams sprul Don brgyud nyi ma. Sungrab Nyamso Gyunphel Parkhang, Tashijong (Palampur, India: Tibet Craft Community: 1972), pp. 407.1, 409.2.

liberation in the Buddhist sense, and that the story is didactic and polemical<sup>16</sup>. These accounts operate like Western hagiographies and are typical of the Tibetan and Indian Buddhist tantric tradition, written in a narrative framework including factual material and showing greater-than-human figures overcoming limitations in very human ways. They also provide models and illustrate a doctrine throughout a long historical period. For example, the hagiographies link Gelongma Palmo with a King Indrabodhi/Indrabhūti, (perhaps one of three figures mentioned in the historian Tāranātha's *The Seven Instruction Lineages*<sup>17</sup>, and possibly one the Indian Mahāsiddhas), and a so-called King Dharmapāla. Gelongma Palmo, prior to her renunciation, is also referred to as Lakṣmīnikarā, and after her healing experience as Vajravārāhī, perhaps alluding to some conflation of her identity with one of the Indian Mahāsiddhas or other figures. The Newars refer to her as Candrikantā and as Śrīmatī Bhikṣunī, who is believed to have existed in the 10th century<sup>18</sup>. There may also have been two Gelongma Palmos/Bhikṣunī Lakṣmī-s, one of this tradition, and another who propagated higher anuttarayoga tantras<sup>19</sup>. Overall, these sources show that the corpus of materials provides models of ordinary beings undergoing and overcoming hardships in religious development and revealing their Buddhanature, and of enlightened beings reappearing as *tulkus* (*sprul sku*) figures, who

<sup>16</sup> *Logyu*, on the other hand, although literally meaning, “news of the year(s),” implying an historical account, is in actuality, a narrative account or record with both historical and ahistorical material included in it. For more information, see L. van der Kuijp 1996, pp. 42-3 and D. Martin 1997, pp. 14-5. For more information on biographies, see J. Willis, *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995) and J. Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> D. Templeman, *The Seven Instruction Lineages*. Translation of Tibetan text: Jo nan pa, Tāranātha, *nKa' babs bdun ldan gyi brgyud pa'i rnam thar ngo mtshar rmad du byung ba rinpoche'i lta bu'i rgyan* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1983).

<sup>18</sup> This information was given to me during research in Nepal, spring 1998. A text entitled: *Śrīmatī Bhikṣunī Kamalāko Upośādhā (nyungne) Grantha* (1993) is also read in Newar communities. Dan Martin also attributes the same identity of Gelongma Palmo in the Newar tradition to Candrikantā (corresponding to Tibetan Zla mdzes?). D. Martin 1997, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> I thank Dan Martin for presenting this possibility. This study is not meant to resolve these questions but to highlight the rich identities of and possible conflation of Gelongma Palmo with other figures throughout Tibetan religious history.

come repeatedly to the world to impart a particular teaching to others throughout a long historical period.

*Synopsis of Hagiographies: Their Common Ground*

Overall, the hagiographies themselves vary in length and detail but offer a wide range of comparative possibilities. In order to appreciate the complexity of the individual works in this study, it is also helpful to find their common ground. Despite diversity in narrative detail and length, the hagiographies in this study share a frame story which includes Gelongma Palmo's royal background, her contraction of leprosy and her struggles with it, her search for and devotion to a deity, her practice of the ascetic ritual, her final realization, and her reinclusion into ordinary life to help others. The present works describe Gelongma Palmo as a Kashmiri princess who was related to one of the King Indrabodhi-s and/or King Dharmapāla. She was known as the most beautiful and noble of women in the region and according to the more extensive modern 1953 version and a medieval text (1400s) by 'Od dpag rdo rje, was desired by kings ranging from Tibet, China, India, and Tajikistan. She entered religious life as a Buddhist renunciant and was known as a "gelongma" or fully ordained nun.

The more extensive modern version describes her studying with a guru for a few years until she surpassed her teacher in knowledge and practice. Eventually she was asked to become the head of a temple despite her ambivalence about being a nun in charge of monastics and her lack of experience. All versions describe how her life took on a new dimension when she contracted leprosy. Her life as a Buddhist nun came to an end in all versions, while the modern version explicitly describes her being thrown out of her monastery by her fellow monastics. All versions also describe the painful journey of living as a despised leper in isolation with a deteriorating body. They also stress that after realizing that suffering this devastating illness was instrumental for her healing and future teaching, she was instructed, via divine intervention, to devote herself to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who revealed to her an ascetic fasting ritual. Despite the hardship of practicing this challenging ritual in her deteriorating condition, she was determined to attain a higher state of awareness

as promised by her protector deities. Then she revealed herself in three aspects typical of the tantric tradition (outer, inner, and secret) encompassing human and divine qualities. Thereafter, she was healed not just from leprosy, but also from *saṃsāra*, the cycle of suffering itself, and returned to transmit her teachings to others. The following sections will show in more detail how it is the stories themselves that are foundational to the understanding of Gelongma Palmo as a key figure for Tibetan practitioners and a transmitter of teachings in the Buddhist tradition through her experience of leprosy.

*Falling to Pieces: Leprosy's Role in the Gelongma Palmo Hagiographies*

Then at the age of 15, after leprosy arose from the ripened sinful actions of previous [lives], her entire body appeared discolored and [as] dead flesh filled with abscesses. It was as if iron nails struck into her face. With the disease in her body, immeasurable suffering arose in her mind.

‘Od dpag rdo rje<sup>20</sup>

The most striking and unique features of leprosy (Tibetan. *mdze or mdze snyung*) are almost immediately confronted by the reader of these texts and serve as graphic examples of the Buddhist tradition's focus on the teachings of impermanence, detachment, and suffering. It is not unusual that texts such as these associate Buddhist teachings on impermanence with an illness like leprosy. The Pāli Canon abounds with examples of how the Buddha taught patients according to the severity of their disease. As Raoul Birnbaum notes in *The Healing Buddha*, the Buddha taught such that, “[t]hose with fatal diseases received lessons on impermanence, while those who could be cured were taught to meditate on the “seven limbs of enlightenment”<sup>21</sup>. What is different in the Gelongma Palmo hagiographies is that the experience of the disease leprosy (which is considered a fatal disease in the above Buddhist texts) is what is crucial here to trigger an awareness of the teaching of impermanence rather

<sup>20</sup> ‘Od dpag rdo rje 1985, fol. 21.4-6: DE NAS SNGON GYI MI DGE’ BA’I LAS NGAN SMIN NAS BCO LNGA LO LA MDZE BYUNG NAS LUS THAMS CAD SHA RO DANG SHAB GRA BYUNG CHU BUR GYI GANG SHAL LA KHRO’I ’DZER BU BDAB PA LTA BUR GYUR / LUS LA NA TSHA DANG SEMS LA SDUG BSNAL DPAG TU MED PA BYUNG /

<sup>21</sup> R. Birnbaum 1979, p. 10.

than the exercise of meditative techniques. In addition, leprosy proved not to be fatal since Gelongma Palmo lasted for quite a while, sometimes years according to some texts, so leprosy proved to have a redemptive quality, giving her the hope for future healing. The deterioration and transformation of the physical and mental constitution of a person to the level of an animal and the subsequent social stigmatization created by leprosy reveals the texts' insistence upon this experience as a first step in Tibetan tantric religious development. Leprosy operates in the texts on two levels: the impact of the disease on the physical individual and on her relationship with society, and secondly, the impact of the illness on promoting understanding of basic Buddhist doctrine<sup>22</sup>.

Leprosy is a devastating disease caused by the microbacterium *leprae* with complex symptoms<sup>23</sup> and manifests itself on the physical level in numerous ways<sup>24</sup>. In general, leprosy appears as a blister on the extremities of the body because the bacilli apparently like cooler surfaces. As

<sup>22</sup> Following the distinction between disease and illness made by certain medical anthropologists and physicians like Arthur Kleinman from Harvard Medical School and Arthur Caplan from the Center for Biomedical Ethics at the University of Minnesota, illness can be defined as a phenomenological experience of disease, a subjective perception of the biological experience: W.F. Bynum and R. Porter, *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*. I (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 18-19, 240, 242.

<sup>23</sup> It was sometimes, nevertheless, very difficult in various cultures to clearly identify the disease as leprosy especially since symptoms may have been secondary or tertiary infections due to lack of, or improper, treatment. Therefore, even though the Tibetan term *mdze* appears in texts, it may not always indicate "leprosy" in the strict sense but a disease that resembles it symptomatically, as small pox does in its early phases. The characteristics described in the passages in this study were most probably associated with leprosy in its various stages.

<sup>24</sup> The evidence of lack of pain is based on the findings of the British surgeon Paul Brand who conducted work on leprosy in India. P. Brand and P. Yancey, *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants: A Surgeon's Journey of Discovery* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993). The association of leprosy with nerve disorders in the *rgyud bzhi* also makes it relevant to the western medical perspective of the disease. It was not until the Norwegian scientist Armauer Hansen (1841-1912) identified the agent responsible for the disease in 1872-4 as microbacterium *leprae*, (a bacillus closely resembling the tuberculosis bacillus), followed by others in the twentieth century like Paul Brand, Philip Yancey, and so forth that crucial objective discoveries about nerve damage and lack of pain in leprosy patients were made about the disease. This disease has proven to be one of the least communicable of all communicable diseases. See also T.J. Tsarong, *Fundamentals of Tibetan Medicine According to the Rgyud-Bzhi* (Four Tantras) (Dharamsala: Tibetan Medical Centre, 1981) for the *rgyud bzhi's* description of leprosy and the nerves.

leprosy bacilli migrate to nerves in the cooler regions of the body, such as around the joints, the body's immune system dispatches masses of macrophages and lymphocytes which swarm in and swell inside the nerves' insulating sheath, choking off vital nourishment. The nerve swellings are the result of the body's own defense mechanism. After the extremities like the nasal passages, hands and feet, testicles, eyes, and ear lobes become deformed, they may also lose, in some cases, all sensation, including the sensation of pain, leaving the victim vulnerable to injury. One of many examples of the effects of leprosy on the extremities is evident in Lama Rab brtan's modern text, "Just about three months passed, the ten toes of the lama's feet fell off. Then five months later, the ten fingers of [her] hands fell off"<sup>25</sup>.

Although no systematic study has yet been conducted on the history of leprosy in Tibetan culture, a study of some of the basic Tibetan medical perspectives on leprosy from one medical text will aid in understanding the descriptive elements in the texts in this study, the physiological and psychological effects of the illness on Gelongma Palmo, and how Buddhism came to play a role in the healing process. Leprosy's association with demons and the psychological and physical nature of the illness are apparent in both genres.

Generally, the Tibetan medical perspective encompasses a broad range of literature and practices designed to improve and maintain mental and physical health. Although the purpose of medicine in the genre of literature called *gso ba rig pa* (the science of medicine; *gso ba* literally means "purification, healing") is for the treatment of disease and the maintenance of health through physical means, the practice of Tibetan medicine is fully integrated with Tibetan religious views and practices and can be related to other systems of medical knowledge like Indian (Āyurvedic), Chinese, and Greek which reflect Tibetan culture's cosmopolitan past<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Lama Rab brtan 1953, 7.19-8.1: ZHABS TOG GANG CIR BYED KYANG MI PHAN PAR / ZLA BA GSUM TSAM LON PA DANG BLA MA<sup>1</sup> ZHABS KYI SOR MDZUB BCU CHAD / DE NAS ZLA LNGA LONG PA DANG PHYAG MDZUB BCU CHAD /

<sup>26</sup> These include a wide variety of religious, ritual, and yogic practices of divination, amulet and talisman-making, astrology, the collection of merit, the power of the lama in addition to practices one associated with modern Western medicine detailed in canonical and post-canonical literature on physiological theory and pharmacology.

The best-known medical encyclopedic work revered in Tibetan medical training is a *gter ma* text, the *rGyud bzhi*, discovered in 1038<sup>27</sup>. The principal idea that emerges from this text is that of balance, balance within the body and between it and its corresponding aspects in the outside world. Imbalance is the cause of disease.

As the Tibetan medical tradition and the Gelongma Palmo stories both make clear, there are basically two causes of disease: one, the long term cause, karma from past lives; and two, the short term cause, factors in the present life, the latter including seasonal changes, evil spirits, poison, and habit and behavior. The third tantra of the *rGyud bzhi* specifically refers to different types of causes — a primary cause (*rgyu*) (distant causes such as, the three poisons, and near causes, with wind as the cause of all disorders because of its influence on both hot and cold) and promoting causes (*rkyen*), such as the influence of time, nutrition, behavior, and demons. But surprisingly ironic is how the *rGyud gzhi* categorizes leprosy.

As with all diseases that could not be satisfactorily explained, Tibetan medical theory traditionally ascribed leprosy (as well as other ailments like possession by evil spirits, dementia, epilepsy, and so forth) to a large category of causes of what is typically translated as “demons”

<sup>27</sup> The *Rgyud bzhi* was based on or influenced by Sanskrit medical works like the *Aṣṭāṅgahr̥daya*. Corresponding to Indic Āyurvedic humoral theory (except for the fourth humor in one of the main texts and other factors to be discussed below), Tibetan medicine follows the line of thought that all metabolic function is ascribed to three humors: wind (*rlung*), bile (*mkhris pa*), and phlegm (*bad kan*). Disease in general results when one or more of these different types of humors becomes unbalanced because of a variety of mundane and supramundane sources. Unlike the Indian system, these humoral factors, with the addition of blood (*khrag*) are delineated in the *Rgyud bzhi* under two broader categories, hot and cold. For example, wind and phlegm are cold diseases, and blood and bile are hot. The causes of disease reflect the fact that humoral balance has to be maintained not just within the body, but also in accord with the psychological life of the individual and the natural environment. See *Rgyud bzhi* (Leh: Tashigangpa, 1975); A.C. de Kőrös, “Analysis of a Tibetan Work,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Jan. 1835), pp. 1-20; R.E. Emmerick, “A Chapter from the *Rgyud-bz̄i*,” in *Asia Major* 19 (1975), pp. 141-62; “Sources of the *Rgyud-bz̄i*,” in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morganländischen Gesellschaft*. Suppl. III.2 (1977), pp. 1135-41; “Epilepsy According to the *Rgyud-bz̄i*,” in G. Jan Meulenbeld and Dominik Wujastyk, eds., *Studie on Indian Medical History*. Groningen: Egbert Forsten (1987), pp. 63-90; J. Filliozat, “Un Chapitre du *Rgyud-bz̄i* sur les bases de la santé et des maladies,” in *Laghu-prabandhāḥ: Choix d’articles d’indologie* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 233-42; and Y. Donden, *The Ambrosia Heart Tantra*, translated by Jhampa Kelsang (Alan Wallace), (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1976).

(*gdon*)<sup>28</sup> who cause certain diseases when they get offended by an action. Demons are perceived not merely as physical entities (for example, demons are transformed into dharma protectors) but also as psychological entities associated with a multitude of mental and emotional obscurations afflictions (*nyon mongs*) that cause individual humans to commit karmic acts<sup>29</sup>. The following passage in Jo gdan Bsod nam bzang po's medieval version of Gelongma Palmo's life describes demons transformed into protectors of Gelongma Palmo's tutelary deity, the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara:

When external demons and so forth began to create obstacles, since [she] meditated a little [on] each [with] kindness and compassion, all [the demons] became endowed with bodhicitta. When the ten directional protectors and so forth also arose to do a little harm, [she] remained steadily in the generation stage of the Great Compassionate One, and [having] summoned [them] before [her], by having bound [them] to an oath, [they] pledged to be the Dharma Protectors of the practice of the Great Compassionate One and in particular, the eight great Nāgas pledged to be the Dharma Protectors of the Eleven-faced One<sup>30</sup>.

It was not until these demonic forces were under the control of Gelongma Palmo after she was healed, that the suffering of the world can be fully overcome.

Therefore, from the Tibetan point of view, it is actually not ironic at all that a disease that seems on the surface to be merely a “skin afflic-

<sup>28</sup> *gdon* or *gdon bgegs* is the general category used for one of the causes of disease, although in the Tibetan religious system, there are many so-called “demon-like” entities called *bgegs pa*, literally meaning “obstacles,” *klu* (Sanskrit *nāga*), *bdud*, and so forth.

<sup>29</sup> One explicit example of so-called “demons” symbolically being identified with mental afflictions (*nyon mongs*) including all negative emotions is found throughout the biographies of the eleventh century *dākinī*, Ma gcig Lab sgron ma, the founder of gCod practice, the practice that cuts through these demons. The demons are conquered and annihilated with meditational and other ritual practices — translation by J. Edou, *Machig Labdrön and the Foundations of Chöd* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1976), p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po 199?, folios 6a.1-6: TING NGE 'DZIN BZANG PO RGYUD LA SKYES / PHYI ROL GYI BDUD LA SOGS PAS BAR CHAD RTSOM DU BYUNG BA LA / BYAMS SNYING RJE CUNG ZAD RE BSGOMS PAS THAMS CAD BYANG CHUB KYI SEMS DANG LDAN PAR GYUR / PHYOGS SKYONG BCU LA SOGS PA YANG CUNG ZAD GLAGS BLTAR BYUNG BA LA / THUGS RJE CHEN PO'Ī BSKYED RIM LA BRTAN PAR BZHUGS TE MDUN DU BKUG NAS DAM LA BTAGS PAS THUGS RJE CHEN PO'Ī SGRUB PA BYED PA'Ī CHOS SKYONG DU KHAS BLANGS SHING / KHYAD PAR DU KLU CHEN BRGYAD KYIS ZHAL BCU GCIG PA'Ī SGOS KYI CHOS SKYONG DU KHAS BLANGS /

tion” is more than what meets the eye and is also a psychological phenomenon based on bad action committed in the past that is now manifested physically. Gelongma Palmo’s therapeutic remedy is thus both physical and psychological. Leprosy is perhaps the most symbolic mirror of psychological sickness; unable to hide inner spiritual deformity, the victim is eaten away internally, and a mental and physical disease is created.

*Leprosy, Suffering and the Purpose of Gelongma Palmo*

[Indrabodhi said],

After having turned [literally, “made”] this virulent disease of yours into an opportunity...<sup>31</sup>.

Gelongma Palmo offered the following petition:

‘Lord in Refuge, Rinpoche, since I can no longer bear it, the suffering of *samsāra* is not to be tolerated any longer in this life and I request you to teach the good path of liberation, the *dharmadhātu*. I am a girl, of low intellect and little insight— please give me a profound instruction in few words and great meaning with a heart of loving-kindness’<sup>32</sup>.

Gelongma Palmo said, ‘[I] am sick for the sake of sentient beings who are as vast as the sky’<sup>33</sup>.

As noted earlier, on the level of disease, leprosy is a biological pathological condition with complex symptoms destroying nerve tissue and leading to physical deformities. Leprosy creates a barrier of physicality impacting on the individual and her relationship with society. The

<sup>31</sup> Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po 199?, folio 3b.2: KHYOD KYI NAD DRAG PO `DIS RKYEN BYAS NAS in the 81st chapter of the third tantra, the *Rgyud bzhi* describes demons (*klu, nāga*), leprosy, and the degeneration of the human race. Gyu thog yon tan mgon po, *bDud rtsi snying po yan lag brgyad pa gsang ba man ngag gi rgyud* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmans dpe skrun khang, 1993); E. Finckh, *Foundations of Tibetan Medicine According to the book Rgyud bzhi*. 2 (Dorset: Element Books, 1985), p. 22. Tibetan text from Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po 1953: folios 3b.2.

<sup>32</sup> Lama Rab brtan 199?, 5.14-: BU MOS ZHU BA `DI LTAR PHUL BA / SKYABS RJE RIN PO CHE LA ZHU BA LA / MI TSHE `DI BAS PHYI MA SHUL THAG RING // `KHOR BA`I SDUG BSNAL BZOD RLAGS MI `DUG PAS // CHOS DBYINGS THAR PA`I LAM BZANG STON PAR ZHU / BU MO BDAG NI BLO DMAN SHES RAB CHUNG // TSHIG NYUNG DON CHE GDAMS NGAG ZAB MO ZHIG / BTSE BA`I THUGS KYIS BDAG LA GNANG BAR ZHU / ZHES ZHUS PA DANG /

<sup>33</sup> Lama Rab brtan 199?, 7.12-.13: NAM MKHA` DANG MNYAM PA`I SEMS CAN GYI DON LA NA BA YIN GSUNGS /

Gelongma Palmo hagiographies, in addition to Tibetan medical texts like the *rGyud bzhi*, confirm that leprosy cannot be understood simply as a biological condition but also as an experience. Leprosy is said to be caused by demons in the Tibetan context that, although believed to be external forces, may also be defined as negative propensities experienced by human beings. Therefore leprosy as an illness experience has instrumental value in terms of Buddhist religious development. In her hardship Gelongma Palmo realizes the purpose of suffering and its eradication. The illness experience of leprosy is an essential part of Gelongma Palmo's path, a *via dolorosa* (literally, path of pain). Leprosy was a catalyst, triggering Gelongma Palmo to undergo spiritual work in order to develop and reveal herself as a model and as a teacher for others.

The suffering caused by leprosy in the Gelongma Palmo hagiographies is due to two factors: a disruption of identity and a loss of human agency. As the texts constantly describe bodily decay and dismemberment in graphic detail, the initial message is the impermanence of physical existence and the suffering response when facing that awareness. These texts reflect the basic Buddhist dictum that whatever is impermanent causes suffering. Lama Rab brtan's modern text describes the effects of leprosy on the physical body and its impact on the sufferer and on others:

Then at a certain time, reaching the age of 25, a mere itch arose on one big toe of her feet and a small boil arose. Then it became as a bursting blister that filled the bottom of her feet to the crown of her head. Then Gelongma Palmo kept it a secret from the preceptors...<sup>34</sup>.

While she remained in the temple, Gelongma Palmo was consumed with severe leprosy. Because of this, suffering arose like an arrow struck into the mind of that very servant Sampelma.. Although she offered whatever services were possible [to Gelongma Palmo], it had no effect. Just about three months passed, the ten toes of the lama's feet fell off. Then five months later, the ten fingers of her hands fell off. At that time, severe suffering arose in the minds of both the mistress and the servant. Sampelma enclosed the lama with a curtain. During this time, it was as if her body was not seen by

<sup>34</sup> Lama Rab brtan 1953, 7.8-.12: DE NAS DGUNG LO NYER LNGA LON PA'Ì DUS NAM ZHIG GI TSHE / ZHABS KYI THE BONG GCIG GYA' BA TSAM BYUNG BAS BRUM CUNG ZHIG BYUNG / DE NAS SRIN THOR GCIG TU SONG BAS / DE'Ì RKYEN BYAS ZHABS KYI MTHIL DANG SPYI BO'Ì GTSUG RNAMS GANG BAS / DENAS BLON MDZAD RNAMS LA GSANG BAS /

anyone. At this time, after all in the temple noticed the pus and blood, Gelongma Palmo and Sampelma were thrown out after the end of the year<sup>35</sup>.

In this passage, the extreme deterioration of the physical body is clear. Scenes of Gelongma Palmo's body literally breaking away from her into little pieces are reminiscent of scenes in Buddhist literature of deteriorating corpses in cremation grounds and the graphic metaphors used about the body exemplifying physical impermanence. Each severed limb and aesthetic imperfection on the body has symbolic impact. The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (4:386-87) in the Indian Buddhist tradition compares the body to a festering pustule, like a boil with nine openings:

Imagine, monks, a boil that has been collecting for many years which might have nine open wounds, nine natural openings, and whatever might ooze out of it, foulness would...squeeze out of it... This boil, monks, is a...metaphor for the body which is made up of the four great elements, begotten of mother and father, ... subject to impermanence,...dissolution, and disintegration...<sup>36</sup>.

An example of Gelongma Palmo being stripped of her identity and of life itself is evident in Lama Rab brtan's text when Gelongma Palmo discourages her servant Sampelma from remaining with her and orders her to return to Kashmir:

I have exhausted benefiting you. This marsh valley is my burial site...  
I am not a person, I am a leprous corpse. Girl, detach yourself from this leprous corpse. It is better that you go to a happier place<sup>37</sup>.

From these stigmatizing experiences, Gelongma Palmo faced a crucial lesson: Illness cuts the barriers between social distinctions and therefore,

<sup>35</sup> Lama Rab brtan 1953, 7.16-8.4: DGE SLONG MA MDZE SNYUNG DRAG PO ZHIG GIS ZIN TE BZHUG PA'Ī TSHE / GYOG MO BSAM 'PHEL MA DE NYID SEMS LA MDA' PHOG PA LTA BU'Ī SDUG BSNAL BYUNG BAS / ZHABS TOG GANG CIR BYED KYANG MI PHAN PAR / ZLA BA GSUM TSAM LON PA DANG BLA MA'Ī ZHABS KYI SOR MDZURB BCU CHAD / DE NAS ZLA LGA LONG PA DANG PHYAG MDZUB BCU CHAD / DE TSHE DPON GYOG GNYIS PO THUGS LA SDUG BSSN-GAL DRAG PO BYUNG BAS / BSAM 'PHEL MAS BLA MA LA YUL BAS SKOR TE / SKU LUS GZHAN GYIS MI MJAL BA LTAR BZHUGS PA'Ī DUS 'DIR / KUN GYIS RNAG KHRAG TSHOR NAS SKABS 'DIR LO RDZOGS PA DANG PHYI LA STON BYUNG /

<sup>36</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*. Translated by Rev. Richard Morris (London: Pali Text Society, 1883), pp. 386-7.

<sup>37</sup> Lama Rab brtan 1953, 11.15-.18: JL LTAR BYAS KYANG PHAN PA MI SRID PAS // NGA NI MI MIN MDZE MA'Ī RO YIN NO // MDZE MA'Ī RO LA ZHEN CHAGS MA BYED PAR // BU MO GANG DGA'Ī, YUL DU 'GRO BA LEGS //

despite her social standing, she as a human being contracted the disease — illness does not discriminate.

In addition, the deteriorating and transformative effects of leprosy also reduces a human being to a lower level of existence, much like that of an animal or preta in the Buddhist perspective, losing all human agency and control. This loss of human agency and control is reflected, for example, on the grammatical level in the use of the non-intentional verb form '*chad*' meaning "to be cut" where scenes of leprosy are described in these texts, rather than the use of the intentional form of the verb, *gcod*, meaning "to cut"; the latter is used when describing Gelongma Palmo's transformed healed state. Notice the transformative deterioration of Gelongma Palmo's physical constitution, and particularly, the loss of her right hand, in a scene from Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po's medieval version:

Despite [the] fact that this nun was knowledgeable in the five domains of science, and instructions and vows were present [in her] in a very noble way, leprosy arose due to the force of previous karma. Her right hand was severed from the wrist, even the front of her face looked as if it had been pounded with bronze nails, her complexion was like an autumn flower struck [by] frost, [her] taking of food and drink was like an animal eating grass not knowing how to feed [herself] with [her left] hand. Even though knowledgeable in the five domains of science, by being afflicted with a virulent illness, there arose immeasurable suffering settling in [her] mind as if without recourse. When attendants carried [her] into an isolated thatched hut, she stayed there crying<sup>38</sup>.

In a South Asian context, the loss of her right hand has great significance. Gelongma Palmo has only two options, to eat with her left hand (an impure act) or simply to eat as an animal. In her initial response to leprosy, Gelongma Palmo feels compelled to lose her human agency

<sup>38</sup> Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po 199?, 2b.3-3a.5: DGE SLONG MA 'DI NI RIG PA'Ġ GNAS LNGA LA MKHAS SHING / BSLAB SDOM RNAMS KYANG SHIN TU BTSUN PAR BZHUGS PA LAS / SNGON GYI LAS DBANG GIS MDZE BYUNG STE / PHYAG G YAS PA'Ġ 'KHRIGS MA NAS CHAD / ZHAL GYI GDONG LA YANG KHRO GZER BTAB PA BZHIN DU GYUR / SHA MDOG NI STON KA'Ġ ME TOG LA BA MOS PHOG PA BZHIN DU GYUR / BZA' BTUNG BYED PA YANG PHYAG GIS BSNYOD MI SHES PAR DUD 'GRO RTSA ZA BA BZHIN DU GYUR / RIG PA'Ġ GNAS LNGA LA MKHAS KYANG / NAD DRAG POS BTAB PAS SDUG BSNAL SEMS LA BZHAG THABS MED PA LTA BU DPAG TU MED PA BYUNG STE / 'KHOR RNAMS KYIS LOGS SHIG TU RTSA'Ġ SPYIL BU CIG TU BSKYAL NAS DER BSHUM GYIN BZHUGS PA NA / the line: PHYAG G YAS PA'Ġ 'KHRIGS MA NAS CHAD literally, "severed from the wrist of her right hand" was changed in the translation to make sense of it.

because of the moral and social implications of the act of eating with her left hand, the defiled hand used to clean oneself.

In addition, as with any devastating illness, the impact does not stop on the personal level, but affects the individual's relationship with society, in this case the monastic community. She is forced to leave her monastic community because of the contraction of leprosy.

Another example of the social stigma created by this illness reminds readers of leprosy's association with sexual transgressions, the weak gender described as "woman" (Tibetan: *skye dman* "low birth" or *bud med*, may etymologically mean "negation of masculinity")<sup>39</sup>, and issues of purity<sup>40</sup>. 'Od dpag rdo rje's medieval version associates gender, leprosy, and purity: "The custodian [of the temple] said, 'On top of being of low birth [i.e. a woman], you are a leper woman. Stay behind the door and make your request<sup>41</sup>.'" This passage comes out of a scene that describes the fury felt by the custodian. Lama Rab brtan's modern text describes the scene in this way:

'You, female leper beggar, have come inside my temple. I myself cannot do offerings of incense to the deities and purification by water in the temple. If the crops fail, hail strikes and so forth, it is certain that [all] will come to my head<sup>42</sup>.'

With the key handle, he beat her from the crown of [her] head to the soles of her feet. Having pulled the nun from [her] feet, he brought her

<sup>39</sup> I thank Professor L. van der Kuijp for this etymology.

<sup>40</sup> Western scholarship also points out the relationship of serious illnesses with sexual potency (or the lack thereof) and purity issues. In other cultures, see S. Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York and London: Doubleday, 1990); S.N. Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1974); and H.M. de Bruin, *Leprosy in South India: Stigma and Strategies of Coping*, Pondy Papers in Social Sciences 22 (France: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> 'Od dpag rdo rje 1985, 23.1.-2: DKON GNYER NA RE KHYOD SKYE BA DMAN PA'Ì THOG DU MDZE MOR 'DUG PA SGO RGYAB TU 'DUG LA GSOL BA THOB CIG GSUNGS /

<sup>42</sup> Lama Rab brtan 1953, 16.16-17.3: MDZE SBRANG GI SBRANG MO KHYOD NGED GYI LHA KHANG NANG 'ONGS PA DANG / NGED RANG NI LHA KHANG NANG LHA BSANGS KHRUS GSOL BYAS MI TSHUGS PAS / LO THOG NYES PA DANG SER BAS RDUNG PA LA SOGS PA BYUNG NA NGED RANG GI MGOR 'ONG NGES YIN ZER NAS / LDE MIG GI THAG PA DES SPYI GTSUGS NAS RKANG THIL YAN CHAD DU BRDUNGS SHING / DGE SLONG MA'Ì SHABS NAS 'THEN TE LHA KHANG GI RGYAB LA BSKAL BAS / DGE SLONG MA'Ì THUGS DGONGS LA SEMS CAN GYI BLO MA RIG PAS SGRIB PA YIN SNYAM BYANG CHUB TU THUGS BSKYED DE /

[to the] back of the temple. In Gelongma Palmo's mind, she generated bodhicitta [by thinking], 'Sentient beings' minds are obscured by ignorance.'

The custodian of the temple was convinced that Gelongma Palmo's presence was going to defile the sacred space of the temple and cause harm even on the level of harming the environment and since he was in charge of maintaining purity, he would be blamed by the locals. It is clear here that women and lepers, who do not fit into society, defile — a theme common throughout diverse religions and cultures.

From these examples, the message of the texts is that as the body breaks down, all marks of identity on the physical level also break down and take on new meaning, while concerns on the psychological level become more prominent. As described in the previous chapter, leprosy destroys the microscopic fibers that produce pain in the extremities of the body therefore making individuals with leprosy prone to injury such as severed limbs. Nevertheless, the leprous individual experiences suffering that is painful, a pain not altogether related to a specific location on the body or to the nervous system. Rather than the sensation of the prick of a needle on the skin, it is a pain that becomes more existential, a philosophical concern about the pain experience that goes beyond the immediate experience to the wider concerns of suffering in the world. Lama Rab brtan's passage reiterates Gelongma Palmo's awareness of the futility of attachment to the body:

Since those who assembled asked Gelongma Palmo to leave, Sampelma said, 'There is no reason for us to leave.' The lama [Gelongma Palmo] replied, 'Sampelma, I myself [am] a lie, even if I do not lie, my own body is a lie'.... Then going away, Sampelma carried her. The toes of [Gelongma Palmo's] feet hit the ground. Her very body appeared like a discarded load. [There] arose hardships three times and [Gelongma Palmo] was the height of filth. Then the *samgha* was happy<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> Lama Rab brtan 1953, 8.4.-7: TSHOGS PA RNAMS KYIS DGE SLONG MA THON ZHUS PAS / BSAM 'PHEL MA ZHU BAS THON RGYU MED ZER BAS / BLA MA'Ī GSUNGS NAS / BSAM 'PHEL MA NGA RANG RDZUN NGED KYANG MI RDZUN RANG GI LUS PO DE RDZUN GSUNGS / BSAM 'PHEL MAS BLA MA KHUR BAS / PHYAG ZHABS MED PA'Ī STABS KYIS DAR STON NAS 'KHUR ZHIG GSUNGS / DE NAS BSAM 'PHEL MAS 'KHUR NAS BYON PAS ZHABS MDZUB SA LA GTUG PAS / SKU LUS DE NYID 'KHUR BOR BA LTAR BYUNG BAS / 'O RGYAL LAN GSUM BYUNG ZHING 'BAG PA'Ī TOG TU GYUR TO / DE NAS NANG GI MI RNAMS DGA' BAS /

The simile, “her body appeared like a discarded load,” and the phrase “[she] was the height of filth” are very pertinent here. Gelongma Palmo became detached from her physical existence because she could no longer be rigidly defined by her body in terms of categories established by the ordinary world, that is, by her gender, social status as daughter and princess, religious status as nun, and even as human being. This is also in accord with the Tibetan Buddhist tantric idea that the level of renunciation that Gelongma Palmo made was not a full one; further religious development needed to be attained in order to achieve the goals of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition such as the aspiration for bodhicitta, the final realization of emptiness of phenomena, and the attainment of enlightenment. She had to overcome the limitations of physicality. These categories are fluid and impermanent as everything else in ordinary existence. Physical decay shook the very foundation of Gelongma Palmo’s preconceived notions of reality, triggering a sense of loss and despair, and an urgent need for direction.

As the next example will show, it is often the case that suffering has a way of shaking a person’s sensibilities and forcing her to concentrate on what is most important, survival. Lama Rab brtan’s text offers an example of the determination displayed by Gelongma Palmo despite her horrific circumstances when Avalokiteśvara appeared to her to offer consolation:

Then in order to practice, she accepted the austerities of the Holy One [i.e. Avalokiteśvara] and left. One day went by. Because her leprosy, she could not walk with her feet Then she crawled on her stumps.... She accepted the suffering and remained there<sup>44</sup>.

These examples of awareness of impermanence, disruption of identity, and loss of human agency make clear that the path of suffering, *la via dolorosa*, can be translated to mean in Buddhist terms that the path of hardship within religious development is the crucial message of these texts. The survival instinct made Gelongma Palmo open to religious

<sup>44</sup> Lama Rab brtan 1953, 14.11-.12: DE NAS DGE SLONG MA DPAL MO 'PHAGS PA'Ī BKA' SGRUB PHYIR DKA' SPYAD DANG DU LONG TE BYON PAS / NYIN CIG BYON PA DANG SKU 'Ī GZHI SNYUNG MDZE YIN PA'Ī STABS KYIS ZHABS KYIS BYON MA TSHUGS / DE NAS SPYI SHUD RGYAB CING BYON PAS / (...) 14.17-.18: SDUG BSNAL DANG DU BLANG STE BZHUGS PA

experience in a fuller sense, she became receptive to the teachings that appeared to her via divine intervention. It was now up to her to take initiative and regain her control over the situation by *re-acting* and transforming this illness experience, *la via dolorosa*, into a hard lesson on value of renunciation and as a foundation for others' future growth.

*Emerging Whole: Fasting as Reconstruction and Transformation in the Process of Renunciation*

With a greater appreciation of the illness experience, a new perspective is gained into the profound role played by fasting ritual in these stories. Bodily deterioration and transformation of the individual caused by leprosy complement aspects of the fasting ritual that Gelongma Palmo practices and transmits to others. Leprosy and fasting in these stories operate on opposing and complementary planes, each offering unique affiliations to Tibetan Buddhism's focus on religious development and transformation: leprosy, with its notion of bodily deterioration and destruction, and fasting, with its focus on reconstruction and renewal. Therefore, after falling apart, Gelongma Palmo will emerge whole. Fasting is the next step in the reassembling process. As leprosy can be an example of a breakdown of the attachment to previous ways of thinking and being, fasting is an example of reconstruction and transformation of this state through human agency and divine intervention that will ultimately put an end to the cause of the cycle of suffering in the first place. A brief analysis of the term "fasting" and examination of its role in relation to leprosy as presented in the hagiographies and one ritual of propitiation (*sgrub thabs*) will reveal teachings on the role of suffering and renunciation<sup>45</sup>.

Literally, the term *smyung gnas* means "a fasting state, abiding in fasting, enduring the fast" and so the first impression after reading the descriptions in the texts is a practice of self-denial of food and sometimes water,

<sup>45</sup> The *sgrub thabs* text used in this study is by the Sa skya scholar Zhu chen Tshul khirms rin chen, *dGe slong ma dpal mo lugs kyi thugs rje chen po bcu gcig zhal gyi sgrub thabs smyung gnas dang bcas pa'i cho ga sdig sgrub nam sbyong*. In *Collected Writings on Buddhist Philosophy, Liturgy, and Ritual of Zhu chen Tshul Khirms rin chen*, Vol. 2 (New Delhi: Ngawang Gelek Demo, 1972), folios 275-315.

a practice common to most religious traditions, meant to purify the practitioner of past transgressions or in preparation for union with the divine. Beyond the literal meaning of the word “fast,” the term can be extended to include other practices in an ascetic program. The Tibetan equivalent the word asceticism is *dka’ thub* meaning “capable of [enduring] difficulties” which is what Gelongma Palmo’s experiences represent. Walter O. Kaelber in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* proposes a useful working definition of the term “asceticism”:

[A] voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual or profane gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher spiritual state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred<sup>46</sup>.

The ascetic aspects of the fasting ritual consist of challenging exercises of discipline and self-denial meant to assist the practitioner in achieving a transformative state<sup>47</sup>. The fasting text according to the Sa skya scholar Zhu chen Tshul khirms rin chen divides the ritual into three stages: a preliminary practice (*sngon ‘gro*, the actual ceremony (*dnegos gzhi*) and the concluding ceremony (*rjes*). Overall, the ceremony may last two and a half days to several months, sometimes being continued for many years. There are vows of purification (*gso sbyong*), refuge vows to the four jewels, prostrations and visualization practices; offerings to the deities; a complete fast of food, drink and even one’s saliva on alternate days, and a vow of silence. The ritual is meant to be performed on an annual basis on new and/or full moon days in Tibetan areas with the longest performance during the most auspicious period, *Sa ga zla ba*, or as needed.

As the next passage will show, the hagiographies are connected with devotion to a deity. Gelongma Palmo was specifically directed by divine

<sup>46</sup> W. Kaelber In: *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, p. 441. As the Jewish scholar Steven Fraade states in his essay in reference to the Greek and later connotations of asceticism, “as athletic and military training require both the positive strengthening of one’s physical faculties and the negative abstention from weakening habits, so too philosophical and spiritual training require both affirmation and renunciation.” S. Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 256.

<sup>47</sup> These practices include prescriptions and injunctions on worship, speech and silence, sleep, clothing, sexual activity, food, offering, story-telling, singing, and pilgrimage. It also incorporates *bhakti*-like activities (devotionalistic) toward a particular deity.

intervention to devote herself fully to a certain bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara, who has historical associations with asceticism and healing and a cultic status as the patron deity of the Tibetan people. Under this bodhisattva's watchful eye, Gelongma Palmo enacts a fasting regimen that triggers a bodily reconstruction and complete mental and physical transformation:

Then from having remained before the Eleven-faced One, she made an oath not to go elsewhere until she attained the highest realization, not paying attention to eating or drinking. Having meditated on the Eleven-faced One day and night, when one year passed, the entire disease of her body shed like the skin of a snake and disappeared. Her right hand was restored and her body became even more beautiful than it had been before the leprosy arose. Sound *samādhi* was generated in her [mind] stream<sup>48</sup>.

Gelongma Palmo is restored to an even more beautiful woman than before, while the restoration of her right hand symbolizes her pure state. This reconstruction is another crucial step in a series of steps on the physical and mental level in a long purification process that varies from text to text. According to the modern version of the story, the restoration of Gelongma Palmo's agency is exemplified by the intentional use of the word for cutting, *gcod*. She is able to take control over her healing process by actively engaging in the act of detachment:

She practiced enduring the fast. One day, she [cut off] food. One day, she [cut off] speech. In meditation, she said the praises of the Holy One with intense fortitude and diligence like this.....Due to the compassion of the Holy One, Gelongma Palmo, having accomplished her aggregates [as] a rainbow body in this life, went to the sky realm<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po 1999?, 5b.2-6a.1: DE NAS ZHAL BCU GCIG PA'Ì DRUNG DU BZHUGS NAS MCHOG GI GNGOS GRUB MA THOB BAR DU 'DI NAS GZHAN DU MI 'GRO BA 'I DBU SNYUNG BEHES TE BZA' BA DANG BTUNG BA YID LA MI BYED PAR NYIN MTSHAN KHOR YUG TU ZHAL BCU GCIG PA LA THUGS DAM DU MDZAD NAS LO GCIG LON PA'Ì TSHE LUS KYI NAD THAMS CAD SBRUL GYI SHUN PA BUD PA BZHIN DU SONG / PHYAG G YAS PA YANG SOR CHUD CING SKU LUS NI MDZE MA BYUNG BA'Ì DUS LAS KYANG MTSHAR BAR GYUR / TING NGE 'DZIN BZANG PO RGYUD LA SKYES /

<sup>49</sup> Lama Rab brtan 1953, 17.4-.6: SMYUNG GNAS GNANG NAS / NYI MA GCIG ZA MA / NYI MA GCIG NGAG BYED NAS / THUGS DAM LA 'PHAGS PA'Ì BSTOD PA SNYING STOBS BRITSON 'GRUS DRAG PO'Ì SGO NAS 'DI LTAR GSUNGS PA / (...) 18.1-.2: 'PHAGS PA'Ì THUGS RJES DGE SLONG MA DPAL MO PHUNG PO 'JA' LUS GRUB NAS TSHE 'DI LA MKHA' SPYOD DU GSHEGS PA YIN NO //

This extra-human transformation is prevalent throughout these versions of the hagiographies. In Lama Rabten's modern text, Gelongma Palmo appears flying above her servant-companion Sampelma like "a sparkling dew drop more brilliant than before<sup>50</sup>". The final process for Gelongma Palmo is to reveal herself as a divine being, an emanation who entered the world for the sake of others.

As mentioned earlier in the case of leprosy, transformation is enacted beyond the individual and society to the universe-at-large. As Gelongma Palmo regained control over herself and was literally "reassembled," she now had control over her environment and became a better vehicle for the Buddhist teachings than in her former state. The demons that were the cause of leprosy, her instrumental illness, and a hindrance to the Buddhadharmā, were subdued and transformed as she herself was.

Ultimately, fasting is the necessary act to reassemble Gelongma Palmo into a purified, yet unattached being. This ritual is instrumental to the journey of suffering in the form of leprosy in that it healed and reinforced a sense of control over the self and the environment through ritual structure and the devotional and tantric transformational process. Textual descriptions and modern-day practitioners' report suggest that fasting creates a sense of control over the self in society and often differentiates women's religiosity and experience from men's. Not only do women in modern-day communities outnumber men in this practice and the retelling of the frame story, but lamas often call this a "woman's practice." The body, speech, and mind of Gelongma Palmo are not just physically purified but ontologically purified in the ultimate sense of achievement or Buddhahood. Gelongma Palmo herself becomes the embodiment of the Buddhist concept of renunciation.

In the conclusion of Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po's medieval version Gelongma Palmo gains full control and reveals herself as a divine figure, appearing as a *ḍākinī dancing* and wielding a knife. Here she is enacting the healing process of others. She is transformed from a patient-leper to the level of physician and teacher to a community. The metaphorical value of this knife is not missed: this ritual implement and meditation tool

<sup>50</sup> Lama Rab brtan 1953, 20.3: DE '1 DBUS SU DGE SLONG MA MO RANG SNGAR BAS KYANG GZI MDANGS CHE BA BZHIN ZIL CHU KHROL LE BZHUGS PAS /

is used intentionally to symbolize the cutting off of human beings' attachments to preconceived notions of reality.

### *Conclusion*

This study offers a glimpse of the diverse purposes for the continual transmission of these texts by individual authors and of a common theme of the hermeneutics of suffering via illness and renunciation through a female embodiment. In addition, because of the consistent prolific written and oral transmission of these stories from the eleventh century to the present-day, these teachings have proven to have been a foundational strand of Tibetan religious history.

Uncertainty about the identity and historical existence of Gelongma Palmo has not detracted from her historical relevance as a symbol since her stories have provided a model and illustrated a doctrine throughout a long historical period. Examples of this are explicitly seen in present-day Buddhist female renunciants' tendency in Tibetan Buddhist communities to be the holders of her ritual tradition. Their nunneries are places for the retelling of her stories. And as the compiler of the modern text and contemporary evidence from Nepal and Tibet show, sufferers of severe illnesses like leprosy have sought solace through the printing and transmission of her story, practicing her ritual, or visiting a temple associated with Gelongma Palmo.

### *Bibliography*

- Birnbaum, Raoul 1979: *The Healing Buddha*. Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications.
- Bla ma Rab brtan 1953: *dGe slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar nges 'byung rgyud la skye ba'i chos gtam* (added English title: *The Biography of Kamala Bhikshuni, Princess of King Dharma Pal, an Ancient King of Kashmir, India*). Kalimpong: Tibet Mirror Press: 1-21; rpt. 1963.
- Blo bzang bskal bzang rgya mtsho, the Dalai Lama VII 1995: *Nyung Nā: The Means of Achievement of the Eleven-Faced Great Compassionate One, Avalokiteśvara*. (Translation of text: *Thugs rje chen po zhal bcu gcig pa dpal mo lugs kyi sgrub thabs smyung bar pa'i cho ga dang de'i bla ma brgyed pa'i gsol 'debs bcas*) Translated by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche and George Churinoff. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

- Bradburn, Leslie et al. 1995: *Masters of the Nyingma Lineage*. Berkeley: Dharma Publishing.
- Brand, Paul with Philip Yancey 1993: *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants: A Surgeon's Journey of Discovery*. London: Marshall Pickering.
- Bordy, Saul Nathaniel 1974: *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University.
- Bynum, W.F. and Roy Porter, eds. 1993: *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*. I. London and New York: Routledge.
- Dargyay, Eva K. 1979: *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet*. Revised ed. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- de Bruin, Hanne M. 1998: *Leprosy in South India: Stigma and Strategies of Coping*. Pondy Papers in Social Sciences 22. France: Institut Français de Pondichéry.
- de Körös, A. Csoma 1835: "Analysis of a Tibetan Work," in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Jan.: pp. 1-20.
- Donden, Yeshe 1976: *The Ambrosia Heart Tantra* Translated by Jhampa Kelsang (Alan Wallace). Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- Edou, Jérôme: *Machig Labdrön and the Foundations of Chöd*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Emmerick, Ronald E. 1975: "A Chapter from the *Rgyud-b'zhi*," in *Asia Major* 19: pp. 141-62.
- 1977: "Sources of the *Rgyud-b'zhi*," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morganländischen Gesellschaft*. Supp. III.2: pp. 1135-41.
- 1987: "Epilepsy According to the *Rgyud-b'zhi*," in G. Jan Meulenbeld and Dominik Wujastyk, eds., *Studies on Indian Medical History*. Groningen: Egbert Forsten: pp. 63-90.
- Filliozat, Jean 1974: "Un Chapitre du *Rgyud-b'zhi* sur les bases de la santé et des maladies," in *Laghu-prabandhâḥ Choix d'articles d'indologie*. Leiden: Brill: pp. 233-42.
- Finckh, Elisabeth 1985: *Foundations of Tibetan Medicine According to the book Rgyud bzhi*. 2. Dorset: Element Books.
- Fraade, Steve D. 1986: "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism" in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, new York: Crossroad: 253-288.
- Guenther, Herbert 1993: *Ecstatic Spontaneity: Saraha's Three Cycles of Dohā*. Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press.
- Gutschow, Kim 2000: "The Women Who Refuse to be Exchanged: Celibacy and Sexuality at a Nunnery in Zangskar, Northwest India," in *Celibacy, Culture, and Society: The Anthropology of Sexual Abstinence*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin.
- Gyatso, Janet 1998: *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Gyun thog Yon tan mgon po 1993: *bDud rtsi snying po yan lag brgyad pa gsang ba man ngag gi rgyud*. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrung khang. *Rgyud bzhi* 1975: Leh: Tashigangpa.
- Holt, John Clifford 1991: *Buddha in het Crown: Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Landa*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, David P. ed. 1990: *Two Biographies of Śākyaśrībhadrā: The Eulogy by Khro phu lo tsa ba and its Commentary by Bsod nams dpal bzang po*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Jackson, Roger 1997: "A Fasting Ritual," in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: pp. 271-292.
- and John Makransky 1989: *Eleven-Headed Avalokiteśvara's Fasting Ritual Condenses into a Nectar Drop*. Ed. Donald Lopez. Oregon, WI: Deer Parks Books.
- Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po 199?: *Smyung gnas bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*. Lhasa: Dpal ldan Par khang: 107 folios.
- Kaelber, Walter O. 1987: *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. I Mircea Eliade, ed. New York: Macmillan: 441-48.
- Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho 1972: *Gangs ljongs dbtus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do (An Account of a Pilgrimage to central Tibet During the Years 1918 to 1920 being the text of Gangs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do)*. Photographically reproduced from the original Tibetan xylograph by Khams sprul Don brgyud nyi ma. Sungrab Nyamso Gyunphel Parkhang, Tashijong, Palampur, India: Tibet Craft Community.
- Martin, Dan 1997: *Tibetan Histories: A Bibliography of Tibetan-Language Historical Works*. London: Serindia Publications.
- Mumford, Stan Royal 1989: *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- 'Od dpag rdo rje 1985: *Thugs rje chen po bcu gcig zhal gyi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* contained in *Instructions for the Practice of the Gso Sbyong and Smyung gnas Focussing Upon the Invocation of Avalokiteśvara in the Eleven-faced Form*. Thimphu: Dorji Namgyal, 1985: 20-50.
- Ortner, sherry 197: *Sherpas through their Rituals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1989: *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Roerich, George N. trans. 1976: *The Blue Annals*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Schlagintweit, Emil 1863: *Buddhism in Tibet*. Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus.
- Shaw, Miranda 1994: *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sontag, Susan 1990: *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York and London: Doubleday.

- Templeman, David trans. 1983: *The Seven Instruction Lineages*. Translation of Tibetan text: Jo nang pa Tāranātha, *bKa' babs bdun ldan gyi brgyud pa'i rnam thar ngo mshar rmad du byung ba rin po che'i lta bu'i rgyan*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- Tsarong, T.J. trans. 1981: *Fundamentals of Tibetan Medicine According to the Rgyud-Bzhi* (Four Tantras). Dharamsala: Tibetan Medical Centre.
- van der Kuijp, Leonard W.J. 1994: "On the Lives of Śākyaśrībhadrā (?-?1225)," in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 114.4. Oct.-Dec.: pp. 599-616.
- 1996: "Tibetan Historiography," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. Ithaca, New York: pp. 39-56.
- von FÜRER-HAIMENDORF, Christoph 1964: *The Sherpas of Nepal: Buddhist Highlanders*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Willis, Janice D. 1995: *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Zhu chen Tshul khriṃs rin chen 1972: *dGe slong ma dpal mo lugs kyi thugs rje chen po bcu gcig zhal gyi sgrub thabs smyung gnas dang bcas pa'i cho ga sdig sgrub rnam sbyong*. In *Collected Writings on Buddhist Philosophy, Liturgy, and Ritual of Zhu chen Tshul Khriṃs rin chen*. Vol. 2, folios 275-315. New Delhi: Ngawang Gelek Demo.
- Zysk, Kenneth G. 1991: *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*. New York: Oxford University Press.