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The *Collected Sayings* of the Master

On Authorship, Author-function, and Authority

Marta Sernesi

Scholarship has questioned and gradually disposed of the romantic conception of the author as an original genius writing in isolation, challenging it on multiple grounds, and investigating it as a modern construct serving disparate means. In particular, it has come to question the idea of discourse as free expression of a subject's individuality, recognizing and exploring the collaborative and derivative nature of much writing: on one hand, it brought new attention at the diverse and collective forms of agency involved in textual formation, on the other hand, it has highlighted to what degree discourses depend on previous ones and are inscribed in a network of relationships with them.¹

In a significant contribution dealing specifically with the issue of authorship in Classical Tibet, J. I. Cabezón has pointed out that exactly these two characteristics are extremely relevant for an understanding of Tibetan literary production.² Indeed, he emphasized how textual production was most often the enterprise of a cluster of individuals, and involved the division of labour (“teachers, or what today we might call principal investigators, note-takers, research assistants, editors, scribes, proof-readers, and a production crew that included fund-raisers, librarians, printing supervisors, block carvers, and printers”). Moreover, he has argued that the authorial

¹ The scholarly literature concerned with the critical appraisal of the notion of authorship is copious; for an overview, cf. Haynes 2005. For an insightful treatment of the issue, cf. Chartier 1996: 45–80. I wish to thank Catherine Cantwell, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, Jonathan Silk, and Federico Squarcini for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

² Cf. Cabezón 2001, esp. p. 237, and pp. 242–243 for the points summarized below.

act is mainly an act of com-pilation or con-junction, of manipulating, combining, and bringing together existing blocks of content-related elements:

More important, the authorial task consists of bringing other texts together. In contemporary criticism such a notion finds expression in the idea of intertextuality. As Kristeva defines the idea: “every text takes shape as a mosaic of citations, every text is the absorption and transformation of other texts.” What makes an author an author (*mdzad pa po*, literally creator or doer; or *rtsom pa po*, com-poser, one who puts-together) is not the act of writing, but the act of com-pilation or con-junction. This in turn has a number of consequences. It means that the locus of the authorial act is considered to lie elsewhere than in in-scription; that identity as an author lies more in one’s ability to manipulate blocks of content-related elements rather than in any chirographic act as such.³

Therefore, for an investigation of the notion and function of authorship in Tibetan textual culture, it seems convenient to proceed by exploring these two aspects: intertextuality, and collaborative literary production. This means, in fact, to look at the factors that contribute to, and determine, the formation of discourse, and see what notion of the author may emerge from this analysis.⁴

Intertextuality

The term *intertextuality* first entered the lexicon of literary criticism in French (*intertextualité*), utilized by J. Kristeva to describe the work of M. M. Bakhtine. In this context, it was employed in order to explain the idea that every discourse is a communicative

³ Cabezón 2001: 242.

⁴ In the following, I will use *discourse* to refer to linguistic communicative acts, either written or spoken, *text* to refer to written discourses, and *speech* to refer to spoken discourses. I will employ *copy*, *document*, or *witness* to refer to a material written record, and *work* to the hypothetical class subsuming similar documents interpreted as products of a given editorial process (see below): thus, for example, the *Blue Annals* is a *work*, and any of its copies are a *document* or a *witness*. Any *document* is also a *text*, and hence a *discourse*. Moreover, I will employ *oeuvre* to refer to the ‘complete works’ of an ‘author’ (see below).

act dialogic in nature: it is two-sided, occurring between the speaker and the addressee, hence the notion of the individual subject of writing fades in favour of the notion of the ‘ambivalence’ of writing, involving both sides. Any utterance responds to preceding utterances, and occurs in specific social situations, and thus it is in this sense that Kristeva introduces the idea that “writing is the reading of the previous literary corpus, and the text is absorption of, and reply to, another text...”⁵ As may be seen, the notion of intertextuality is coined in order to describe the inherent derivative nature of any literary composition, in the sense of it being inscribed within a shared linguistic and epistemological field that allows its formulation and guarantees its intelligibility as a communicative act. The “absorption and transformation of other texts” refers for example to the set of references that the writer of a novel shares with the work’s recipients, and employs to situate his work within others and to deliver the intended meaning: indeed, the intertextual relationships are glossed by Kristeva as “what XIX century discourse has called the social value or moral message of literature.”⁶ This notion of intertextuality is thus very broad, and may be fruitfully associated with Foucault’s statement that the singularity of a text is relative and emerges within a complex field of discourse, with multiple references to other texts and utterances: “noeud dans un réseau.”⁷

⁵ Kristeva 1969: 88: “Parlant de ‘deux voies qui se joignent dans le récit,’ Bakhtine a en vue l’écriture comme lecture du corpus littéraire antérieur, le texte comme absorption de et réplique à un autre texte...;” cf. also *ibid.*: “Ainsi le dialogisme bakhtinien désigne l’écriture à la fois comme subjectivité et comme communicativité ou, pour mieux dire, comme *intertextualité*; face à ce dialogisme, la notion de ‘personne-sujet de l’écriture’ commence à s’estomper pour céder la place à une autre, celle de l’‘ambivalence de l’écriture.’” For a presentation of this standpoint, cf. also Nencioni 1976: 22–23.

⁶ Kristeva 1969: 85: “tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d’un autre texte;” pp. 88–89: “Bakhtine postule la nécessité d’une science qu’il appelle *translinguistique* et qui, partant du dialogisme du langage, saurait comprendre les relations intertextuelles, des *relations* que le discours du XIXe siècle nomme ‘valeur sociale’ ou ‘message’ moral de la littérature.”

⁷ Foucault 1969a: 36: “C’est que les marges d’un livre ne sont jamais nettes

In this perspective, the production of signification does not occur in a void, but within a social space. Hence, it does not depend from the sole intention of the speaker, or from the mechanical functioning of a linguistic system, and is not univocal and concluded in itself, to be recovered or reconstructed by hermeneutical means. In terms of agency and intentionality, the speaker is not free and autonomous, but he is not absent either, disappearing in favour of the impersonal self-sufficient nature of discourse, as advocates of the ‘death of the author’ would have it.⁸ Instead, the production of meaning may be seen as arising from a dynamic social process, involving the speaker and the recipient, who both connect the discourse with other discourses produced in the social space, synchronically and diachronically: hence, also the location of the discourse within a linguistic and hermeneutical field engenders meaning in itself.⁹

The communicative act may thus be investigated recovering the multiple determining factors and parties contributing to the

ni rigoureusement tranchées: par-delà le titre, les premières lignes et le point final, par-delà sa configuration interne et la forme qui l’autonomise, il est pris dans un système de renvois à d’autres livres, d’autres textes, d’autres phrases: noeud dans un réseau (...): son unité est variable et relative. Dès qu’on l’interroge, elle perd son évidence ; elle ne s’indique elle-même, elle ne se construit qu’à partir d’un champ complexe de discours.”

⁸ The *manifesto* of this point of view may be considered “La mort de l’auteur” by Barthes (1968). For an exposition of this position, cf. e.g. Chartier 1996: 45–46, who calls it “cet effacement de l’auteur caractéristique du temps de l’hégémonie sémiotique,” quoting MacKenzie 1986: 7: “The congruence of bibliography and criticism lay precisely in their shared view of the self-sufficiency nature of the work of art or text ...;” MacKenzie, indeed, criticizes a structuralism that “lost sight of human agency” (*ibid.*: 6). On the two opposite notions of the author, cf. also Squarcini 2008: 207–214, who, following Bourdieu, names the two polarities “spontaneismo soggettivista” (i.e. voluntaristic subjectivism) vs. “strutturalismo oggettivista” (i.e. functionalist structuralism); *ibid.*: 209, n. 49.

⁹ Cf. e.g. Bourdieu (1982: 59–61), who speaks of the “structures of the linguistic market” and remarks: “[C]’est dans la relation avec un marché que s’opère la détermination complète de la signification du discours” (p. 60), et “le marché contribue à faire non seulement la valeur symbolique, mais aussi le sens du discours” (p. 61).

production of an utterance in that specific form on the synchronic level, showing the relationships between the discourse and other pre-existing or co-existing discourses, investigating the categories of thought, the traditions of discourses, and the material aspects of the medium, which inform the discourse, and reconstructing the configurations of the specific literary, social, and intellectual, or religious, space in which it takes shape. Moreover, in written discourses the spatio-temporal distance between the speaker and the recipient is amplified, the extra-linguistic elements of communication are not available to the reader, and the social space of existence of the discourse, with its network of relationships, varies over time: in this case meaning is recreated over and over again by the communities of readers who transmit and employ the text. Hence, it is possible to study the construction of meaning as historically determined and changing over time, i.e. studying the transmission and reception history of a text.

As may be seen, intertextuality in its original meaning, i.e. to indicate the situated point of view of discourses among others that participate in the same epistemological field, is a feature of every communicative act. However, it has become common to employ the term intertextuality to indicate another kind of relationship among texts, that must be distinguished from this first one described, and which implies the recurrence of specific vocabulary, references, stock phrases and formulations, shared narratives or verses, with the eventual overlap of significant portions of text. When this occurs, it denotes a high level of relationship among texts, and allows identifying small groups of inter-related discourses. It is this specific kind of intertextuality that has been observed as a constitutive feature of much Buddhist literature, and to this that Cabezón referred to, in the passage quoted above, when stating that the “identity as an author lies ... in one’s ability to manipulate blocks of content-related elements.”¹⁰

To approach this phenomenon, J. Silk has proposed to employ a terminology coined for the analysis of Rabbinic literature: *micro-*

¹⁰ Cf. Scherrer-Schaub 2009, 156–158, and especially p. 158 n. 31, noting the semantic shift of the word *intertextualité*.

form indicates textual units which are found in multiple attestations and shifting relationships with other units; they are composed into a variety of superimposed literary units called *macroforms*, which thus are in a fluid relationship with each other, as long as they share common *microforms*.¹¹ The term *macroform* remains in fact ambiguous as it denotes both a “superimposed literary unit... the fictional or imaginary single text” (i.e. the *work*), and the actual “manifestations of this text in the various manuscripts” (i.e. its *witnesses*).¹² This vocabulary is useful in order to describe the content of composite texts, understand the correlations among different texts showing significant parallels, and tackle the issues involved in the eventual ideal construction of *works*.

The Work: Titles, Genre Labels, Author Names

The work is constructed as an entity that transcends any of its particular witnesses, and is thus recognized as a unity beyond the multiplicity of the available documents. This looks quite straightforward when a redactional moment may be pinpointed, such as in the case of a novel printed in multiple exemplars, with little textual variants among them. However, even in these cases, it is the product of an editorial endeavour which lasts in time, involves multiple people, and affects the text operating changes, corrections, cuts, etc.:

It is a common belief that the phenomenon [of authorial versions (*varianti d'autore*)] was peculiar to the premodern era, i.e. before the printing press. However, also many textual histories of modern works attain, on closer inspection, an original which is ‘instable’ or surely *not unique* and on the contrary provisional.¹³

¹¹ This terminology, due to Peter Schäfer, and its potential for the study of Mahāyāna literature have been analysed by Silk unpublished, whom I thank for sharing the paper with me. For an employ of these categories for the study of an instance of textual overlap in Tibetan literature, cf. Cantwell and Mayer 2013.

¹² Silk unpublished: 6.

¹³ Canfora 2002: 11: “La convinzione che il fenomeno [delle varianti d'autore] sia stato peculiare dell'età premoderna, cioè di quella antecedente la stampa, è diffusa. Eppure anche molte storie testuali di opere moderne approdano – a ben guardare – ad un originale ‘instabile’ o senz'altro *non unico*”

Thus the notion of textual unity is always a conceptual construct based on an actual multiplicity of witnesses that emerge from a fluid textual history.

For some works it is fairly straightforward to recognize a key moment in their redactional history, and apply what Silk calls the ‘hourglass’ model:

The redactional identity of a work happens at this zero-point. All that precedes is not yet ‘work’ but ‘sources used by the redactor.’ All that follows belong to the ‘history of transmission’ of the work defined through the zero point of the single redaction.¹⁴

This model is what is usually employed for the so-called *authored works*, when the *author* is implicitly identified with the main redactor active at that specific zero-point. On the other hand, for a number of texts the redactional history is much more obscure, fragmented, complex, and fluid, and thus they must be dealt with by different approaches, such as the proposed *microform-macroform* model:

This sort of evidence should incite us to exercise caution, and to develop a methodology of textual criticism that is adequate to the very considerable complexities of the traditions and their (written or oral) transmission in ‘floating’ texts, with a view to avoiding over-simplified stratifications of texts and analyses of their doctrines.¹⁵

In all cases, the construction of the work is achieved by investigating textual relationships, drawing boundaries, and subsuming a number of witnesses under a unique category. In my understanding, the inherent fluidity of the macroforms is tackled by means of liminal elements, which are employed to divide or associate

e anzi, via via, provvisorio;” for an overview of the problems relating to positing a unique ‘original,’ cf. *ibid.*: 9–14. For an extensive treatment of the *varianti di autore* in classical literature, cf. Pasquali 1962: 395–467.

¹⁴ Silk unpublished: 4.

¹⁵ Ruegg 2004: 23–24. The inadequacy for much Buddhist literature, and in particular for works of the *sūtra* typology, of the practice of textual criticism in search of a unique ‘original’ text (the *Ur-text*) has been pointed out by many scholars; cf. e.g. von Hinüber 1980, Ruegg 2004, Schopen 2009, Silk unpublished.

discourses with each other: such liminal elements are titles, genre labels, and author names.¹⁶

Titles create and designate the category *work* grouping macro-forms that overlap to a great extent, and which are thus understood as variant versions stemming from a redactional process. Titles may themselves be shifting in the copies: multiple titles may be employed for witnesses of one work,¹⁷ a single title may designate what are understood as different works, or single chapters or portions of a work may circulate autonomously, with their own title. Hence, the association of a discourse with a specific title is arbitrary, and operates as ordering factor to group that discourse with others designed in the same way. Genre labels operate as ordering factors on a greater scale, associating discourses considered as formally and functionally homogeneous. They are often expressed in the titles or in incipits and colophons of texts, but may also be mentioned, for example, in catalogues of multi-textual collections, employed to structure the corpus.¹⁸ Also, specific formulas are employed in accordance with the expected features of a given discourse tradition, referring to their previous appearance in other discourses, and constitute a sort of genre-marker that the recipient will identify: for example, the incipit “Thus I have heard” (*evaṃ mayā śrutam*) functions as a marker of a typology of discourse (the *sūtra*). These shared linguistic features have an ordering function, locating the discourse among others and thereby creating classes or types of discourses. Such a positioning conveys signification in itself, attributing to the given discourse a relative status: in the mentioned case, singling out a particular discourse as belonging to the *sūtra* typology, and thus enjoying the associated status of being *buddhava-cana*.¹⁹ Finally, author names associate discourses in terms of

¹⁶ For a survey of the liminal elements composing the *paratext* of works of modern literature, cf. Genette 1987, and especially pp. 41–106 for author-names and titles.

¹⁷ This is the case of the work on Great Bliss serving as example 1: cf. n. 41, n. 43, n. 44 below.

¹⁸ For a study of Tibetan titles and their reference to genre labels, cf. Almogi 2005.

¹⁹ Among the vast bibliography on the subject, cf. e.g. MacQueen 1981,

individual agency, connecting together disparate texts by means of a person's name or epithet: this, as I will argue below, is an ordering factor which also operates on the level of the discourse's status.

In this way, when we refer to a work as an entity located beyond a particular witness, we are in fact grouping a number of existing written documents into an hypothetical class, usually designed by a title, and characterised by certain attributes which express the perceived relationship with other discourses. For example, when we refer to *The Complete Liberation [life story] of the Venerable Mi la ras pa Great Lord of the Yogins Showing the Path to Liberation and Omniscience* (*rNal 'byor gyi dbaṅ phyug chen po rje btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam par thar pa daṅ thams cad mkhyen pa'i lam ston*) we are referring to a class subsuming documents that bear contents overlapping for the major part (that is, the multiple existing witnesses): this class is usually conceived as wide enough to include the work's many editions, its translations in other languages (Mongolian, English, etc.), and its 1959 critical edition. The title indicates that the 'work' will be related to other macroforms similarly labelled as *complete liberation life stories (rnam thar) of Mi la ras pa*, with which it will share a deal of narrative contents, i.e. many *microforms*; and also that the work is related more loosely to other *macroforms* labelled as *rnam thar*, with which it will share some formal features and functions proper to that discourse tradition. Finally, the work is associated to the epithet The Yogin Wandering in Charnel Grounds Adorned in Bones, which in the colophon indicates an agent of the redactional process ("who arranged it in writing" *yi ger bkod pa*): this name locates the work among others that are associated to the same, or to another, name designating one individual, i.e. gTsañ smyon Heruka (1452–1507).²⁰

1982; Silk 1989; Davidson 1990; Galloway 1991; McMahan 1998; Harrison 2003.

²⁰ On the many life stories of Mi la ras pa, cf. Quintman 2014. On the many editions of gTsañ smyon Heruka's *The Complete Liberation [life story] of the Venerable Mi la ras pa Great Lord of the Yogins Showing the Path to Liberation and Omniscience*, cf. Sernesi 2011a, forthcoming. For a critical edition of the text, based on four witnesses, cf. De Jong 1959.

As may be seen, titles, genre labels, and author names, are factors that serve an ordering function, allowing to group discourses and locate them among others, and enabling to construct entities such as works, at the issue of an hermeneutical process.

The Author-Function

As is well known, M. Foucault was critical of the major role assigned to the synthetic activity of the subject in discourse formation, and in his famous contribution titled “What is an author?” he focused especially on “the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text.” In this regard, he argued that:

[An author’s name] is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others. A name also establishes different forms of relationships among texts. (...) [T]he fact that a number of texts were attached to a single name implies that relationship of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentication, or of common utilization were established among them. Finally, the author’s name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse. (...) [T]he name of the author remains at the contours of texts – separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence. It points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within society and culture.²¹

In this perspective, the author name serves the function of ordering factor, establishing relationships between a text and others, and contributing to its status and its modes of reception. Indeed, by virtue of their connection to a specific author’s name, discourses are recognized as not pertaining to ordinary communication, to be “immediately consumed and forgotten,” but as standing out, and possibly deserving to be brought to attention, remembered, and transmitted. In fact, etymologically *auctor* and *auctoritas* are strictly related words, and for a literary ‘author’ to become ‘canon-

²¹ Foucault 1969b: 123. This scholar’s critical stance towards the celebration of the rational subject – “faire de la conscience humaine le sujet originaire de tout devenir et de toute pratique” (Foucault 1969a: 23) – is well known.

ical'²² a social group needs to value the words attached to his name enough to preserve and transmit them, interpret and appropriate them. The link between author name and text is not a natural and permanent association, which lies in an act of original inscription, but an action of appropriation of speech, which implies complex operations concerning both the construction of the rational entity called author, and the construction of the unity of his *oeuvre*:

Such a device requires a double sorting. The first selects among the multiple texts produced by an individual those which may be connected to the author function (“Among the million traces left by an individual after his death, how to define a *oeuvre*?”). The second retains among the countless events that constitute a biography, those significant to characterise the position as author.²³

The construction of the *complete works* of an *author* is a process involving multiple choices in terms of the selection and organization of the textual materials, their evaluation and authentication in order to determine their relative status (i.e. what deserves to be included). And also the identity of the author is gathered from the texts themselves, while selected episodes in his biography may be put forward to construct his persona.²⁴ His ‘position’ (*position d’auteur*) alluded

²² I am employing here the notion in the sense of “actively circulated cultural memory,” i.e. what is actively preserved and transmitted by a social group; cf. Assman 2010, beware of its reductionistic take on the complex theoretical issues at stake. On *corpus* and *canon*, cf. Scherrer-Schaub 2009: 162 n. 44, and in particular, for our purposes, her quote of E. R. Curtius (*La littérature européenne et le Moyen Âge latin*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1956: 311): “À cet égard, il est utile, ce nous semble, de souligner que le terme ‘canon’ ‘apparaît pour la première fois au IV^e siècle apr. J.-C. dans le sens de ‘liste d’écrivains,’ et ce à propos de la littérature chrétienne...’”

²³ Chartier 1996: 49: “Un tel dispositif requiert un double tri. Le premier isole à l’intérieur des multiples textes produits par un individu ceux qui sont assignables à la fonction-auteur (‘Parmi les millions de traces laissées par quelqu’un après sa mort, comment peut-on définir une oeuvre?’). Le second retient parmi les innombrables faits qui constituent une biographie ceux qui ont pertinence pour caractériser la position d’auteur.”

²⁴ Cf. Foucault 1969b: 124–131, and especially 127–128 on the traditional methods “for determining the configuration of the author from existing texts,” derived from Christian practices of textual authentication; cf. Foucault 1969a: 37–38 on the problems of constituting an author’s *oeuvre*.

to in the quoted passage may be understood as pointing to the location of the speaker within the linguistic, literary, and social field, and hence to his rank, and the ensuing status that the discourses attached to him may enjoy. This position is also a shifting cultural construct, as certain author names may attain a high rank, and the works attached to them may be eventually consecrated as literary 'classics,' only over time.

In what follows, I wish to investigate this process in the Tibetan context, looking at how certain statements and discourses were connected to author names in order to construct *oeuvres* of the masters, and what strategies, problems and disagreements arose in this context. To do so, I will analyse the practices leading to the production of these textual materials, and the value of agency thereof, and look at how this is perceived and represented by the tradition. In this way, I wish to highlight how the connection of a certain discourse to a proper name may be less linked to a creative or chirographic practice, than to the tradition's construction of that discourse's *auctoritas*, within wider narratives of self-representation. I will thus argue that the question of authorship is not so much related to the text's origin, but to its *life* and *status*, i.e. its relationship to other discourses, which the author's name contributes to determine in a changing network of associations.

I will take as an object of investigation the so-called *Collected Sayings* of Tibetan masters. The term *bKa' 'bum* or *gSuñ 'bum* is commonly applied to a certain corpus to indicate that it represents the words of a given master, i.e. contains statements which may be grouped as they are all linked to the same authoritative source. Thus, the *Collected Sayings* constitute collections of texts that are straightforwardly linked to a proper name, and are arranged together to represent the *oeuvre* of a given individual. However, such collections may not be considered as immediately given, certain, homogeneous units, but are the output of an interpretative and editorial enterprise, involving the selection, arrangement, and attribution of existing textual materials. Therefore, the *Collected Sayings* of Tibetan masters seem a privileged point of departure to investigate editorial practices that lead to the association of texts to proper names.

Orally determined genres

The label *Collected Sayings* is widely used to indicate multi-textual collections, which differ in contents, modes of production, and organisation, and include texts belonging to different genres. However, here I will limit the discussion to the *Collected Sayings* of early bKa' brgyud masters (11th–13th century), such as Mi la ras pa, Ras chuñ rDo rje grags pa, and sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen, down to Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po or Yañ dgon pa rGyal mtshan dpal. Although I will narrow down my discussion to a limited range of materials, and provide only two brief case studies, the issue is relevant for other early Tibetan instructional literature, such as that of the bKa' gdams pas for example, so I hope that some of the general remarks offered may be of interest also beyond the specific examples provided.

It is interesting to note, at this point, that the descriptive model of the *microforms* and *macroforms* has been conceived to be applied to a corpus made of “formal rhetorical structures such as the Rabbinic *mashal* (parable), *petihta'* (proem), and the midrashic sermon,” which are understood as taking shape in a particular context in which “literary composition and oral performance dynamically *interface* with one another,” and “texts are composed so as to be socially (that is, orally) enacted, with the enactments in turn suffusing the process of their literary textualization, and so on.”²⁵ Indeed, a comparable context characterized by the strong interaction of the oral and written mediums of knowledge transmission is a feature of pre-modern Tibetan religious traditions.

The prominent role of the oral medium in Tibetan religious education is well known: when texts are concerned, they are read aloud individually or collectively recited, such that the word is recognized from, and identified with, its sound more than with its inscribed form. Texts form the basis for collective performances, and are quoted by memory in instances such as debates and examinations. As has been observed, “Tibetan monastic education stressed the verbatim memorization of texts, a practice which, by dislocating

²⁵ Fraade 1999: 34 and 35 respectively.

texts from written to oral/mental loci, blurred the boundaries of one's own and others' texts."²⁶ Thus, orality is supported and surrounded by literacy – which is in itself influenced by orality – and constitutes an essential medium of transmission of culturally essential knowledge.²⁷ bKa' brgyud, the name by which this religious tradition calls itself, means literally “oral lineage” or “transmission of the oral precepts [of the Buddha]:” identity is thereby defined stressing the oral medium of transmission of knowledge within an unbroken succession of individuals (a *paramparā*).²⁸

I would argue that we may understand the religious context of production of the textual material forming the Tibetan *bKa' 'bums* in question as characterized by the co-presence, fluidity, and reciprocal influence between the oral performance and the written text. Indeed, the early bKa' brgyud *Collected Sayings* are constituted for the major part of a limited, and specific, range of writings, which were denoted by D. Martin with the label *orally determined genres*.²⁹ Indeed, these genres seem to have their origin in instances of dynamic encounter among individuals and in associated oral acts.

²⁶ Cabezón 2001: 251. For a discussion of the practice of debate, an oral performance based on scholarly knowledge, cf. Dreyfus 2008. For an impressionistic appraisal of the role of orality in Tibetan monastic education, cf. Klein 1994.

²⁷ Cf. also Martin 2010: 202, n. 19, criticizing Walter Ong's term “residual orality,” with a witty remark on learned academics and their rituals of reading papers aloud to each other.

²⁸ Note that also the bKa' gdams pa, “those of the oral instructions,” identify themselves with reference to the medium of their knowledge transfer. On the qualification of *paramparā* by terms referring to its dynamic aspects, cf. Squarcini 2008: 41: “Sebbene abbia comunque prevalso il senso di ‘istituto istituito’ dato al termine, persistono esempi del rimando alla valenza dinamica di *paramparā*, come nei casi in cui le fonti sottolineano gli aspetti cinetici e mediologici di questa importante parola...”

²⁹ Martin 2010: 202: “The *Kambums* of that time are largely made up of what I would call ‘orally determined’ literature. The later-on typical genres we are used to seeing in the *Collected Works* known as *Sungbum* (*Gsuñ-'bum*) are either missing in them or in incipient forms. Some of what I would call ‘orally determined genres’ flourished during that time, but later faded from view.”

They may be listed as follows:

- *gsuñ s[/b]gros*: sayings: statements, general explanations, parables, simply introduced by “the master said;”
- *dri lan / źus lan*: questions and answers, replies to questions, responsa: a pupil is granted clarifications on specific points of theory or praxis;
- *tshogs chos*: teachings to the assembly, teachings to the gathering: public sermons delivered to a religious community;
- *gdams pa / gdams nag / źal gdams / khrid*: instructions: guidance delivered to a disciple, usually on specific topics of yogic practice or meditative techniques.
- *mgur ma*: songs: versified compositions, that may be sung for a specific occasion such as a ritual feast, composed to express realization, or employed as teaching technique.³⁰

We may understand the genesis of these kinds of texts in acts of speech occurring in an oral context, of usual and informal, or ritualized, exchange between master and students. The recipient or the audience participate in the formulation of the speeches: directly, by requesting specific teachings and asking questions, or indirectly, if we take into account the manner in which the composition, expectations and responsiveness of an audience influence oral performance. It must be noted that the medial dichotomy spoken/written does not imply a corresponding opposition in terms of linguistic conception, such as oral-informal-immediate-popular vs. literary-formal-mediated-elite or the like. It has been shown how between the two poles spoken-informal and written-formal, denoting the everyday familiar oral communication on one side,

³⁰ A thorough treatment of these genres lies beyond the scope of this paper, and I will present it elsewhere. In this context, it needs solely to be noted that the *mgur ma* songs, according to tradition, fall within the didactic means of communication, and may be accordingly labelled as “songs of instruction” (*gdams pa'i mgur*). On this genre, cf. R.R. Jackson 1996, who employs the term “songs of experience” (*ñams mgur*); Martin 2010: 203, n. 20, however, specifies that “I find that in these earlier times they are not called so, and in fact are generally associated with ‘realization’ (*rtogs pa*) rather than ‘experience’ (*ñams*).”

and the highly elaborate written document on the other, discourses may correspond to a range of conceptional profiles, that each may be investigated in its particular features.³¹ It is beyond the scope of this contribution to analyse in detail the features of the communicative event corresponding to all the above discourse traditions, exploring issues such as the private or public setting, or spontaneity versus reflexion, but an oversimplification of the issue should be avoided.³²

Reading these kinds of texts, we may have the impression of a first-hand transcript of the sermons, conversations, or songs. The statements are usually reported employing direct speech, introduced by sentences such as “then, the master spoke” (*de nas bla ma'i źal nas*), and presented as “instructions of” (*gdams pa*), or “spoken by” (*gsun*) the given master. Thus, the words are explicitly attributed to the individual in question conveying the idea of a direct record of spoken discourses. The labels of the collections themselves – *bKa' 'bum*, *gSun 'bum*, or *gSun s[/b]gros thor bu* (the latter literally “miscellaneous sayings”) – refer to their contents as acts of speech, considered of such significance to the tradition to deserve to be duly recorded.

However, the collections of sayings are usually compiled at the death of the master concerned, or even generations later combining disparate textual material. Thus, the process leading from the oral utterance to the available textual form is far from being ‘immediate’ or ‘un-mediated.’ As a matter of fact, investigating more closely the nature of such texts, and Tibetan practices of textual production, we learn a great deal about the multiple stages leading

³¹ Letter writing, dramaturgical works, or the oral epic, are just a few instances that have received attention in the exploration of the multiple linguistic conceptional profiles, especially investigating their value for the study of past oral languages, for which only written records are available; cf. e.g. Nencioni 1976, Oesterreicher 1997. See especially *ibid.*: 194 for parameters that characterize communicative instances of the “language of immediacy” (*Sprache der Nähe*) and the “language of distance” (*Sprache der Distanz*).

³² I will discuss this issue in detail elsewhere. The dichotomy spontaneity versus reflection requires particular investigation in connection with religious rhetoric of immediacy vs. scholarly learning.

to the composition of the *Collected Sayings* and the texts included therein.

Textual Production as a Collective Endeavour

As mentioned above, at the origin of the texts belonging to the orally determined genres we may posit an oral act of speech (*gsuñ*), which takes place in dynamic interaction with a recipient or an audience. This does not occur in a void, and is influenced by contingent factors depending on the circumstances in which the speech is delivered – such as the occasion for the lecture, the composition of the audience, the questions raised, etc. In particular, features of linguistic conception will govern its formal aspects, and the speech will almost inevitably, according to the requirement of its genre, rely on authenticating referents, and thus quote from the scriptures or from previous instructional literature: these quotes are also functional to the positioning of the discourse, both on the religious level, indicating its relationship with tenets and textual sources, and on the social level, indicating the intended audience and function of the speech. For example, a response to specific critical or polemical questions, a monastic sermon on the stages of the path, personal instructions on the inner heat practice, or a song to a lay patron praising virtuous deeds, each will rely on distinct quotes to sustain its argument. Hence, the oral discourse, coming forth as an act of communication occurring in a given situation, already involves multiple individuals and is inscribed in a network of textual relationships.

Possibly, the master's instructions could be transmitted orally for some time, although there is ample evidence of the common use of written summaries (*zin bris*) and mnemonic notes (*brjed byañ*) to sustain memory and as aids in teaching.³³ These notes were taken

³³ Sometimes, the terms *zin bris* or *brjed byañ* figure in the colophons of the instructional texts, implying that they were the source material for their composition (see example 1 below). Such documents, together with personal books (*phyag dpe*), are often mentioned among the belongings entrusted by a master to the disciples or donated to a specific monastery; cf. e.g. Martin 2010: 212 on the “personal books” of Phag mo gru pa. It must be noted that

either on the spot or later by memory, and thus the understanding, mnemonic abilities, and formal choices of the scribe determine the actual form of the written words. The agency lies in the chirographic act (*bris*):

In a Tibetan context, a *brjed byang* often precisely refers to a set of lecture notes pulled together by an author and reworked by him to form a seamless narrative. Put crudely, a work of this kind is therefore, authorially speaking, a secondary reflex, for what the lecturer had said was further reflected upon and digested by the *brjed byang*'s immediate author. It would stand to reason that, in either case, the *brjed byang* will to some extent reflect its original source[s].³⁴

In this scenario, the instructions imparted at a specific occasion could also be recorded by different pupils, and multiple versions of them circulate at the same time. Texts could be memorized and quoted by heart, commented upon, or referred to implicitly in front of a knowledgeable audience. At the moment of redaction, a pupil may insert scriptural references in the text, either anew, or editing and completing a quote referred to in the oral teachings:³⁵ in this way, the borrowing, appropriation and adaptation of textual fragments occur in a mixed oral and written environment, where texts are memorized, and may proceed from speech to writing, and vice versa, or from text to text, in a way that is very difficult to determine. Moreover, also in those cases in which the transmission relied on textbooks or notes purportedly written early on, they were employed in teaching to different audiences and therefore could be reworked and reformulated (see example 1 below).

During their transmission history, texts may undergo formal developments, such as scribal corruptions, losses, contaminations,

Krasser has suggested that most of the extant Indian works treating Buddhist philosophy are based on lecture notes taken by monastic students; cf. e.g. Krasser 2011.

³⁴ van der Kuijp 2003: 404; cf. *ibid.* for examples of this kind of texts, and of *zin bris*, defined as “notes and a draft for a study,” or “a record of a lecture.”

³⁵ Cf. the evidence in this regard in Cabezón 2001: 242–244 (his example 2), noting an instance in which a junior monk acting as scribe “functions – like an editor and research assistant combined – to fill in arguments and add scriptural references” (*ibid.*: 243).

updates to the vocabulary or language to ensure comprehensibility, the incorporation of glosses, and the like: in short, all the sorts of changes due to scribal transmission.³⁶

Microtextual units (*microforms*) may circulate autonomously or in clusters, or they may be employed as building blocks for composing other texts. They may be gathered without an overarching ordering principle or major internal subdivisions, in volumes of collected saying (*bka' 'bum*) or miscellaneous sayings (*gsuñ bgros thor bu*) that read as a sequence of unrelated fragments; these may also be implemented over time, with the addition of further fragments of sayings from successive masters of the lineage.³⁷ In other instances, the micro-units may be edited and combined to prepare practice manuals (*yig cha*) of a specific tradition, or the collected sayings (*gsuñ 'bum*) of a given master that include clearly demarcated textual units, sometimes only created at that later stage assembling sparse fragments under a unifying title (see example 2 below). Moreover, songs (*mgur*) or responsa (*dri lan*) are genres that are commonly found embedded in structured narrative texts, the life stories (*rnam thar*) of the masters, where they may acquire narrative frames that expand upon or contextualize anew their

³⁶ On this topic, cf. especially the enlightening discussion by Canfora 2002, especially pp. 15–33 (“The copyist as author”). He remarks that a copyist unavoidably intervenes in the text, guided by his own understanding: “[C]on la totale appropriazione che così si determina, nasce – nel lettore copista – la spinta a intervenire: tipica, e quasi obbligata, reazione di chi è entrato nel testo. È così che il copista, proprio perché copiava, è diventato protagonista attivo del testo. Proprio perché è colui che più di ogni altro lo ha capito, il copista è diventato co-autore del testo. Ci si potrebbe perciò spingere a sostenere che il plagiatario non è dunque che un copista che ha perso la nozione di sé, e si sente ormai autore di quel testo che ha tanto approfonditamente letto perché lo ha copiato.”

³⁷ This is the case of the *bKa' gdams gsuñ bgros thor bu*, that has a first colophon (“Among this heart advice of the sublime masters of master Atiśa’s lineage, a few of the sayings of the kadam masters, which once remained scattered, have been collected and compiled [here] by the monk Chegom [ICe sgom]”), followed by two “supplements,” i.e. the Sayings of Kha rag sgom chuñ dBaṅ phyug blo gros (set down in writing by the spiritual mentor lHo pa), and the Sayings of lCe sgom (no compiler); cf. Thupten Jinpa 2008: 601, 608, 610.

contents. At the same time, there is also evidence that instructional materials were transmitted together with, or grew out of, narrative material.³⁸

These larger compositions require a process of selection, organization, and edition of the materials into a new textual unit (*macroform*), a process indicated in Tibetan as: to establish (*bkod*), to make (*mdzad*), to compose (*rtsom*) – but also sometimes more precisely to summarize (*bsdus*), or expand upon (*rgyas*). At least in the rhetoric of the colophons, it often takes shape by exhortation (*bskul*) of one’s master, pupil(s), or fellow disciples, and/or in order to benefit an intended recipient of the work (*ñor*): textual production is conceived as a social process.

Also this activity may be performed in writing or orally, and in the latter case put into writing by an appointed scribe. At the moment of writing, the text may be revised/edited: *žus dag*.³⁹ Although this is not true for every manuscript, as some may be produced or copied for private use only, it was a common practice to revise the written copies for accuracy, looking for spelling mistakes, omissions, and the like. The task was often assigned to a third party, but in the case of scribes writing under dictation, the master who uttered or composed orally the text could be called upon to evaluate the result, correct misunderstandings, and generally authenticate the final written text. The text may be possibly prepared in a carefully laid out format, as a calligraphed manuscript or as a print. In this process, more people are involved, supervised by

³⁸ It is well-known, for example, that several “songs of Mi la ras pa” are quoted in texts of instruction ascribed to early bKa’ brgyud masters: for the song on the *bar do* titled *’Phrañ sgröl gnad kyi bar do la dris pa lan dan bcas pa’i brda don glur blañs pa mgur chu gser gyi phreñ ba*, found within the narrative cycles recounting Mi la ras pa’s encounter with the Tshe riñs ma sisters, and its commentary attributed to Yañ dgon pa, cf. Cuevas 2003: 54–56.

³⁹ Sometimes, the term *žus dag* may designate more properly an editorial process in terms of critical textual scholarship, and is thus employed to indicate the activity of a scholar who gathers and compares witnesses, studies the variants, and seeks to establish a text that fits his criteria of accuracy and authenticity (see below example 2).

a project leader (*do dam pa*): the scribe(s) (*yig byed*; *yig mkhan*), the illuminators (*le lha'i rig byed*), in the case of a printed edition the wood carver(s) (*rkos byed*; *rkos mkhan*; *le lha'i rkos byed*), the person(s) in charge of revising the text (*žus dag*), and the sponsors (*sbyin bdag*).⁴⁰ All these people ultimately contribute to give to the text its final form, and hence to determine the production of signification.

These copies, in turn, are the object of transmission processes, may undergo revisions and re-arrangements, and may be employed as the basis for new textual products. As may be seen, this process of textual production and transmission, leading from the initial communicative act to its written witness found in a given document, has a strong dynamic potential. The redactional process extends over time and involves distinct levels of agency, which may be differently evaluated by Tibetan scholars discussing about textual authority and authenticity.

Example 1: A Great Bliss Text

In many cases it is not easy to determine when the text has been actually written down, and what kind of interventions it endured during its transmission. Therefore, the tradition itself may hesitate in giving priority to one or the other moments in the redactional history. Thus it will fluctuate in ascribing the text to a specific master, and distinguish among the different levels of agency employing the corresponding terms reviewed, such as speaking (*gsuñ*), making (*mdzad*), arranging/establishing (*bkod*), composing (*rtsom*), writing (*bris*).

As a telling example I would mention a text devoted to the practice of Great Bliss (*bde chen*) found in a collection of texts of the esoteric tradition of the Aural Transmission of Saṃvara (*bDe mchog*

⁴⁰ The different figures and artisans involved in book production are known from colophons, letters, and biographical sources; cf. e.g. Bacot 1951; Cabezón 2001: 249–250, 252–254; Schaeffer 2009: 19–43; specifically on the workers and technology employed for the production of blockprints, cf. Jest 1961, Ehrhard 2000: 69–79; for an overview of practices employed in early Tibetan scriptoria, cf. Scherrer-Schaub 1999.

sñan brgyud), compiled by the famed 16th century polymath Padma dkar po (1527–1592). Its colophon states:

The Great Lord Mi la ras pa made (*mdzad pa*) a manual (*yig cha*) on [the practice of] Great Bliss, [called] the Disclosed Secret of the *ḍākinīs*. It had the two [instructions, involving] the action consort, and the radiant consort. From these two, having prayed to the master and the *ḍākinīs*, for the benefit of a few worthy vessels keeping the monastic discipline, these instructions on the Great Bliss of the radiant consort have been carefully distinguished and set aside. This book should be [kept] tightly sealed, secret and hidden: [it] was drawn from *Žañ lo tsā ba*'s mnemonic notes (*zin bris*).⁴¹

What we have here are teachings descending from Mi la ras pa, who purportedly already arranged them in written form, as a manual treating both sexual yoga with an actual consort and the practice of Great Bliss without a partner. Later, these instructions were re-arranged to meet the new requirements of the religious community, in the specific case purged of the more explicit instructions on sexual yoga with a physical consort. The mentioned *Žañ lo tsā ba* is a learned master of the lineage who may be dated to the beginning of the 13th century (d. 1237), i.e. over a century later than Mi la ras pa, and who is credited with crafting the mnemonic notes from which the text is drawn. First of all, it must be noted how the dynamic aspect of the teaching practice, the ensuing personal appropriation of the instructions, and the need to adapt to modifications of the religious community, are powerful factors which supersede the concern with literal textual transmission. Moreover, we may observe how different individuals in the chain of transmission contributed to shape the extant text, and thus could be legitimately be called its 'author.'

Padma dkar po, in two works discussing the Aural Transmission tradition's instructions, attributes this Great Bliss text to *Žañ lo tsā*

⁴¹ 'Og sgo mkha' 'gro'i gsañ ba bde ba chen po'i las kyi 'od rig bde chen gyi gdams pa, p. 31: *dbañ phyug chen po mi la ras pas mkha' 'gro'i gsañ bsgrogs pa bde ba chen po'i yig cha mdzad pa 'di la/ las rgya dan 'od rigs[=rig] gñis las/ bla ma dan mkha'<'>gro la gsol ba btab nas/ tshañs spyod 'dzin pa'i snod ldan 'ga' la phan pa'i phyir/ 'od rigs[=rig] bde chen gyi gdams pa 'di legs par phye žin zur du bkol ba'o/ ldpe 'di la śin tu dam par bya/ gsañ bar bya/ sba bar bya/ žañ lo tsha ba'i zin bris las phyuñ ba'o.*

ba (*Žaṅ los*, “by Zhang,” no verb employed).⁴² Thus, the ‘revised’ text is ascribed by Padma dkar po to the late master, who crafted the notes from which the text has been prepared, and not to its claimed source Mi la ras pa, nor to the individual (unmentioned) who actually gave to the work its final form. In the 19th century collection *gDams ṅag mdzod*, the text has a very similar colophon, which, however, does not mention *Žaṅ lo tsā ba*’s notes anymore, and attributes the editorial arrangement to Khyuṅ tshaṅ pa, who was a pupil of Mi la ras pa’s disciple Ras chuṅ pa, and is known to have been an ordained monk.⁴³ On the other hand, in a very recent reprint of the same text another name is substituted in the colophon to that of Khyuṅ tshaṅ pa, that of an otherwise unknown dGe sloṅ rdo rje ’dzin pa bDe gśegs rin chen, but the colophon is followed by an editorial note stating “made by Mi la ras pa,” and the same attribution is found in the table of contents of the volume.⁴⁴

This is a case of a work which is said to have its origin in teachings by Mi la ras pa, which was possibly initially written or arranged by him; then it was transmitted for several generations, in which it underwent at least one major editorial intervention, when some of the instructions were separated from the rest: this redactional moment is associated by the different sources to different masters. Padma dkar po attributes the work to *Žaṅ lo tsā ba*, i.e. he values principally the chirographic act of keeping notes (*zin bris*) of the teachings, which served as the basis for the redaction. In the 19th century collection *gDams ṅag mdzod*, the main

⁴² Cf. *mKha’ ’gro sñan brgyud kyi dpe tho*, p. 5; *bKa’ brgyud kyi bka’ ’bum gsil bu rnams kyi gsan yig*, p. 407.

⁴³ *gDams ṅag mdzod* vol. 5, pp. 333–343. The colophon adds the name of Khyuṅ tshaṅ pa ye śes bla ma as the individual who, after having supplicated the *ḍākinīs*, has set aside the teachings on radiant knowledge. Note that the title of the text given in this collection is *bDe mchog sñan brgyud kyi ’od rig bde chen gyi gdams pa*. On the Aural Transmission tradition and lineage of transmission, cf. Sernesi 2011b.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ras chuṅ sñan brgyud skor* vol. 4 (259), pp. 323–332; the colophon is at p. 332, and the final editorial note reads: *rje btsun mi las mdzad do/ lgcig žus/ śubham*. In this volume the text bears still another title: *sñan brgyud las ’od kyi rig ma’i gdams pa*.

editorial intervention is pushed two generations back, and attributed to Khyuñ tshan pa. On the other hand, in the modern edition of the work, although not effacing its redactional history, it is considered *Mi la ras pa*'s. Hence it may not be posited a univocal relationship between a proper author name and a text; rather the association depends on a judgement concerning the text's editorial history, and the ensuing choice of one moment, and agent, to privilege. Tibetan scholars, far from being unaware of the issues related to intricate textual transmission, investigate it, and take stances on the question of the attribution of the writings and/or of their contents.

Example 2: The *Dwags po bKa' 'bum*

The *Collected Sayings* of Dwags po lha rje sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen (1079–1153) offer a very interesting example to investigate the modes of production of early *bKa' brgyud bKa' 'bums*. Indeed, a recent article explores the formation of this collection, bringing to attention a manuscript of the *Dwags po bKa' 'bum* which may be fruitfully compared with the 16th century printed edition of the collection, as the two versions contain much the same textual material, differently arranged. Their analysis deserves to be undertaken anew in light of what has been presented here so far, in particular regarding the relationship between text, title, and author name.⁴⁵

The manuscript collection bears no colophon, and thus its date and place of origin are unknown, and its relationship with the printed

⁴⁵ Cf. Kragh 2013. Besides the minor factual mistakes, and the faults in the translations from the Tibetan that punctuate this contribution, the analysis of the issue of “authorial ascriptions,” extensively discussed (pp. 384–391), is highly problematic. No general theory or definition of authorship sustains its remarks, and the ensuing ambiguous use of “authored,” “written,” and “composed,” generates confusion throughout: for example, when stating that colophons mention bSod nams rin chen as the *author* of a text, it is referring in one case to the original employ of *bris pa*, and in another case of *bkod pa* (p. 388), all introduced by the ambiguous statement “three texts appear to be actual works written by Bsod nams rin chen's *own hand*, though further study is needed in all three cases to fully verify their *authorship*” (*ibid.*, emphasis mine).

version yet to be assessed.⁴⁶ It is a ‘golden manuscript,’ written with golden ink on dark blue paper, therefore a luxury edition. It is made of four volumes, plus one separate volume at the beginning bearing the most important text attributed to sGam po pa, the treatise on the stages of the Buddhist path called the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. The other four volumes begin with a short lineage-history down to sGam po pa, and then contain a continuous stream of textual units, not always clearly differentiated: the textual units are separated by special punctuation marks – the “snake stroke” (*sbrul śad*). There are no internal titles at the beginning of major textual units: sometimes the statement “here it is finished” (*rdzogs śo*) apposed at the end of one unit allows identifying the transitions. In these cases, the section may be given a title by the editors, which is usually not found at the beginning, but only in the final line, and is derived from the *incipit*. For example a section begins with the following verse of homage:

I pray to the feet of the precious master,
 who has spontaneously accomplished the excellent qualities,
 and has directly realized the supreme Truth,
 completely pure, changeless, unconditioned.

It is followed by “The Precious Lord Dwags po said,” and a series of instructions, all short fragments introduced by the initial formula “moreover, the master said...”⁴⁷ At the end we find the following statement: “The public sermon called *The Excellent Qualities* (*yon tan phun tshogs*) ends here. It is made of thirty teaching sessions (*chos thun*):”⁴⁸ the title has no connection whatsoever with the contents

⁴⁶ The claim that, since it does not reflect the organization of the print, the manuscript must predate it (Kragh 2013: 370–371), should be further substantiated. More generally, note that the kind of editorial arrangement does not depend on the medium: indeed, there exist printed collections of *Collected Sayings* showing barely any internal breaks, and manuscript collections made of separated textual units each with its own title-page.

⁴⁷ *Dwags po bKa’ ’bum* (mss.), vol. 1 (KA), p. 100: *yon tan phun tshogs lhun gyis grub/ lnam dag ’gyur med ’dus ma byas/ |chos ñid mñon du rtogs mdzad pa’i/ |bla ma rin po che la ’dud/ |rje dwags po rin po che’i źal nas/.*

⁴⁸ *Dwags po bKa’ ’bum* (mss.), vol. 1 (KA), p. 137: *chos rje sgam po pa’i tshogs chos yon tan phun tshogs ces bya ba rdzogs śo/ |chos thun gsum bcu pa’o/ śu bham/.*

of the text, but is derived from its first words, since the verse of praise begins with “excellent qualities” (*yon tan phun tshogs*). Evidently the internal short fragments introduced by “moreover, the master said” represent the thirty separate teaching sessions, which, however, show no thematic homogeneity. In many other cases, it is in fact very difficult to group the short sayings into major textual units, as the breaks are not clearly defined and marked in the collection, and topics treated may vary greatly.

On the other hand, the printed version of the *Collected Sayings* of sGam po pa is made of clearly separated works. The collection was compiled and printed in 1520 at the master’s main monastic seat of Dwags la sgam po by the abbot of the time bSod nams lhun grub zla ’od rgyal mtshan dpal bzañ po (1488–1552). The project was conceived in order to codify and spread the school’s specific teachings.⁴⁹ The available textual material that is also recorded in the manuscript has undergone editorial work: indeed, the micro-units are selected, sometimes re-ordered, and grouped into different independent texts, each with its own title, title-page, and volume number. The edition comprises 38 texts, which are ordered to construct a coherent collection. It starts, like the manuscript, with the lineage-history (vols. KA–KHA), which is cut short and completed by a full-fledged biography of sGam po pa (vol. GA) finalized by the abbot bSod nams lhun grub himself. This is followed by the “teachings to the assembly” (*tshogs chos*), the “responsa” (*dri lan*), and then the meditation and yogic instructions (vols. ÑA–CHI). The collection is closed by two treatises, the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (*Thar pa rin po che’i rgyan*), and the florilegium called the *Sunbeam of Scriptures and Treatises* (*bsTan chos luñ nyi ’od*), numbered respectively E and WAM. In this edition distinct texts are created, each with its own title, also combining fragments that were circulating unrelated, as testified by the manuscript.

⁴⁹ On the circumstances of this printing project, and its successive re-editions, cf. Sernesi forthcoming. A full copy of the collection has been filmed by the NGMPP Reels L 594/1–595/1–596/1, while other sparse volumes are also available; cf. Sernesi 2013. A complete copy of the collection is also now available in *Bod kyi śiñ spar lag rtsal gyi byuñ rim msdor bsdus*.

Therefore, in comparing these two collections, it may be noted how the compilers had to face, and differently handled, three kinds of issues, which are strictly interrelated:

1. The selection of the materials: how are the sayings selected within all the existing statements of the master? What are the criteria for drawing the boundaries? Would everything found be included, or some criteria of what is significant be applied?
2. The problem of attribution and of the notion of authorship: how a certain statement is linked to a proper name? Among all those involved in the production, record, and transmission of a certain statement, to whom will it primarily be linked as its “source of authority” (*auktoritas*): is it the oral, chirographic, or editing act given pre-eminence?
3. The edition of the materials: among contrasting versions in multiple copies, how is the text established? What sources are considered authoritative? And what organisational criteria, if any, are applied to the materials, in their grouping, ordering, and succession?

These issues concern, in fact, the relationship of the statements included in one version of the *Collected Sayings* with all the existing written documents and pronouncements of the lineage-masters; i.e. the role of the specific selection called “the collected sayings of the master so-and-so” within the school’s discourses and literature.

Regarding the first issue, both collections have a broad approach. The manuscript is even more inclusive than the print, incorporating materials absent from the other, and in particular: (1) ritual texts with no distinct attribution, evidently considered part of the tradition’s lore;⁵⁰ (2) texts on *sems khrid*, a treasure (*gter ma*) attributed to sGam po pa, and discovered at the beginning of the 14th century by the master Dung tsho ras pa, considered the reincarnation of sGam po pa’s disciple Ye śes rdo rje: interestingly enough, the root-

⁵⁰ Cf. e.g. the texts on Vajrayoginī found in *Dwags po bKa’ ’bum* (mss.), vol. 1 (KA), pp. 29–42.

texts of this system were eventually printed autonomously in order to ensure their preservation.⁵¹

Another difference between the two collections is that while the manuscript simply incorporates the textual materials, with their colophons when extant, the print explicitly associates the distinct textual units to sGam po pa's agency. Indeed, in the title-pages, the titles are for the most part introduced by the statement "made by (*mdzad*)" or "spoken by (*gsuñ*)" the Venerable sGam po pa, or Dwags po lha rje, also when this is not explicitly mentioned in the manuscript.

Both collections include a few texts that bear a colophon stating that they were written (*bris pa*) by sGam po pa, or arranged (*bkod pa*) by him. For the most part, however, they include textual units presented as records of words that were purportedly spoken by sGam po pa, but were written in their present form by someone in the succession lineage, possibly even generations after the master's demise. For example, within a cluster of "instructions spoken by sGam po pa," an internal colophon explains that "these instructions (*man ñag*) of the precious master sGam po pa, [come from] the personal booklet of the teacher sGom bcug, were [imparted by him] as instructions to the teacher sTod luñ pa, and he gave them to me."⁵² From the reference to the personal booklet of sGam po pa's disciple, we may infer that the transmission occurred in a mixed oral and written form for generations. And most probably the final recipient is not the scribe of the manuscript that we have, but the individual

⁵¹ On the discovery and transmission of the *sems khrid*, cf. Roerich 1949: 717–724. The *Lus med mkha' 'gro zes bya ba'i sgrub thabs* is found in *Dwags po bKa' 'bum* (mss.), vol. 3 (GA), pp. 184–191, preceded by an account of the treasure history (*ibid.*: 175–184). The same text is found in a printed edition, unfortunately undated, where it is accompanied by the *'Pho ba don gyi gron 'jug*; cf. Sernesi 2013: 192–193. We may speculate that, perhaps, the master responsible for the print of these texts was concerned by their exclusion from the printed edition of the *Dwags po bKa' 'bum*.

⁵² *Dwags po bKa' 'bum* (mss.), vol. 2 (KHA), pp. 161–162: *phyag rgya chen po thog babs rtsis kyi rgya mdud dañ bcas pa/ rin po che sgam po pa'i man ñag/ slob dpon sgom bcug gi phyag dpe/ slob dpon stod luñ pa la gdams pa/ des bdag la gnañ pa'o// rin po che'i gdam ñag/ ithi.*

who recorded the fragment in that form. But the fragment, in turn, was transmitted in written form and made its way into both the manuscript and the printed edition of the *Collected Sayings*, in the latter combined with other fragments under a text-title.⁵³

It must be noted, at this point, that the acceptance of specific fragments as “the words of sGam po pa” was not unanimous. The attribution may be contested, and in other instances, by other editors, the same text of instruction could be as well attributed to the master who codified it in the present form, instead of the master at the origin of the teachings. We have seen in the previous example how this may be the case, and in fact the 16th century scholar Padma dkar po apparently had a more cautious point of view also regarding sGam po pa’s instructions. Indeed, he expressed reservations about the printed edition of the *Collected Sayings of sGam po pa*, precisely on the issues of the selection, attribution, and arrangement of the textual materials:

As for the *Collected Sayings* of the Venerable Zla ’od g’zon nu [i.e. sGam po pa] preserved in print at [Dwags la] sGam po, it appears that the authentic sayings are not presented in [proper] order, and the texts on mixing and ejecting and so on are a cluster of miscellaneous [fragments], and they are interpolated with [sayings] certainly made by others. Therefore, [the collection] must be examined separately [in detail].⁵⁴

The scholar expresses his disappointment with the re-ordering, and mixing of the fragments to create new texts, the editorial policy adopted in the print. Moreover, he also questions the attribution of some units to sGam po pa, stating that they were certainly made by others, and are therefore to be considered interpolations, unworthy of selection within the *Collected Sayings* of the master. As may be

⁵³ *Dwags po bKa’ ’bum* (print), vol. WA: *Chos rje dags po lha rje’i gsun/phyag rgya chen po’i man nang thog babs dan mgur ’bum rnams bzugs so*, fols. 1b–3a; cf. also Kragh 2013: 385, n. 65.

⁵⁴ *bKa’ brgyud kyi bka’ ’bum gsil bu rnams kyi gsan yig*, fol. 2a: *lrje zla ’od g’zon nu’i bka’ ’bum sgam por par du bzugs pa la’an gsun gtsan ma sgrig ma ’tshal ba dan/ bsre ’pho la sogs pa’i g’zün thor bu ’tshans pa dan/ g’zan gyis byas nes pa ’dir bcug pa sogs snañ bas logs su dpyad rgyur bzag*. Cf. also the translation in Kragh 2013: 394.

seen, the preparation of the *oeuvre* of a given master is subject to debate in terms of the inevitable choices concerning the selection and arrangement of the materials, and ultimately also the association of given discourses to the author name. The collection is the issue of a deliberate process, and not a pre-existing unitary entity made of the existing “works of the master.”

On still another level, it is interesting to note that the editor of the xylograph faced serious difficulties dealing with the treatise *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, which is one of the best-known works of sGam po pa, found towards the end of the *Collected Sayings* (vol. E). Apparently there were transmission problems, as he felt the need to add a note of caution to his version, lamenting that “In some [previous] prints of the *Ornament of Liberation* it is said that a reliable exemplar (*phyi mo*) could not be found,” and therefore mistakes and interpolations affect some portions of the text. Notwithstanding his concern with the lack of a reliable model for establishing the text for the print, the editor considered the treatise to be a fundamental discourse on the stages of the path of the tradition, and therefore to be necessarily added to complete the *Collected Sayings*, in order to construct the *oeuvre* of the founding master of the monastery and of the school. From this passage we also learn that there were previous printed editions of the work, so far unfortunately not found, and that the process of establishing a reliable text of the treatise was an ongoing effort.⁵⁵ Indeed, the same text was reprinted sometime later by the following abbot of the monastery of Dwags la sgam po, the famed scholar Dwags po bKra shis rnam rgyal (1513–1587), who was willing to ameliorate the text. In the same spirit, he also reprinted a lengthy commentary

⁵⁵ *Dam chos yid bžin gyi nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan žes bya ba bka' phyag chu bo gñis kyi theg pa chen po'i lam rim gyi bśad pa*, fol. 131b: *thar rgyan gyi par 'ga' žig las/ yid brten gyi phyi mo ma rñed zer nas*. The statement runs for five lines, giving precisions on the dubious sections of the text; cf. Sernesi 2013: 194, and Kragh 2013: 390. The latter's translation is problematic: note, for example, that he renders the *par 'ga' žig* of the first line as “some manuscripts,” while the reference is clearly to prints. The editorial history of the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* would be a fascinating issue of research in itself, but lies beyond the scope of this paper.

on sGam po pa's four doctrines a very short while after its first printed edition, estimating that both these works needed further editorial revision (*zus dag*). For the latter text, he states that he took into consideration manuscript witnesses unavailable to the former editor – the 4th *Žwa dmar pa Chos grags ye šes* (1453–1524) – that he could identify within the library of sGam po pa's home monastery, in a passage echoing introductions to contemporary works of textual criticism.⁵⁶

As may be seen, when preparing the *Collected Sayings* of a given master, the compilers are confronted with theoretical problems in all of the three mentioned areas of concern, i.e. the selection, the attribution, and the edition of the available textual materials. Their stances in these matters, and the practical solutions that they adopt, may lead to very different results. We may find collections of disordered fragments with barely any breaks among them, or the fragments may be re-arranged and grouped under distinct headings and become individual works with straightforward attribution. As noted above, the attribution of titles, genre-labels, and author-names, are the effective means to construct distinct works. In the *Dwags po bKa' 'bum* they are exactly the ordering means employed by the editors in compiling the two available collections in different ways. Therefore, where we may expect the first-hand record of a 12th century structured sermon spoken by sGam po pa, we will most probably be confronted with a text of composite nature and collective construction. Specific works may be the result of a collective endeavour over multiple generations, and this is recognized by the tradition itself, as the question of the construction and transmission of the textual material may be addressed by Tibetan scholars engaging in exegetical practices, textual criticism, or inter-sectarian polemics.

⁵⁶ *mNyam med dwags po'i chos zhir grags pa'i gzhung gi 'grel pa snying po gsal ba'i rgyan*, fol. 116a; cf. Sernesi 2013: 198. For examples of the Tibetan sensibility for issues of textual criticism, cf. Scherrer-Schaub 2009: 165–167; Schaeffer 2009: 37–43; van der Kuijp 2010.

Author and *Auctoritas*

Textual production may be understood as a complex process during which many different individuals contribute to shape the extant text, and thus could be legitimately be called its 'author.' On the synchronic level, many forms of agency may be involved in textual production, and many proper names may be associated to any given discourse: that of the speaker, the exhorter, the recipient, the scribe, the main patron and the multiple sponsors, the proof-reader, the chief editor supervising a print, the scribes and carvers of the blocks, etc. On the diachronic level, pronouncements generated within an oral context of personal interaction are transmitted over time in a mixed oral and written context, edited and appropriated in stages, producing a bulk of textual material interrelated and derivative, with many instances of overlapping, contrasted attributions and appropriations. Textual *microforms* may be rearranged, inscribed in new narrative contexts, employed for different aims, in a great fluidity of the *macroforms*. Hence, textual production is a collaborative and derivative process, and the univocal connection of a textual unit with a proper name is a construct, potentially changing, working within a system of dependencies. In this fluid context, a work may be associated with one specific master in the chain of its transmission, who is thus credited with that particular formulation of the teachings, in a deliberate, and sometimes possibly questionable, manner.

Therefore, it may be seen how the idea of author-function borrowed from Foucault may be developed in useful ways. Indeed, the author name may be conceived as a liminal element lying at the contours of texts, which serves, together with other classificatory elements such as titles and genre labels, to draw boundaries, establish relationships, group together or differentiate discourses. The association of a discourse with a proper name brings extra-signification to it, places it in a class with other related discourses, and tells something about its *status*: for example, the name of a famous, respected, reliable individual, or of an iconoclast, unconventional, witty personality, will influence the mode of existence of the associated discourse within the wider symbolic field, its

reception, circulation, and eventual function. Pseudepigrapha, recurring epithets, and multiple great ‘authors’ of a tradition bearing the same name (e.g. Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, etc.), are phenomena attesting to the function of the author-name as ordering factor operating at the level of the *auctoritas* and status of the discourses. Hence, the associations between text and author may be created and re-created over time, reflecting changes and needs of the community occurring at multiple levels, and especially in its literary, intellectual, and political fields.

In particular, when assembling sparse materials and publishing them in a unified and organised form as the *Collected Sayings* of a given master, disparate discourses are linked to a unique proper name: in this endeavour, the author name serves as a means of classification, establishing “relationship of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentication, or of common utilization” with other texts. The gathered *sayings* are singled out and located within the school’s literature, situated at a given time in the transmission-lineage, and connected to a source of authority, thereby determining their relationships with other textual units. At the same time, the figure of the *author* of the *Collected Sayings* is constructed by the community in correlated discourses, such as life-stories, lineage histories, eulogies, prayers, etc. The master’s profile, and his place within the tradition, is usually presented at the beginning of the collection, in the narrative of his life story that opens the compendium. Such narratives construct the *authority* of the contents of the *Collected Sayings* by establishing the authority of their *author*: by a selection of biographical episodes, showing how the master attained complete liberation, what understanding he has gained, and what spiritual qualities he has shown, these narratives construct his figure as trustworthy teacher, and consequently, establish that what he has taught and has handed over is worthy of faith, is authoritative, and free from corruptions.⁵⁷ In this way,

⁵⁷ A discussion of the genre of Tibetan complete liberation stories (*rnam thar*) is beyond the scope of this paper. Here it suffices to note that they are effective means of affirming and transmitting religious values, and narratively constructing holy personae. On the interaction between narrative and didactic functions in Buddhist literature, cf. Ruegg 1999, who notes “[N]arrative

Tibetan *bKa' 'bums* may be seen as the output of a double process, aimed at defining the *author* and his *oeuvre*, which is the mechanism of construction of the author-function described above.

The move of associating text and author name is in itself a specific communicative act carried out in a given socio-political context. In particular, as in the case of *sGam po pa*, the *Collected Sayings* are often a local production, prepared at a specific monastic seat within a range of institutional enterprises meant to preserve, hand down, and promote its legacy. The 1520 printed edition of the *Dwags po'i bKa' 'bum* was perceived as the authoritative source because it was produced at the master's monastic seat, and enjoyed great diffusion. For this reason, its arrangement of *sGam po pa's* sayings under distinct rubrics proved successful, and was mirrored in all the later printed editions as well. Indeed, the following printed edition of the collection, produced in the Western Tibetan kingdom of *Mañ yul Guñ than* only fifty-five years later, would proudly claim its strict adherence to the earlier model.⁵⁸ This shows how, notwithstanding its intrinsic problems that didn't go unnoticed, the association of the redactional moment with the prestigious institutional setting guaranteed to that specific edition a surplus of symbolic value, in virtue of the strong relationship existing among the attributes of the discourse, the attributes of its speaker, and the attributes of the institution which authorises him to speak.⁵⁹

has been employed both for cognitive (i.e. epistemological and evidential) and for aetiological purposes, e.g. for the sake of (quasi-)historical explanation, authentication, legitimation and, eventually, canonicity" (p. 200). The issue of the definition of the 'authorised speaker' and of the 'person of authority' in Buddhism is relevant in this respect, as emic concepts defining the individual who embodies the authority, and hence speaks the Truth; among the extensive bibliography on the subject, cf. e.g. Steinkellner 1983; Ruegg 1994a, 1994b; van der Kuijp 1999; Silk 2002; Eltschinger 2007.

⁵⁸ The arrangement of the collection underwent minor interventions during the 16th century, with the addition of few short prayers and eulogies, and then remained stable since. On the *Mañ yul Guñ than* 16th century printed edition, cf. Ehrhard 2012: 166, and Sernesi forthcoming.

⁵⁹ Religious institutions develop a number of strategies to construct and sanction the 'authorised speaker,' and to control issues of textual attribution,

For this reason, the *Collected Sayings* of the masters are best understood when considered within the process of a tradition's self-representation, in dialogue and often competition with other religious communities. The collections serve as a means of constructing a system of references, establishing a corpus of inter-related texts, attributing them a specific status, and situating them within a linear narrative (that of the lineage). In this sense, the claim "these are the sayings of the master" is not primarily meant to convey information on the circumstances of a text's production, but to perform a communicative act of symbolic value.

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(mss.) = *Dwags po lha rje'i bka' 'bum*, in *'Bri guñ bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, Lhasa, 2004, vols. 11–14 (DA-PHA).

authentication, and transferral; cf. Squarcini 2008, especially pp. 25–77. Cf. Bourdieu 1982: 159–173, who outlines the conditions of recognition (*reconnaissance*) of the authoritative discourse (*discours d'autorité*), i.e. that it must be pronounced by the legitimate person, in a legitimate situation, and in the legitimate forms (p. 167).

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