

# An Early Tibetan Gesar *bsang* Text

Solomon George FitzHerbert

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In both Tibet and Mongolia, the heart of the ritual culture associated with Gling Ge-sar/Ge-ser (henceforth Gling Gesar) is in the ritual of *bsang*, or fragrant, purifying smoke-offering. A majority of the Gesar ritual texts compiled by Khams-sprul Rinpoche in his compendium the *Gling Ge sar sgrub skor* (LGGK) are of the *bsang* type, and in both Mongolia and Tibet *bsang* texts devoted to Gesar may even predate the extant epic texts that we have. In Mongolia, Heissig found Gesar *bsang* texts he believed to date to the 17th century,<sup>2</sup> and in Tibet the text presented below, which appears to be the earliest to yet come to light, probably also dates from the 17th century, though it may in parts be considerably earlier. This text reflects a mature development of the figure of Gesar in a Buddhist register, while also embracing many aspects of his cultic persona within the popular religion of the laity, some of which have persisted into contemporary representations of Gesar, but rarely with such rich and elaborate expression.

The particular connection between the figure of Gesar and the culture of *bsang* in Eastern Tibet, raises the speculative hypothesis that one ingredient in the rich cultural broth of “origins” from which the Gesar epic is born, is the Buddhicisation of the *bsang* rite as a prominent lay ritual for the propitiation of worldly (*'jig-rten-pa'i*) deities and spirits.

*Bsang* is widely recognized as a ritual of native Tibetan origin rather than one derived from Indic Buddhism, and the native Tibetan origins of *bsang* appear to lie in the purifying propitiation of local spirits. But in the context of Buddhism, the rite is also interpreted in terms of the (Indic) custom of burning incense as an aromatic offering to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who in Tibet’s Mahāyāna Buddhism come to “replace” the gods (*lha, deva*) as the deities of the Upper Realm. It is also sometimes explained that the fragrant smoke rising into the sky creates a connection or a pathway between the Buddhas in their Purelands, and the people who would supplicate them.

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to express his gratitude to Jeff Watt, Alak Zenkar Rinpoche, Samten Karmay, Charles Ramble, Daniel Berounsky and Robert Mayer (for the Yongs-dge mi-gyur rdo-rje suggestion), for help with this article at various stages. Errors are all my own.

<sup>2</sup> Walther Heissig, *Gesar Khan als Heilsgottheit*.

That the worldly spirits propitiated through *bsang* have been merged and combined with the enlightened Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Tibetan popular religious practices should come as no surprise, since fluidity around this classical Buddhist distinction between on the one hand worldly (*'jig-rten-pa'i* Skt: *laukika*) spirits, deities and oath-bound protectors, and on the other, transcendent (*'jig-rten-las-'das-pa'i* Skt: *lokottara*) enlightened Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, is a defining characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism more widely. The promotion, or “Buddhicisation” of Tibet’s panoply of spirits – and especially its local protectors – into oath-bound protectors, and from thence into enlightened beings, is a strong and recurrent dynamic in Tibetan religious history. This process is particularly well-exemplified in, for example, the 18th century compendium of such spirits in the 5th Sle-lung Rinpoche Bzhad-pa'i-rdo-rje’s *Ocean of Oath-Bound Protectors*. This voluminous compendium effectively Buddhicises all worldly protectors and “converted” or oath-bound (*dam-can*) deities – including even Dbang-phyugs/Rudra, the archetypal demon of Tibetan Tantra – to the status of enlightened Buddhas.<sup>3</sup>

The origins of the word *bsang* lie in the notion of “cleansing” or “purification,”<sup>4</sup> not unlike the word *sel* often used in incantations at the time of making *bsang* offerings (*sel-le sel-le sel-le*). That the etymology lies in a notion of purification suggests that the primary objects of such rites were not originally the passed-beyond or transcendent Buddhas—who as enlightened beings have no need for purification—but rather the worldly spirits and deities, who are apt to defilement, particularly as a result of human activities. As such, rites of *bsang* in a putatively pre-Buddhist or only partially-converted context were primarily directed to the spirits of the three-tiered vertical world of *numina* so familiar in the Gesar epic: the *lha* above, the *klu* below, and *gnyan* divinities often associated with mountains in the middle. The wider idea, as explained by Karmay, is that these presiding spirits of earth, sky and water

Have been “defiled” (*phog-pa*, *'bags-pa*) as a result of man’s own impure nature and activities. In other words, the deities are offended by what man does to himself

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks for this observation are due to Cameron Bailey, whose recent doctoral research at the University of Oxford is on Lelung’s *Ocean of Oath-Bound Protectors*.

<sup>4</sup> *Bsang* is etymologically related to the modern Tibetan *gtsang-ma* meaning “clean” as well as *gtsang-po* meaning “river” (and particularly the Yar-klung *gtsang-po*). That this related cluster of phonemes, sharing a connotation of purity, was important in pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion, is also reflected in the name of the primordial creation deity of Bon, Sangs-po 'Bum-khri, and in its Buddhicised “white” equivalent, Tshangs-pa dkar-po, which came to be adopted as the Buddhist Tibetan translation of the Vedic Indian creation deity, Brahmā. The phoneme ‘*sang*’ is also found in the Tibetan word coined to translate “Buddha,” namely *sangs-rgyas*, which might be translated as “unbounded purity.”

and to his environment. Consequently they become enraged and withdraw their favours. Man must therefore accomplish a purification rite each time he has committed an impure deed. The rite must be performed regularly...<sup>5</sup>

## GESAR AND THE *BSANG* RITE

Certainly, the figure of Gesar is closely associated with the *bsang* rite in eastern Tibetan imagination. But why? Partly the answer lies in the epic tradition itself. The warrior kinsfolk of Gling, in the Tibetan epic tradition, are portrayed living in a highland society only marginally touched by the culture of monasticism. Instead, the primary religious and ritual culture represented in the epic tradition is that of the laity: especially in communal rites of *bsang* and in the practice of divination (*mo*). As such, the *bsang* offerings made in the context of the epic, in its mythic time and space, come to be models or examples (*dpe*) for the practice of such rites in contemporary societies. And over time, Gesar and his companions, one can speculate, become not just model exemplars of men who make such offerings, but also themselves the *objects* of such offerings.

But there is also a further speculation to be made concerning the particularly intimate relationship between Gesar as a Buddhist hero and the rite of *bsang* in eastern Tibetan culture. To understand this it is worth looking at Bon traditions concerning the mythical backstory (*smrang*) to the *bsang* rite, as translated and wonderfully elucidated by Karmay, in the story of how the primordial Bon deity Ge-khod came to be defiled after having accidentally killed his mother, thus incurring the need for such rites of “purification.” This narrative runs as follows (paraphrased from Samten G. Karmay, “The Local Deities and the Juniper Tree,” 394ff):

Ge-khod is born from the union between a god and a she-demon. His demon mother G.yu-sman abandons the gods and thus rekindles the primordial cosmic conflict between gods and demons. Ge-khod goes to the land of demons, and encouraged by his father, lashes out wildly. In his rampage he accidentally kills his own mother. He returns to the gods with her ring and gives it to his father. In his inconsolable grief he then swallows the sun and moon and retires to sleep for months and years. The demons rejoice.

The gods then hold council on how to liberate the sun and moon. Whoever does so will be awarded the “insignia of magical power” (*mthu-dbang yig-tshang*). Only

<sup>5</sup> Samten G. Karmay, “The Local Deities and the Juniper Tree: a Ritual for Purification (*bsang*),” 383.

the diminutive god Ku-byi mang-ke volunteers. Being very small indeed, he rides off on a spider carrying a tiny ladle of molten bronze. He sneaks up to the sleeping giant and quickly pours the molten metal into Ge-khod's ear. Being terrified of Ge-khod's wrath, he flees immediately, but in his haste he falls off his spider. The giant Ge-khod wakes up with a start and roars in displeasure. But at the sight of titchy Ku-byi, tumbling off his spider, he bursts out laughing. And as the giant laughs, the sun and moon float up out of his mouth and resume their journeys across the sky. In this way the world is returned to light.<sup>6</sup>

As Karmay shows, the mythological background-stories for the particular shrubs used in *bsang* rites such as juniper (*shug-pa*), white rhododendron (*ba-lu dkar-po*), and artemis (*mkhan-pa*), are found in Bon texts for the purification of Ge-khod. Here the story goes like this: A primordial goddess, the "mother of ambrosia" named "Queen of the Sky" (Gnam-phyi-dgung-rgyal) spills an ambrosiac spittle from her mouth, and where these drops of ambrosia touch the ground, there the detoxifying plants grow.<sup>7</sup>

Now where this becomes particularly interesting is in the connection between this primordial goddess in the (Bonpo) myth of Ge-khod and the (Buddhist) epic tradition concerning Gling Gesar. For as Karmay observes, this primordial goddess appears to be one and the same as Gesar's female spirit-guide in the epic, Ma-ne-ne Queen of Sky-*sman* (Dgung-sman-rgyal-mo) also known as "White *sman* of the Sky" (Gnam-sman-dkar-mo) who is often depicted in the epic arriving with a vase of healing ambrosia (*bdud-rtsi*).<sup>8</sup> Gnam-sman-dkar-mo is the name of one of the "nine primordial females" and "eighteen brothers and sisters who are the forebears of mankind" in Bon tradition.<sup>9</sup> It makes sense therefore for Gesar, whose celestial father is the high-god (*lha-chen*) Tshangs-pa – the

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<sup>6</sup> This is a paraphrase of Karmay's translation (*ibid.*, 394–96). In Bon tradition the Ge-khod divinities are 360 in number, perhaps symbolizing the days of a year. This myth seems to be of ancient origin, as Ku-byi is alluded to in the Dunhuang manuscript PT1038, where he is associated with 'O-lde-dgung-rgyal, the sky/mountain divinity associated with the divine descent of the progenitor of the Yarlung Dynasty. According to Kvaerne (Per Kvaerne, "Tonpa Shenrab Miwo, Founder of the Bon Religion," 90) the deity Ge-khod was originally associated with Mount Ti-se (Kailash).

<sup>7</sup> Samten G. Karmay, "The Local Deities and the Juniper Tree: a Ritual for Purification (*bsang*)," 403–4.

<sup>8</sup> A good example of her detoxifying ambrosia at work in the epic, is the section from *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed* (HLYG) in which her ambrosia, conveyed by soul-bird cranes, purifies Gesar out of his stupor of forgetfulness. *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed, smad cha*, 449–52.

<sup>9</sup> Namkhai Norbu, *Drung, Deu and Bön: Narrations, Symbolic languages and the Bön tradition in ancient Tibet*, 166.

Buddhicised cognate of the Bon primordial high-god Sangs-po<sup>10</sup> – to describe her as his celestial “aunt” (*a-ne*).



PLATE 1: Gnam-sman-rgyal-mo. Gesar’s celestial “aunt”: Detail from Sichuan Museum Series no. 1 (reproduced with permission from Zhang Changhong, ed. From the Treasury of Tibetan Pictorial Art, 26)

Based on these observations, there is an interesting speculation to be made – in keeping with the dynamic by which the Gesar epic functions as a Buddhist appropriation (and sometimes inversion) of shamanistic religion and Mongol-Tibetan warrior-culture – whereby Gesar, as a figure closely associated with the *bsang* rite, might be regarded as a “new” (the “*sar*” in Ge-sar being perhaps a contraction of *gsar*, “new”), Buddhicised Ge-khod figure: The “New Ge-khod.” In other words, that one of the aspects of Gesar’s mythic identity is as a divine figure who provides a Buddhist myth to replace the Bon myth at the heart of the *bsang* rite. For Ge-sar, like Ge-khod, is a son of the gods in the Upper Realm (though in Gesar’s case of the Buddhist “converted” forms), mixed with ancestry in the Middle and Lower Realms; who incurs karmic contamination through his violent deeds; who retreats from action and has to be spurred into revival; who visits the hell-realms; and who is cultically associated with the cycle of seasons

<sup>10</sup> That Tshangs-pa may be considered a Buddhicised or “white” (*dkar po*) cognate of the Bon sky-god deity Sangs-po ’bum-khri is a theory I have elaborated elsewhere. S. G. I. FitzHerbert, “Constitutional Mythologies and Entangled Cultures in the Tibeto-Mongolian *Gesar* Epic: The Motif of Gesar’s Celestial Descent,” 319–20.

and the sun.<sup>11</sup> As Karmay observes, at the foundation of the Ge-khod myth and the *bsang* rite in general, is the dualistic dynamic of light (purity) overcoming darkness (impurity). Gesar embodies that ongoing battle, as clearly reflected in the epic tradition, but in a Buddhicised framework.

That the title Ge-sar could plausibly be interpreted as having an additional and alternative etymology to its well-established derivation via Central Asia from the Greek title *kaisar* (Caesar),<sup>12</sup> is worth considering. A contraction and reinvention forged from the name of the powerful nature-deity Ge-khod, may also be part of the cultural brew which nourishes and sustains the epic and its associated cult. And that such a contraction is circumstantially possible is seen in the treatment one finds of the figure of Gling Gesar in a clan history of the A-pho lDong recently translated by Yeshe Dhondup. There, it is said that the title Ge-sar was adopted by a Bon chief named Ge-khod-skyabs (“Protected by Ge-khod”) upon his adoption of Buddhism, a chief who then becomes known as Gling Gesar.<sup>13</sup>

I will now present some salient features of this exemplary and rich Gesar *bsang* text which seems to be, at least in parts, of considerable antiquity. This is followed by an assessment of the difficult questions surrounding the text’s provenance; and concludes with a fully-annotated translation of the text itself.

## THE SECULAR ORIENTATION

The popular interest in Gesar in Eastern Tibet has traditionally been a largely secular affair. Gesar and the society of Gling have long provided folkloric examples or models (*dpe*) for many aspects of secular life among eastern Tibetan

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<sup>11</sup> In all the areas in which the epic of Gesar is celebrated – from far eastern Tibet to Ladakh in the far west – there is an association between Gesar and popular rituals of the New Year (*lo gsar*).

<sup>12</sup> The most thorough presentation of these arguments is found in Geza Uray, “Vom römischen Kaiser bis zum König Ge-sar von Gling.” There is little doubt that the title *’prom/ phrom/ ’phrom/ khrom ge sar* enters the Tibetan lexicon from Central Asia with its etymology in the Greek title *rum kaisar*, Caesar of Rome, which was one of the titles of the Byzantine emperors. Numismatic evidence reveals that in the 8th century, during the Tibetan imperial period, a Turk Shāhi King in the region of modern Kabul assumed the title *fromo kesaro* (on this figure see Inaba, Minoru, “From Kesar the Kābulshāh and Central Asia”) whose daughter married a king of Khotan. In the post-imperial period this title came to be associated in eastern Tibet with the *ldong* clan to which, in the epic tradition the clans of Gling belong. On the migration of this title see especially Geza Uray, “Vom römischen Kaiser bis zum König Ge-sar von Gling”; also R. A. Stein, *Recherches sur l’Épopée et le Barde au Tibet*; Helmut Humbach, “Phrom Gesar and the Bactrian Rome.”

<sup>13</sup> Gyilung Tashi Gyatso and Gyilung Thugchok Dorji, *The Treasure of the Ancestral Clans of Tibet*: 56.

highlanders (*'brog pa*). Historically, highland communities in eastern Tibet – particularly in the notoriously bandit-prone regions of 'Go-log – were often part of very local/clanic juridical scenarios, in which things like raiding, banditry and other forms of conflict were generally mediated without the intervention of state enforcers. In the Gesar heartlands of 'Go-log and 'Bri-stod and other areas, even monasticism was also very weak until the late 19th century. In such a context, notions of law and normative social conduct were often governed as much by appeals to such “examples” (*dpe*) – as reflected in the epic and its associated proverbs – and as by any formal written codes or agreements, which were rare. The sanctification of Gesar as a religious figure, and his absorption within the frameworks of Tibetan religion, should be understood as an outgrowth of this essentially secular folkloric base.

The text presented here (the full title of which is *Seng chen nor bu don 'grub la gsang* [sic: *bsang*] *mchod 'bul tshul lags so* “Purificatory Offering for Sengchen Norbu Dondrup”) is a particularly rich example of a Gesar *bsang* ritual text which replaces the polyphony of the epic with the distillation of praise for the single hero (Gesar), his horse (Rkyang-bu-sna-dkar), and his spiritual and personal entourage.

In addition to its rather cryptic colophon (discussed later) what makes it of special interest is the unusually rich texture in which it apotheosises Gesar. In it we see the core popular appeal to protection in worldly secular affairs – cattle-rearing, trade, travel, theft, and highland family life – as befits Gesar as an ancestral hero and chivalric-shamanic protector-figure. We also see in it elaborate appeals to the archaic Bon-po-esque folkloric strand of sensibility concerning the spirit world which the epic preserves. And we also see in it the *ris-med* (non-sectarian) pieties of the Buddhist tantric and/ or Mahāmudrā/ Rdzogs-chen *yogi* who put the text together and gave it its final form. The text thus presents several layers at once, all of which are pertinent to an understanding of the evolution and the nature of the eastern Tibetan cult of Gling Gesar.

For the sake of elucidation, presented below is a cursory run-through of the pieties espoused in the *bsang* text before us. This run-through is presented backwards, starting at the end of the text with its final supplication, working backwards towards the lofty Buddhist pieties expressed at its beginning. It is presented in this way because if we are to look at this text as a kind of palimpsest of the cult of Gesar as worldly champion-turned-protector-turned-enlightened-*yi-dam*, then the layers in that apotheosis appear in roughly this reverse order – with the more secular and folkloric strands appearing at the end, and the most overtly religious at the beginning.

It is the final supplication at the end of the text which appears to constitute its most archaic layer. Here Gesar is called upon as a protector of men, cattle and horses, and a source of inspiration and support in the activities of raiding (*jag*),

trading (*tshong*), hunting (*lings*), travelling (*lam*) and a general defender of the home and protector of well-being and health in the vulnerable highland tent-dwelling life. The apparent antiquity of the supplication is reflected for example in its evocation of the practice of the *lings* “enclosure hunt” and the ensuing division of meat among its participants. The *lings* enclosure hunt – a typically Inner Asian collective hunting practice whereby wild animals are corralled and encircled over the course of many days or weeks before moving in for the kill – was a mainstay of Tibetan cultural life in the Tibetan Imperial period and may have persisted thereafter, but later faded into obscurity.<sup>14</sup>

Here is the supplication in full (fol. 19–21):

On behalf of myself and my generous beneficiary (*rgyu sbyor yon bdag*),<sup>15</sup>

[20] Keep men safe and protect [our] fields and horses!

When we go out to fight, be our commander!

May we gain the hoped-for victory!

When we go raiding for horses (*'jag la 'gro na*),

Be our bandit-chief (*jag dpon*)!

May we gain the hoped-for horses!

When we do trade,

Be our merchant-chief (*tshong dpon*)!

May get what we want from the trade!

When we do a *ling* (sic.) enclosure hunt,

Be the chief of the hunt (*ling dpon*)!

May we get the meat we want!

When we travel, protect us from harm,

Kill the “heart vein” of the [animal] “hosts” male and female,<sup>16</sup>

Divide up the food, the wealth, the provisions of guts.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For a philological and historical treatment of the importance of the *lings* “enclosure hunt” and the prescribed models for the division of meat in the early Tibetan imperial ritual and “literary” culture, see Brandon Dotson, “The Princess and the Yak: The Hunt as Narrative Trope and Historical Reality in Early Tibet.”

<sup>15</sup> Some broad speculation is made on the question of the text’s sponsor later in this article.

<sup>16</sup> *Gnas po gnas mo snying rtsa 'gum*, “the host and hostess.” It is tempting to interpret this, in the context of what I elsewhere call the Gesar epic’s “shamanistic model of conflict” as referring to the *gnas* “residence” of numinal power, or *bla*. The “hosts” here probably refer to animals killed. We see reference to “yak hosts” (*mgron g.yag*) in a range of old Tibetan texts, and also in Bon tradition. For example in relation to the *cang-seng* spirits of the road in the *Gzi brjid*, vol. *kha*, 580; Adriano Clemente, *The sGra-bla, Gods of the Ancestors of Gshen-Rab Mi-Bo*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Zas nor rgyu ma'i zas kha phyas*.



When we are away from home, be our god of the road (*lam lha*)!<sup>18</sup>  
 When we are at home, give us protection!  
 May good things come to pass, and bad things be turned away!  
 Send laden horses [home] one by one with the *mdzo*,  
 Repulse harmful enemies, raiders (*jag chom*) and thieves!  
 Bring happiness for children!  
 May food, wealth and enjoyment increase!  
 [21] May the power and influence (*dbang thang*) of the clan (*rigs brgyud*) grow!  
 May fame, skill and strength increase!  
 By day [may we] take good care [of work],  
 By night [may we] amuse [ourselves] with talk!  
 When enemies come, take action [on our behalf]!  
 When illnesses come, medicine them!  
 Utterly liberate (i.e., kill) our bitter enemies!  
 Draw the strategies of foreign foes out in front,  
 [So] now enemies will be repulsed and tamed.

This layer of the text, I would suggest, is a generic though archaic supplication to a worldly deity. It could as easily be directed towards a presiding mountain deity as it could towards Gesar. The primary source of this strand, I would suggest, lies in the secular Tibetan custom of making purifying smoke offering to worldly, ancestral, or local deities. The primary layer in Gesar's apotheosis is as such a worldly protector.

## THE FOLKLORIC CHIVALRIC-SHAMANISTIC ORIENTATION

The second broad strand we can discern running through the text, is that which draws heavily upon the folkloric or narrative traditions concerning Gesar. In the presentation of Gesar we find in this text, he doubles – as he does in the epic – as a chivalric and a shamanistic hero. On the one hand he is the virile epitome of an equestrian knight embedded within a particular social or clanic context, and this constitutes his “chivalric” (for want of a better word) status. But on the other he is also surrounded by an elaborate spirit-world entourage which has largely non-Buddhist resonance, and this reflects the epic's “shamanistic” tint. For the main spirit companions of the epic hero reflect a range of sensibilities concerning the spirit world and the hero's efficacy in that dimension which might variously be

<sup>18</sup> *Byis[sic phyi] la 'gro na.*

called native, Bon-po-esque, shamanistic, or even northern Asian. They include his “familiar” from the three-tiered vertical spirit-world of *lha*, *klu* and *gnyan*, as well as animistic spirits of martial efficacy known as the *dgra-bla* (sic.) and *wer-ma*. Since this blend of chivalric and shamanistic elements that we find in this *bsang* text is also characteristic of the epic tradition, it seems fair to surmise that their inclusion here derives from that folkloric base.

So, working back from the final secular-orientated supplication, we find the evocations immediately preceding the final supplication have a rather archaic feel (fol. 19):

Purify the *mgul-lha bcu-gsum*, the thirteen hunting gods of Tibet<sup>19</sup>

Purify the *bstan-ma bcu-gnyis*, the *Twelve Goddesses of the Teachings*<sup>20</sup>

Purify the *srid-pa chag-pa'i lha-dgu*, the Nine Mountain Gods of Tibet.<sup>21</sup>

Then, proceeding backwards, there is a section for purifying Gesar’s consorts. These figures are clearly drawn from an already well-established epic tradition.

<sup>19</sup> *Mgul lha*. See R. A. Stein, *Recherches sur l'Épopée et le Barde au Tibet*. These deities are often invoked in the eastern Tibetan tellings of the epic (HLYG, LX etc). *Mgul* literally means “neck,” and is used to refer to the upper reaches of a mountain, before it becomes rock and scree – hence the “neck” of the mountain. In old Tibet, these were the most fruitful areas to hunt for deer, antelope, bear, leopard and so on, and the places from which mountain divinities would be propitiated.

<sup>20</sup> *Bstan ma bcu gnyis*. These are an important set of protectors of the esoteric teachings, particularly in Nyingma tradition. They are analogous or overlapping with the seven native goddesses tamed by Padmasambhava and Rlang Dpal-gyi-seng-ge as seen in PT307. See Cathy Cantwell and Rob Mayer, “Enduring Myths: *Smrang, Rabs* and Ritual in Dunhuang Texts on Padmasambhava,” 298. Gesar’s cultic association with this act of taming the indigenous goddesses is interesting from a religious-history perspective. When the 5th Sle-lung, Bzhad-pa’i rdo-rje, had his pure-vision of Gesar in 1729, he reports that the vision occurred “not long after the great festival to celebrate the joining of the Great Queen (*sman btsun chen mo*) Rdo-rje g.yu-sgron-ma and the great noble one of Ling (*gling skyes bu chen po*)” (LLDN). Well, Rdo-rje g.yu-sgron-ma is one of the Bstan-ma bcu-gnyis, and also of the “original” seven goddesses (from which the twelve seem to have evolved) who were converted by Padmasambhava and Rlang Dpal-gyi-seng-ge according to PT307. Later Rdo-rje g.yu-sgron-ma also appears at Gesar’s side in various Gesar *sādhana*s by Ju Mi-pham. The cultic association between Gesar and the taming of the Bstan-ma bcu-gnyis appears to be close to the heart to the evolution of the close cultic association between Gesar and Padmasambhava.

<sup>21</sup> *Srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu*. This is a traditional designation of the important mountain deities of early Tibet. Dung-dkar’s *Tshig mdzod chen mo* describes them as “‘O de gung rgyal and his eight sons,” namely Yar-lha sham-po; Gnyan-chen thang-lha; Rma-chen sbom-ra; Sgyogs-chen ldong-ra; Sgam-po lha-rje; Zhogs-lha rgyug-po; Jo-bo g.yul-rgyal and She’u kha-rag. These are the holy sites of Upper (Western), Middle and Lower (Eastern) Tibet respectively. Note the list always includes the holy mountain of ’Go-log, Rma-rgyal spom-ra which is so central to the culture of Gesar.

Some overlap with figures from the epic who are well-known to this author, while others are more obscure (though there is nothing surprising in this as the Gesar epic is a tradition of considerable flexibility, innovation and variability).

We see for example the blacksmith's "daughter" (a major figure in the epic concerning the struggle between Hor and Gling), who is here named Aon-mo Chos-'bum and described as a chattel of the Mgar clan (*Mgar ldan pa*).<sup>22</sup> Also evoked is Sman-za 'bum-skyid (sic.), "of the upper northern reaches" (*byang kha stod*) – a central character in the epic concerning Gesar's sojourn in the demon land of the north. In keeping with the sanctification of its objects, here all of these consorts are exalted as incarnations of various tantric goddesses and *mkha' 'gro* (fol. 19), as one also finds in the eastern Tibetan epic tradition.

A similar treatment is also found for Gesar's chivalric clanic entourage or *comitatus*<sup>23</sup> of "thirty warriors" who are identified – in what looks like a rather late Rnying-ma-pa manner – as emanations of the Thirty Mahasiddhas. Several among the core epic *comitatus* are cited by name, and the names given reflect the text's close alignment with the Gesar epic narrative tradition as found in northern Khams and 'Go-log. Particular correspondences can be observed with the early-18th century *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed* (from Sde dge) (HLYG) and the early 20th-century edition of the epic composed at Gling-tsang (LX).<sup>24</sup> For example, the half-brothers Rang-tsha dmar-leb (sic.) and Rgya-tsha zhal-dkar, the uncle Spyidpon Rong-tsha khra-rGAN; the "father" Seng-blon rgyal-po, the mother Mdogsza lha-mo (sic.), and the wife Skya-le Seng-lcam 'Brug-mo.

Beautifully encapsulating the chivalric warp and spirit-world weft of the epic tradition, the *bsang* text also elaborately evokes Gesar's "spirit-companion" entourage of *dgra-bla* and *wer-ma*, which are here presented as beings emanating from the Three Realms (Upper, Middle and Lower) of *lha*, *klu* and *gnyan* (here *gnyen*). In religio-historical terms, these warrior-spirits, which empower weaponry and armour, resonate more with Bon than they do with the Buddhist traditions. In Bon they are two of a fourfold classification, as we see for example in the

<sup>22</sup> In the classic text the *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed* (HLYG) composed at Sde-dge in the 1730s, this figure is known as Mgar-bza' chos-sgron, and is the daughter of the King of Hor's blacksmith.

<sup>23</sup> I use this word in deliberate deference to the work of Christopher Beckwith and Michael Walter in what they describe as the Central Eurasian Cultural Complex (CECC), and its relevance for understanding early Tibetan society, including its culture of valourisation through warrior epic.

<sup>24</sup> The three volumes (LX I, LX II, LX III) composed at Gling-tshang in the early 20th century under the patronage of the then Gling *rgyal po* Dbang-chen bstan-'dzin chos-rgyal. The three volumes were translated into French by R. A. Stein (1956), and have recently been published in full English translation in Kornman et al., *The Epic of Gesar of Ling: Gesar's Magical Birth, Early Years and Corontaion as King*.

well-known section from the *Gzi brjid*.<sup>25</sup> In our text, each of the “nine *wer-ma*” are depicted riding a different wild animal. Although the primary resonance of these entities appears to be Bonpo, both the *dgra-bla* and *wer-ma* have also been embraced by the *ris-med* (and particularly Rnying-ma) Buddhist ritual traditions that developed around the figure of Gesar. Indeed, the spelling *dgra-bla* used here (rather than the spelling *sgra-bla* favored in Bon) is suggestive of Rnying-ma rather than Bon-po roots.<sup>26</sup>

In its presentation of the *dgra-bla* and *wer-ma* this *bsang* text is explicitly non-sectarian, and despite the text’s overall Buddhist orientation we find the Bon-po resonance of these spirits evoked explicitly. Among the *dgra-bla* called upon, for example, are those of Ye-smon rgyal-po, the primordial Bon deity on the side of light and existence and so on, in the Bon dualist mythology of primordial cosmic conflict between the *ye* and *ngam*, between light and darkness.<sup>27</sup> It is also interesting to note the old Tibetan or Imperial-era resonance given to the martial spirits here: among the *dgra-bla* and *wer-ma* evoked and purified are the *dgra-bla*

<sup>25</sup> In the *Gzi brjid* (the seminal Bon text, redacted in the 14th century, about the life of Stonpa Gshen-rab Mi-bo) the *sgra bla* and *wer-ma* are just two classes in a fourfold grouping of warrior deities, namely *sgra-bla*, *wer-ma*, *cang-seng*, and *shug-mgon*. In the fifth chapter of the *Gzi brjid*, in a text called the *Rgyal bu gzhon nu rol brtsed kyi mdo*, there is a very interesting treatment concerning the *sgra bla* in particular, which has been analysed and translated into English by Adriano Clemente (*The sGra-bla, Gods of the Ancestors of Gshen-Rab Mi-Bo; According to the sGra bla go bsang from the gZi brjid*). In it, the *sgra bla* are called upon as Gshen-rab’s ancestors in the context of a *bsang* rite, for the purposes of purifying the “nine weapons of the *sgra bla*” which have emerged from meteorite-missiles fired at Gshen-rab by black demons. The *sgra bla* he invokes are described in very interesting terms: “From the border between origin and being (*ye yod kyi so mtshams*), gShen-rab mi-bo invokes the *sgra bla* of both being and non-being (*yod med gnyis kyi sgra bla*): Khyung-nag g.yu’i ra-pa-can (Black *khyung* with a turquoise mane), the Lord of all Existence who dwells in the world of non-being, while watching from the world of being. . . . From the border between darkness and light (*mun snang gi so mtshams*) he invites the *sgra bla* of light and darkness (*snang mun gi sgra bla*): mKha’lding gser-gyi-spyan-mig-can (Golden-eyed *mkha’lding*: a mythological eagle), who pervades both light and darkness, residing in the world of darkness and watching through the lamp of light.” After the invocation, the defiled weapons are presented as support or “receptacle” (*rten*) for the *sgra blas*, and all cry *Ki bSwo*. Using the smoke as a pathway, the *sgra bla* then descend into the weapons while Gshen-rab declaims the sacred history of his ancestors. Adriano Clemente, *The sGra bla, Gods of the Ancestors of Gshen-Rab Mi-Bo; According to the sGra bla go bsang from the gZi brjid*, 128–31.

<sup>26</sup> On rites for the *dgra-bla* (which are mentioned in this spelling in various Dunhuang texts) and their historical evolution see Berounský, Daniel, ““Soul of the Enemy” and Warrior Deities (*dgra-bla*): Two Tibetan Myths on Primordial Battle.”

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller account of this mythology see Samten G. Karmay, “The Appearance of the Little Black-headed Man.”

and *wer-ma* of “Royal Tibet” *sku rgyal bod*, a typical corruption of *spu rgyal bod*, and the *dgra-bla* of the “Six Tribes of the Little Men” (*mi ’u rus drug*), a reference to the six proto-clans of Tibet.

Next (still going backwards) is a brief section in praise of the various shrubs used in the smoke-purification rite (fol. 17), some of which are commonplace like juniper (*shug pa*), while others I have been unable to identify. These medicinal substances are referred to by the archaic term *tshan*. This term is found in many Bonpo rituals of purification texts. In one of the Ge-khod *bsang* purification presented by Karmay for example, we hear how the purifying *tshan* substances used in the *bsang* ritual first appear in the world as the result of Gnam-phyi Dgung-rgyal spreading her spittle of ambrosia over the earth: “and she spread the ambrosia over the earth/ so then the substances for the *tshan* appeared/ it is called the *tshan* because it falls like rain... it is called *tshan* because it purifies pollution...” after which a variety of medicinal substances for use in the purification rite are listed.<sup>28</sup> In an earlier article, Karmay also explains “the spittle of the goddess becomes both medicine and water, the mixture of which is called *tshan*.”<sup>29</sup>

Then there is a section evoking and purifying the hero’s personal effects (*sku chas*), in particular his armour and weaponry (fol. 17). Here again, the names of various pieces of armour and weaponry correspond closely to the names one finds in the epic tradition: For example the sword Btab-pa len-med (“unanswerable strike”), the bow Ra-rgod ’khyil-ba (“whorl of a wild goat”), and the black armour breastplate Zil-pa’i thog-sdug, are all names one also finds in the (early 20th century) Lingsang xylograph (LX) edition of the epic. Other items however do not correspond so closely.

Then there is (fol. 16) an evocation of Gesar’s “spirit siblings,” or his birth-companion “familiar”: the Elder Brother (*phu bo*) Dung-khyung dkar-po (sic.); Younger Brother (*nu bo*) Klu-sbrul ’od-can (sic.); and Sister (*sring mo*) Thig-la ’od-mtsho (sic.). These names again correspond with the eastern Tibetan epic tradition as exemplified in the mid-17th century *Hor gling g.yul ’gyed* (HLYG) and the Lingsang Xylograph (LX). These figures are also represented, with very similar names, as central figures in the celebrated Gesar *thangka* series held at the Sichuan Museum.<sup>30</sup>

The evocation of the birth-companions is also accompanied by an invocation of the triad of Gesar’s paternal protectors in the Three Realms (Upper, Middle

<sup>28</sup> Karmay, Samten, G., “The Social Organization of Ling and the Term “phu-nu” in the Gesar Epic,” 401.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, “A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon,” 145.

<sup>30</sup> For more on this important series see Zhang Changhong, ed., *From the Treasury of Tibetan Pictorial Art: Painted Scrolls of the Life of Gesar*.

and Lower), namely *lha-chen* Tshangs-pa dkar-po, *sku-lha* Gnyen-chen Germdzo (sic.) and *klu-rgyal* Gtsug-na rin-chen. This again is in close alignment with the northern Khams epic tradition as exemplified in HLYG and LX.

On fol. 15–16 there is a praise of the goods being presented in the *bsang* rite as offerings. Among them are medicinal shrubs to be burnt, the “three white offerings” (curd, milk, butter); “three sweet offerings” (honey, molasses, sugar); *tsampa* and butter (*phyé mar*), tea and *chang*, and also “yak, sheep, goats and any animal which crawls.” The inclusion of animals in the list appears to be a gesture towards a practice of animal sacrifice, or at least of meat-offering (*dmar mchod*).

What has been described so far (fol. 15–20) constitutes what I have called the text’s Prayer of Purification and Supplication. What precedes it, in the middle section of the text (fol. 8–15), is an elaborate invocation which I have called the Calling the Deity section. In it, many of the themes already mentioned are also found. Here Gesar is invoked in an elaborate, almost iconographic, depiction as a mounted warrior bedecked with accoutrements, clothes, armour and weapons, surrounded by his clanic entourage and his spirit-familiars as well as hosts of *lha*, *klu* and *gnyan* (here spelt *gnyen*). A *thangka* based on this text, should one exist, would be a marvellous thing. His horse, the white-muzzled tawny Rkyang-bu sna-dkar, is given just as elaborate a treatment as the rider, as are the resplendent saddle and tack, the pieces of which are enumerated in detail (fol. 10–12).

Here we also have an unusual elaboration of nine *wer-ma*, each riding a different animal, and the nine *dgra-bla* led by the red tiger-spirit Gnyan-stag dmar-po, who is well-known from the epic tradition as Gesar’s most prominent *dgra-bla/dgra-lha* assistant. The elaboration of the nine *wer-ma* found here appears to be original to this text,<sup>31</sup> but otherwise all these elements are recognizable from the epic tradition.

## THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE BUDDHIST GESAR CULT

In addition to these aspects of the text’s invocation, which appear to have their origin either in the epic tradition itself, or in the lay practice of making *bsang* offering to local worldly deities (such as mountain-gods, who are the typical objects of supplication during *bsang* rituals), the text also has a further layer which makes clear that the text we are looking at here was the work of a Buddhist *yogi* practitioner.

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<sup>31</sup> In LX II there is an elaborate presentation of thirteen *wer-ma*, which have been written about elsewhere, but the presentation there is quite different.

This is most explicit in the couplet which follows the final supplication above (fol. 21):

And in the places of we yogis (*rnal 'byor dag cag*),  
May the never-setting banner of the teaching be planted!

Followed by the concluding refrain:  
May all wishes be fulfilled!  
With a mighty  
*Ki bswol! lha rgyal lo!*

Whoever the compiler, author or redactor of this text was, he was clearly a tantric practitioner. But what kind of *yogi* are we considering here? What is clear is that he was very keen to espouse his *ris-med* “non-sectarian” ecumenicism, for as we will see below, the text appears to espouse Bon, Bka’ brgyud and Rnying-ma pieties all together. But predominant among them is certainly the Bka’-brgyud alignment, which is also corroborated by the difficult colophon (discussed below). We see this most explicitly in the line on fol. 16: “Bless and purify the root lamas of the Oral-Transmission (Bka’-brgyud) lineage.”

It is certainly interesting, though not surprising, that this apparently old text (there are plenty of obscure lines that I have not highlighted) should have a Bka’-brgyud-pa rather than Rnying-ma-pa origin. In modern times the Buddhist cult of Gesar is a predominantly Rnying-ma phenomenon, and this is seen in the hero’s strong associations with Padmasambhava as a tamer of Tibet’s unruly spirit world. However, the Rnying-ma-pa “ownership” of the Buddhist cult of Gesar may not be very ancient. In fact, it can only be traced as far back as the mid-late 17th century, by which time the epic was already a well-developed oral tradition.<sup>32</sup> Before this time, it is highly probable that a lay cult concerning Gesar already existed in eastern Tibet, but outside the remit of organized religion (and indeed of the literate sphere). It was only around the mid-17th century that Rnying-ma-orientated *yogis* appear to have started to adopt Gesar as a symbol of enlightened heroism, and thus that we start seeing explicitly Buddhist Gesar ritual texts, mostly of the *bsang* type.

<sup>32</sup> That the Gesar *epic* tradition (as distinct from the Gesar *ritual* tradition) was well developed by the late 17th century is beyond doubt. If we look for instance at the *Stag gzig nor 'gyed* (TZNG) apparently composed by Rdzogs-sprul Padma rig-'dzin in 1661 (making it our oldest datable Gesar epic text), we see a snippet of what was clearly an already well-elaborated epic tradition. A plethora of *rdzong* episodes are listed, and the text is replete with epic formulae and characters which have persisted in the epic tradition today.

An important point to recognize about the cult of Gesar in Tibet is that it has been primarily evolved as a *regional* phenomenon, rather than one delimited by sectarian religious pieties. In central Tibet, the cult has traditionally been weak (though it has on occasion been attractive to members of the political elite),<sup>33</sup> while in Khams and in A-mdo, it has traditionally been very strong. Arguably the most important heartland of the Gesar epic tradition – and certainly the region from which this particular text’s presentation of Gesar is drawn – is the broad region of northern Khams and southern Mgo-log which surrounds the historic kingdom of Gling-tshang. These regions – which include Sde-dge, Rdza-chu-ka, Nang-chen, ’Bri-stod, Gser-rta, Dga’-bde, Gcig-sgril and so on – are the heart of a strong Gesar tradition, and are regions in which even today locals self-identify their world with Gesar’s historic-legendary-mythic domain of Gling. It was in these areas, especially among those who shared some sense of clanic affinity with the hero through the *ldong* tribal lineage, that the popular *lay* culture surrounding Gesar and the epic evolved. And it was in these same areas, and in particular in the Buddhist monastic hotbed of the Sde-dge region, that the figure of Gesar came to be accepted and even embraced by local religious masters and tantric adepts as an emblem of local pride and a flamboyant symbol of the region’s vibrant and individualistic Buddhist culture. This *local* embrace of Gesar by tantrics and monastics was not a sectarian matter at all. On the contrary, part of Gesar’s appeal was that he (and the society he leads) epitomized the cultural glue of the region – the shared secular culture which transcends sectarian divisions and rivalries.<sup>34</sup> Even today, in the region around Gling-tshang (in present-day Sde-dge county), one finds that all the local Buddhist monasteries of Sa-skya, Bka’-brgyud or Rnying-ma denominations perform Gesar dances as part of their New Year festivities. And in the summer months, many participate in the horse riding fairs and annual community festivals in which the epic is evoked as a *dpe* (example or model) in a variety of activities, competitions and rituals of hospitality. This is true not just of the immediate vicinity of Gling-tshang, but across a wide swathe of northern Khams and southern Mgo-log, the areas between Rma-rgyal spom-ra and the ’Bri-chu (upper Yangtse) and Rdza-chu (upper Yalong) rivers, all of which consider themselves as having been part of the legendary land of Gling.

The evolution of the Gesar cult – the growth of his religious and mythic stature from that of a local ancestral hero to that of a national protector for all “black-headed” Tibetans (*dbu nag bod kyi lha skal*) and a messenger and avatar

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<sup>33</sup> Notable examples being Rdo-ring Paṇḍita in the 18th century and Reting (Rwa-greng) Rinpoche in the 20th.

<sup>34</sup> The Dge-lugs sect, with its reputation for strictness and sectarianism, has historically been weak in these regions, and only started to make its presence felt in the early 20th century.



of Padamasambhava himself – has been connected, in many ways and at many junctures, to the patronage of Gesar-culture by the aristocratic elites of this region (spanning lay, monastic, and *yogi* spheres) who often identify with the *ldong* tribal lineage.<sup>35</sup> Even in relatively modern times, many of the lamas most associated with the development of the Rnying-ma-dominated *ris-med* Rdzogs-chen cult of Gesar which took off in the 19th century – such as Mchog-gyur-gling-pa, 'Jam-mgon-kong-sprul-blo-gros-mtha'-yas, 'Jam-dbyangs-mkhyen-brtse'i-dbang-po, 'Ju-mi-pham-rnam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho, and the successive incarnations of the Rdzogs-sprul lineage of Rdzogs-chen monastery, as well as those lamas who have in modern times brought Gesar with them as part of their *dharmā* teaching in the West, such as Chogyam Trungpa (Chos-rgyam-drung-pa), Tarthang Tulku (Dar-thang-sprul-sku), and Namkha Drime (Gnam-mkha'-dri-med), and those lamas in modern Tibet who have had the greatest influence on the directions in which the epic and its associated cult are now developing, most notably Mkhan-po 'Jigs-med-phun-tsogs (1933–2004) – have come from and continue to come from these same regions where local traditions and clanic associations with Gesar have traditionally been strongest.

And historically, at the centre of the eastern Tibetan aristocratic patronage of the Gesar legacy has been the royal family of Gling-tshang itself, long considered one of the most prestigious families in Khams, on account of their reputed descent from Gesar's own nephew.

So to return to our text – that an apparently old text supplicating Gesar should have Bka'-brgyud rather than overtly Rnying-ma origins is not surprising because of the long-standing historic association that existed between various branches of the Bka'-brgyud-pa and the royal house of Gling-tshang. This association persisted for several centuries, spanning the period in which the epic evolved and grew as a mainstay of popular culture, but for which we have no documentary evidence.

Said to be the descendants of Dgra-lha rtse-rgyal, Gesar's nephew (Rgya-tsha's son) in the epic, the aristocratic Gling-tshang royal family long served as

<sup>35</sup> *Ldong* being one of the six “original” tribal lineages of the Tibetan people, schematized as the *mi'u gdung drug* the “six lineages of the little men.” In modern transcription the clanic lineage of Gesar is sometimes said to be the *smug po ldong* – the red-brown *ldong* lineage. One also finds *ldong* spelt *gdong*, which means “face.” This looks to be a spelling corruption, but one which furnishes a populist etymology, whereby Gesar belongs to the clan of the “ruddy-faced” – Tibetan highlanders are known for their ruddy complexions. It is interesting to observe that the *bsang* text presented in this article makes no allusion to the *ldong* clan identity, and instead presents Gesar in a more “national” register as hero of all “black-headed” Tibetans as their “destined god” (*dbu nag bod kyi lha skal*, fol. 2).

the prestigious guardians of the Gesar legacy in Khams. A rich web of religio-political-clanic association connecting Gling-tshang with the Phag-mo-gru lineage in particular, dates back certainly as early as the late 14th century, and perhaps further back still to the 12th century. For it was in 1188 that the founder of the Yel-pa Bka'-brgyud tradition, Sangs-rgyas yel-pa (1134–94) who was one of the chief disciples of Phag-mo-gru rdo-rje rgyal-po,<sup>36</sup> took possession of Rtar-na (“Horse’s Ears”) monastery on the edges of the Byang-thang in Nang-chen, apparently under the patronage of the then Gling chief. The chief of Gling is then said to have donated many relics of Gesar to that monastery for safe-keeping. These included a set of his *prajñāpāramitā* scriptures (*pha 'bum*) and various pieces of his weaponry and armour which have reputedly survived into modern times.<sup>37</sup>

The relationship between Gling and the Phag-mo-gru was in full flower in the 14th and 15th centuries. It was in this period that the Phag-mo-gru-pa dynasty of Byangs-chub rgyal-mtshan rose to political dominance in central Tibet, while Gling was the predominant power (at least in terms of prestige) in Khams. In this period Gling (at its current location south and east of 'Dan-khog, and north-east of Sde-dge) was a favoured stop-over for central Tibetan and Ming-dynasty dignitaries<sup>38</sup> during journeys across eastern Tibet. These included successive Karmapa incumbents who are recorded stopping there in 1359, 1406 and 1466.<sup>39</sup> The cultivation of a religio-mythic-clanic association between Gling (and its symbol of potency, Gesar) and the Phag-mo-gru-pa was also textually enshrined in the *gter-ma* charter-text of the Phag-mo-gru, the *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru*. In that text (which according to R. A. Stein may have undergone its final redaction

<sup>36</sup> Phag-mo-gru-pa Rdo-rje rgyal-po (1110–70) was in turn was one of the three chief disciples of Sgam-po-pa Bsod-nams rin-chen (1079-1153), or the Doctor of Dwags-po (Dwags-po lha-rje), one of Milarepa’s foremost disciples.

<sup>37</sup> According to the website of the current Tana monastery re-established in Kollegal, Karnataka, India, it was Sangs-rgyas yel-pa himself who was supported by the chief of Ling, and during his tenure that the Gesar relics were donated to the monastery. However, it is possible the bestowal of Gesar’s relics happened at a later date (in the late 14th or 15th century for example). A physical examination of the relics in question would help settle this question, which I have as yet been unable to do.

<sup>38</sup> The chiefs of Gling-tshang received Ming dynasty titles on a par with their central Tibetan counterparts. Elliot Sperling, “Ming Ch’eng-tsu and the Monk Officials of Gling-tshang and Gongyo,” 75.

<sup>39</sup> Successive Karmapas visited Gling-tshang during the 14th and 15th centuries. For example, the fourth Karmapa Rol-pa’i rdo-rje visited in 1358, where he met the Great Chief (*dpon chen*) of Gling at 'Dan klong thang. The 5th Karmapa De-bzhin gshegs-pa also visited in 1406; as did the 7th Karmapa Chos-grags rgya-mtsho dpal-bzang-po in 1466. Luciano Petech, “Yuan Organisation of the Tibetan Border Areas,” 376; R. A. Stein, *Recherches sur l’Épopée et le Barde au Tibet*, 213–14.

around 1450) Gling Gesar is elaborately described as a chief and horse-trader who greeted the sage Byang-chub 'dre-bkol (a former scion of the Rlangs dynasty) on the latter's journey to China (putatively in the late 11th or early 12th century). During one such encounter, Gesar is said to have asked Byang-chub 'dre-bkol to be his lama.<sup>40</sup>

So given the historic connections over several centuries between Gling and various branches of the Bka'-brgyud tradition, it would not be surprising to find that the Buddhist cult of Gesar emerged in the context of this association. Though it should be added, that a similar argument could also be made of the Sa-skyia school.<sup>41</sup>

The Rnying-ma pa adoption of Gesar in Eastern Tibet seems to be traceable to the mid-17th century. It is no coincidence that this was also the period in which the Gling-tshang kingdom was being subsumed within the ascendant (Rnying-ma-sympathising) kingdom of Sde-dge which at that time had the support of Gushri Khan.<sup>42</sup> It is also no coincidence that this was the period in which royal family of Gling-tshang, who it seems had been suspected of Bon-po or Bka'-brgyud-pa (or both) sympathies,<sup>43</sup> formally embraced Rnying-ma devotions. A key figure in that "conversion" was the charismatic and controversial lay tantric guru and *gter-ston* Rig 'dzin Bdud-'dul rdo-rje (1615–72), who was himself from

<sup>40</sup> For the extensive descriptions of Gling Gesar in the *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru* as an eastern Tibetan horse-trader who takes Byang-chub 'dre-bkol as his lama, see LPSR, 45-49. R. A. Stein ("Une Source Ancienne pour l'Histoire de l'Épopée Tibétaine: Le Rlangs Po-Ti bSe-Ru") gives a full treatment of these passages. I have also translated them, but these are not yet published.

<sup>41</sup> The royal house of Gling also maintained longstanding historic ties with the Sa-skyia-pa school, which seem to have begun even before the period of Sa-skyia hegemony in Tibet during the Mongol period (13th century). Should an old Gesar ritual text emerge with a Sa-skyia leaning, I wouldn't hesitate to make a similar argument.

<sup>42</sup> Basing himself on the *Sde-dge rgyal rabs*, and the *dkar-chag* of the *Sde dge bka' 'gyur*, R. A. Stein writes: "With the 42nd generation of the Sde-dge chiefs, the generation represented by the Lama Byams-pa phun-tshogs, who according to the *dkar-chag* [of the *Sde-dge Bka' 'gyur*] died in the Fire-female-Sheep year (1667), we find Gling at the beginning of its decline. The two parallel texts of the history of Sde-dge tell us that in this period a few 'minor chiefs of Gling' (*gling gi dpon phran 'ga*), the king of Be-ri and others 'became hostile to Buddhism' and were marked by pride. Byams-pa phun-tshogs decided to subdue these enemies of religion, but since he didn't have the wherewithal to do it on his own, he asked the great chief of the Ölod Qoshots, Gushri Khan (Bstan-'dzin chos-rgyal 1584–1654, reigned in Tibet from 1642) to help him. The result, according to the *dkar-chag*, was that the Chief of Sde-dge brought under his control the 'Eighteen Great *rdzongs*'" (R. A. Stein, *Recherches sur l'Épopée et le Barde au Tibet*, 222–23; translation by the author). As Stein goes on to observe, the expression "Eighteen Great *rdzongs*" is significant. It is an expression weighted with Gesaric resonance. It seems that with the absorption of Gling into the Sde-dge domains, Sde-dge formally took on the mantle as the kingdom in whom the heroic legacy of Gesar lived on in Khams.

<sup>43</sup> See note 42 above.

Sde-dge (and connected through his first teacher with the Sde-dge royal house), but had spent much of his adult life in Spo-bo in southern Tibet, where he had earned his reputation as a treasure-revealer.<sup>44</sup>

After his return to Sde-dge in 1656 Bdud-'dul rdo-rje visited Gling-tshang the following year, and there he "established an excellent patron-priest relationship with the king of Ling."<sup>45</sup> A few years later (probably 1661) Rdzogs-sprul Padma rig-'dzin, a disciple of the Mahāmudrā/Rdzogs-chen master Karma Chags-med, is credited with composing the *Stag gzic nor 'gyed* (TZNG), currently our oldest datable Gesar epic text. Like the *bsang* text under examination here, the TZNG testifies to the existence of what was already a very expansive and well-elaborated epic tradition,<sup>46</sup> but it also, interestingly, describes Gesar as a tantric empowerment guru, wearing a jewel-studded *vajra*-crown and dharma robes, distributing empowered pills (*ril bu*) and protective cords (*tshe mdud*) to the ministers, generals and heroes of Gling.<sup>47</sup> In TZNG, Gesar also describes himself (in a song) as the "combined embodiment of the Rigs-gsum mgon-po" (*rigs gsum gcig tu bsdus*), and as "an emanation (*sprul pa*) of Padmasambhava (*o rgyan chen po*)."<sup>48</sup> We also find Gesar described, not as a local chief, but rather as a supra-local or national champion of all "highlander Tibetans" (*sgang pa bod rnams*). All of these features indicate a considerable degree of alignment with the presentation of Gesar that we find in the *bsang* text being considered here.

Only a few years after the composition of the TZNG, sometime in the 1670s or 80s, Rdzogs-sprul Padma rig-'dzin, with support of both the chief of Sde-dge and the chief of Gling-tshang, established Rdzogs-chen monastery in a beautiful valley only a day's ride from the royal palace of the Gling-tshang *rgyal-po*.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> On the career of Bdud-'dul rdo-rje see Jan Ronis, "Bdud 'dul rdo rje (1615–72) and Rnying-ma adaptations to the Era of the Fifth Dalai Lama." Soon after this, Bdud-'dul rdo-rje (who was a lay tantric with wives and children) fell from favour in Sde-dge, and was forced to leave.

<sup>45</sup> Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 816.

<sup>46</sup> The TZNG conforms in all respects to the epic genre as it continues to exist today, both in the narrative structures it evokes for the epic at large, and in the many formulae, phrases and names that together constitute the epic's distinct pool of tradition. For example, we see the scheme of the Four Great Enemies of the Four Directions namely Hor, Bdud, Jang and Mon. We see several of the main characters of Gling such as Tsha-zhang 'Dan-ma, Spyi-dpon Rong-tsha khra-rGAN, Dgra-lha rtse-rgyal and so on, and we see innumerable familiar formulae and phrases (such as *mna 'mi bod kyi gnam dpe la*). We can see just how highly-diversified and well-elaborated the epic tradition already was at this time by the long list "campaigns" listed at TZNG, 8–11.

<sup>47</sup> This image of Gesar comes at the end of the text. TZNG, 71.

<sup>48</sup> TZNG, 8.

<sup>49</sup> The author rode from the seat of the Gling-tshang *rgyal po* at Gu-zi to Rdzogs chen monastery in 2005. There may now be some kind of road link.

This monastery would become one of the leading Rnying-ma monasteries in all of Tibet, and also a major centre for the burgeoning Rnying-ma cult of Gesar.<sup>50</sup>

The cult of Gesar then became a renewed focus of attention during the *ris-med* efflorescence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which it is beyond the scope of this article to go into.<sup>51</sup>

## THE *RIS-MED* YOGI ORIENTATION

So to return to the opening section of our *bsang* text (fol. 1–7), this is its most explicitly “religious” part, and represents a *yogi*-monastic (and Bka’-brgyud affiliated) scribal “packaging” of what might otherwise be a largely secular, epic-derived ritual invocation. We find Seng-chen skyes-bu (Gesar) supplicated devotionally in what looks like a Rdzogs-chen/Mahāmudrā and/or tantric register. This is clear from even the first three lines (fol.2):

From the space-palace of the *dharmakāya*,  
From the spontaneity-palace of Clear Light,  
Enlightened emanation-body of all the refuge-Buddhas.

For example, in a manner that one often finds in other early Rnying-ma-oriented Gesar texts such as the *Stag gzig nor ’gyed* (TZNG) or the opening paen of the *Rtsa ba’i rnam thar* (GX) – one here finds the hero called upon as the combined manifestation of the Rigs-gsum mgon-po (Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi), and also aligned with the *trikāya* of compassionate enlightenment as represented by Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, and Padmasambhava. In addition, the hero’s enlightened subtle body of *cakras* (*’khor lo*) is evoked, as is his “wrathful gaze for the taming of Rudra,” intimating a role as a *yi-dam* figure.

Furthermore, unusually for a Gesar text (in which Gesar is rarely if ever invoked in combination with other particular meditational deities or tantric

<sup>50</sup> The Gesar *’cham* performed by monks of this monastery, using masks designed by ’Ju mi-pham, is particularly well-known.

<sup>51</sup> On this see the excellent work on Gesar rituals of this period by Gregory Forgues (*Materials for the Study of Gesar Practices*) and the article by Jeff Watt on the iconography of Gesar (“Ling Gesar: A Preliminary Survey of the Art & Iconography of Ling Gesar – A Tibetan Culture Hero”).

<sup>52</sup> Jeff Watt puts this feature very well in his seminal article on Gesar in Tibetan art: “It is important to recognize that Gesar does not typically or normally appear as an accompanying figure in other more traditional compositions such as with a central figure of a Buddha, religious teacher, meditational deity or protector deity. Gesar also does not appear as a protector deity in any Field of Accumulation (Refuge Field) paintings. Gesar does not appear in any religious lineage

cycles)<sup>52</sup> specific tantric deities are also mentioned by name, with references for example to Rdo-rje 'jigs-byed (Vajrabhairava, a form of Yamāntaka) and Kyedor (Hevajra).

But though its Buddhist and tantric *yogi*-orientation is clear, the text exuberantly disavows sectarianism. This avowedly ecumenical spirit is most apparent in this opening section. For it is here we are presented with one of the text's most striking and unusual images: Gesar as a seated king-figure with Śākyamuni at his right knee and Ston-pa Gshen-rab at his left.

It is true that a *ban bon dbyer med* ("no distinction between Buddhism and Bon") dimension is something one occasionally encounters in Gesar epic texts and in the repertoires of various Tibetan epic bards, but it is very unusual presented in this way, and particularly so when found within a ritual text (fol. 5):

Upon the right knee,  
As sign of being completely endowed with the Ten Virtues,  
Sits *Buddha Śākyamuni*,  
Upon the left knee,  
As sign of being completely endowed with magical power,  
Sits *bon sku Ston-pa Gshen-rab*.

However, despite avowing this Bon piety, the author gives something away here. The *bon sku* is the equivalent in Bon tantra and Rdzogs-chen to the Buddhist *chos sku/ dharmakāya*, the formless "body of ultimate reality." However, it is clumsy (if not simply wrong) in a Bon context to present Ston-pa Gshen-rab as *bon-sku*, since he is considered a *sprul sku/ nirmānakāya* physical-manifestation form (similar to Padmasambhava in a Rnying-ma scheme).<sup>53</sup> This suggests that although our author is here paying deference to some kind of Bon dimension to Gesar's spiritual status, he is not particularly well-acquainted with its systems.

The ecumenicism of the text is also continued in the various protectors evoked alongside Gesar (fol. 7), which seems to suggest a predominantly Bka'-brgyud

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paintings or lineages of the ancient Tibetan Kings. To reinforce the point, depictions of Ling Gesar in painting generally stand alone as a single and dominant subject unrelated to other subjects save for the usual image of Padmasambhava located at the top center of the composition. This is an important distinguishing characteristic in the presentation of the iconography of Ling Gesar. This understanding of the painted depictions clearly indicates how Gesar stands apart as a true Tibetan culture hero – not related or associated with the Buddhist traditions originating in India along with their extensive pantheon of Indian Tantric Buddhist deities." Ibid., 184.

<sup>53</sup> Thanks are due to Samten Karmay for the observation of this idiosyncrasy.

<sup>54</sup> On the basis of the figures evoked in this section Jeff Watt suggests that the author was likely a Bka'-brgyud-pa who was well-versed in the Phag-gru Bka'-brgyud traditions, more than

orientation but also include some Rnying-ma-esque and even Bon sensibilities.<sup>54</sup> These include A-phyi Chos-sgron (11th century *yogini* who became a principal protector of the Bri-gung Bka'-brgyud); Rme-ba brtsegs-pa (Bhurkumkūta); Dpal-ldan lha-mo (an originally Sa-skya and Bka'-brgyud figure), and the obscure figures Yaksha me-dbal "who overcomes the harmful influence of *btsan*," and Khyung-chen 'bar-ba "who overcomes the harmful influence of *klu*." These last two look like Bon protectors (the *dbal* are a major category of divinities in Bon), but deities with these specific names appear to be unknown in that tradition.<sup>55</sup>

This summary of the text illustrates its layered and potentially composite nature with the more archaic "secular" folkloric and folk-religious portions appearing at the end, and its ecumenical tantric-practitioner religious packaging at the front.

## GESAR, BUDDHISM AND BON

The inclusion of apparently Bonpo pieties in this text is interesting, because there is little evidence historically of there having been a Bon-po cult of Gling Gesar.<sup>56</sup> In the epic tradition, although Bonpo-esque elements are certainly there in the

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those of the Karma Bka'-brgyud. If the author was properly a Karma Bka'-brgyud practitioner, he says, one would expect the inclusion of important deities and protectors unique to their hierarchy, but these are not present. Private correspondence with Jeff Watt.

<sup>55</sup> Samten Karmay: private correspondence.

<sup>56</sup> That is to say, there is no evidence of an *early* Bon cult of Gling Gesar. The only exception to this that has come to my attention is in the Steng-chen region or northern Khams where in the early 20th century a local Bonpo chief named Dbang-chen nyi-ma was devoted to Gesar as a martial protective deity and wrote a number of epic texts in praise of him. He also patronized a Gesar chapel near his house at which rituals were regularly performed. Manuscripts of these texts are held in the Musée Guimet in Paris and were recently published with a full French translation and excellent introductory essays by Anne-Marie Blondeau and Anne Chayet (see their *L'Épopée Tibétaine de Gesar: Manuscrit Bon-po Fonds A. David-Néel du Musée Guimet: Présentation et Traduction*). However, this case seems to be anomalous, and there is no widespread tradition in Bon of acknowledging Ling Gesar. His namesake T'rom Gesar (*'phrom ge sar/ khrom ge sar*) does crop up in Bon ritual texts, but only (in my experience) as a figure "at the borders," functioning in a ritual setting as an outer boundary marker. John Bellezza, for example, shows a reference to *khrom ge sar* in such a capacity in a 13th century Bonpo *g.yang 'gugs* ritual text (Idem, *Spirit-mediums, Sacred Mountains and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet: Calling Down the Gods*, 460), and Dan Martin has shown several mentions of both *phrom* as a foreign (non-Tibetan) place-name and the title (or place-name) *ge sar* (sometimes *gye sar*) in a range of Bonpo sources concerning the life of the Gshen-rab mi-bo. See his "From Gesar: The Place this time."

epic's setting and in its cultural complex, Gesar himself is always depicted as a Buddhist hero, while it is his opponents such as the Hor-pa (and the Kha-che<sup>57</sup> and Stag-gzig and so on) who are routinely depicted worshipping deities such as Gnam-the which have Bon resonance.<sup>58</sup> Even the unusual Gesar texts authored by a Bon chief named Dbang-chen-nyi-ma in the early 20th century, make it clear that Gesar is to be understood as a Buddhist hero.<sup>59</sup> And this is in keeping with the theory intimated at the beginning of this article, that one of the main creative drives sustaining the Gesar epic is its conversion of a Bon-po sensibility concerning the spirit world into a Buddhist frame. In the epic, the theme of ambivalence or impartiality between Buddhism and Bon in fact tends to be reserved for the epic's villainous-uncle character, A-khu Khro-thung, whose fickle loyalties earn him the epithet "double-sided drum-head" (*mgo da ma ru*).<sup>60</sup> It is possible however that this reflects a later excision of Bon pieties from the figure of Gesar, as at one point in the *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed* (HLYG) a text originally authored in the 1730s though later edited, we find an example of Gesar himself invoking Bon and Buddhist *dgra lha* (sic.) together.<sup>61</sup>

But for the most part, it seems that while Buddhists (and especially Buddhist monastics) often struggle with the Bon-esque aspects of the Gesar figure – such

<sup>57</sup> One might expect the *kha che* to be Muslim, as *kha che* is still a term used for Muslims in Tibetan, but as is illustrated by the version of this episode translated into German by Kaschewsky and Tsering, its ruler is in fact depicted in quite standard Bonpo and "heretical" (*mu stegs pa*) terms. See Rudolf Kaschewsky and Pema Tsering, "Gesars Abwehrkampf gegen Kaschmir."

<sup>58</sup> Gling's opponents, such as the Hor-pa for example, are often cast in "Bonpo" terms, honouring shamanistic animal-headed divinities, or the three T'e (*the* or *thel*) divinities of the sky, earth and intermediate space. See Karmay's article on the Bonpos of the Steng-chen region who are known as the "Thirty-nine Tribes of Hor," and claim descent from Mongol soldiery that settled the region in the 13th century. The correspondence between their practices and those of the Hor-pas depicted in *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed* (HLYG) are unmistakable (see Samten, G. Karmay, "The Thirty-Nine Tribes of Hor: A Historical Perspective"), and add fuel to the speculation that it was in the wake of this period of Mongol settlement in the 13th century that the Gesar epic really took hold as a mainstay of eastern Tibetan popular culture.

<sup>59</sup> See Anne-Marie Blondeau and Anne Chayet, *L'Épopée Tibétaine de Gesar: Manuscrit Bon-po Fonds A. David-Néel du Musée Guimet: Présentation et Traduction*.

<sup>60</sup> A *damaru* is a small double-sided hand drum used in many Tibetan ritual incantations. One example of A-khu Khro-thung's ambivalence between Buddhism and Bon is in a song recorded by the author in Jyekundo (Skyes-dgu-mdo) in 2005 sung by the contemporary "inspired" (*'babs sgrung pa*) Gesar bard Zla-ba grags-pa. In it Khro-thung begins his song with "as a Buddhist, I call upon Sakya-thub-pa to bear witness, as Bonpo I call upon Ston-pa Gshen-rab."

<sup>61</sup> In the second part (*smad cha*) of the *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed* (HLYG), Gesar, when charged with obscuring the divinations of a particularly powerful diviner of Hor, calls upon a broad pantheon of protector spirits which include both Buddhist and Bon deities: *bon skyong srid pa 'i dgra lha 'bum//....ban bon med kyi dgra lha 'bum//...gling de rdib rogs mdzod//*. HLYG *smad cha*, 260.



as his “parentage” among primordial sky-deities, his connections to the spirits of the Upper, Middle and Lower realms, and his association with the archaic *dgra-bla/dgra-lha/ sgra-bla*<sup>62</sup> and *wer-ma* warrior spirits – and as a result consider there to be “something Bonpo about Gesar,” Bonpos for their part have generally considered Gesar as an explicitly Buddhist hero hostile to their traditions, and have not taken part in his apotheosisation. Once again what we see at play here is the dynamic of appropriation and inversion that underlies so much Tibetan religious history, which also sustains the Gesar epic and its cult: Through the vehicle of Gesar, Buddhism supplants Bon, while retaining aspects of its sensibility, atmosphere and belief system.

### THE COLOPHON: KARMA PAKSHI... OR NOT?

Finally, we must address the colophon itself and offer some theory about our text’s authorship and date.

The copy of the text presented here is an *dbu-med* manuscript of twenty-one folios. It was found by Tashi Tsering of the Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamsala among the manuscripts in the personal library of Namkha Drime Rinpoche at the Phuntsokling Tibetan settlement in Orissa, India. It was then brought to the attention of Jeff Watt of Himalayan Art Resources by Alak Zenkar Rinpoche, and came to the attention of the present author via that route.<sup>63</sup>

Tibetan ritual texts are notoriously hard to date and this one is no exception. If the text carried no colophon (common for ritual texts), an initial assumption – based on the considerations above – would have been to assume it came from the period of *ris-med* efflorescence of the cult of Gesar in eastern Tibet in the late 19th century. I might, for example, have provisionally attributed it to ’Jam-mgon Kongs-sprul Blo-gros mtha’-yas (1813–99), who came from a Bka’-brgyud background, had Bon sympathies, and whose Gesar texts bear a similar emphasis

<sup>62</sup> For an excellent treatment of the issue concerning the spelling of this class of martial spirits, see Daniel Berounský, “‘Soul of the Enemy’ and Warrior Deities (*dgra-bla*): Two Tibetan Myths on Primordial Battle.”

<sup>63</sup> I am much indebted to Jeff Watt for passing this text to me, which he received from Thubten Nyima (Zenkar Rinpoche). Watt mentions this text and its attribution to Karma Pakshi in his important article on the iconography of Gesar, but at the time of writing that article the text itself had not been available to him. See Jeff J. Watt, “Ling Gesar: A Preliminary Survey of the Art & Iconography of Ling Gesar – A Tibetan Culture Hero.”

<sup>64</sup> See Forgues’ translation of Kongtrul’s *Sku rje ge sar bsangs mchod dgos ’dod char ’bebs*. Gregory Forgues, *Materials for the Study of Gesar Practices*, 146–52.

on the *lha*, *klu* and *gnyan*.<sup>64</sup> However this would be a hasty assumption, since this text has a number of idiosyncracies, archaisms and obscurities which make such an ascription unlikely.<sup>65</sup>

Which brings us to the colophon, the interpretation of which is uncertain and may support a variety of hypotheses. It runs as follows:

Composed in the heart of *Mdo-sgam* [sic] at '*Dam-stod kha-shis-gong* [sic] at the time when *grub-chen Karma-pa-shes-pa* had a vision of *Ge-sar skyes-bu don-'grub*.

*mdo sgam sa yi thig le 'dam stod kha shis gong nas grub chen karma pa shes pa*

*ge sar skyes bu don 'grub gi zhal gzig pa'i dus mdzad pa'o /*

What appears to be the place name – '*Dam-stod kha-shis gong* in *Mdo-sgam* (the archaic spelling of *Mdo-khams*, or eastern Tibet) remains unidentified by the author at this time, but the identity of *grub-chen Karma-pa* is clear (especially with the *che-rtags* symbol inserted between *grub chen* and *Karma-pa*): it refers to the second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204–83), also known as *grub-chen* Pakshi, for whom the title *grub-chen* (“great adept” or Mahāsiddha) is reserved in the context of the Karmapa lineage.

On the basis of this colophon, Alak Zenkar Rinpoche (Thubten Nyima) provisionally attributed the text to Karma Pakshi himself, and it is this attribution which is referred to in a recent article by Jeff Watt.<sup>66</sup> In a personal conversation, Alak Zenkar Rinpoche re-affirmed this suggestion, adding that the *pa shes pa* one finds here appended onto Karma, could possibly be an alternate or archaic rendering of “*pakshi*.”<sup>67</sup>

Though not impossible, this is an attribution which is hard to accept, since it would push the date of our earliest evidence of the culture of Gesar back by several

<sup>65</sup> There are tell-tale signs that would make an attribution to Kongs-sprul unconvincing. For instance Kongs-sprul writes of thirteen not nine *wer-ma*, and gives the name of Gesar’s horse as Rkyang-rgod not Rkyang-bu sna-dkar. Archaisms include the reference to the *lings* hunt in the final supplication and obscurities include the strange image of Ston-pa Gshen-rab at the hero’s knee. All of which would be very odd in a text by Kongs-sprul.

<sup>66</sup> “One contemporary scholar believes that the earliest written text, a short offering ritual or praise to Gesar, was composed by the 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204–1283). [A copy of this Karma Pakshi text was not able to be located for this article].” Jeff Watt, “Ling Gesar: A Preliminary Survey of the Art & Iconography of Ling Gesar – A Tibetan Culture Hero,” 177.

<sup>67</sup> Author’s interview with Alak Zenkar Rinpoche during the latter’s visit to Oxford in April 2014.

centuries, and there are some features of the text's content, which to this author at least, make such an early date unlikely. But the suggestion is certainly intriguing. If it were true, it would make this not only our oldest Gesar ritual text, but also the oldest textual attestation of the Gesar epic *per se*. It would also explain evidence in contemporary Tibet of a cultic association between Karma Pakshi and Gesar. This association is seen for example in the contemporary Gesar prayer-flag pictured below. In this flag we see Gesar depicted in the centre, with Karma Pakshi at the top-left corner, Padmasambhava at top-centre, and another unidentified Karmapa at the right.<sup>68</sup> Whether this flag represents a long-standing traditional association, or is a modern phenomenon (perhaps even directly connected to the recent emergence of this *bsang* text and its attribution by Alak Zenkar) is unclear.



PLATE 2, PLATE 3: A modern Gesar prayerflag from Eastern Tibet depicting Karma Pakshi at top left

Assuming that the Gesar epic already existed at the time of Karma Pakshi (which is already a big assumption to make, as on current evidence the epic

<sup>68</sup> Katia Buffetrile kindly sent me this prayer flag of Gesar that she purchased at Gcig-sgril in southern Golok. I also found the same flag for sale in Rebkong in 2012. Iconographically Karma Pakshi is immediately recognizable by his trademark goatee beard.

may only have developed substantially in the wake of (i.e., after) the Mongol invasions and settlements in Tibet in the 13th and 14th centuries.<sup>69</sup> But if that hypothesis was wrong and the epic was already well-developed during the life of Karma Pakshi, is not impossible that he would have had an interest in it. After all, Karma Pakshi spent his early formative years in precisely the region of northern Khams where the epic was – at least in later centuries – very strong. And his involvement with the Mongol court (among whom warrior cults were undoubtedly strong),<sup>70</sup> may have made a Tibetan – and moreover a Buddhist – warrior cult diplomatically relevant. But this, I feel, is grasping at straws. There are no other textual sources to link Karma Pakshi, even tangentially, with the figure of Gling Gesar. Also the attribution looks weak for a number of technical reasons. For one thing, Karma Pakshi would not have referred to himself with the title *grub chen*, which would only be used of him by others. For another, there is nothing in the text itself which either stylistically or philosophically suggests any particular affinity with Pakshi's other works.<sup>71</sup> And perhaps most tellingly of all, given what we know about the malleable transmission or the oral epic genre in Tibet, the high degree of alignment that one finds between this text's presentation of Gesar, his companions and his spirit-familiars, with what we know of the epic tradition in recent centuries, suggests – to this author at least – that this text cannot be as old as the attribution to Karma Pakshi suggests. Based on style alone, it could certainly be 17th century, and in parts could considerably earlier than that (possibly 15th century),<sup>72</sup> but to place it in the 13th century appears to be too much of a stretch.

Instead, what strikes this reader as a more likely (though not unproblematic) reading of *grub chen karma pa shes pa* is that the author of the colophon is asserting that the originator of the text (i.e., the one who had the vision of Gesar on which the text is based but not necessarily the author of the text itself), was one who “knew” (*shes*) Karma Pakshi in a visionary context: *grub chen karmapa shes pa*.

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<sup>69</sup> For a brief outline of my theory concerning the crystallization of the Gesar epic in Tibet only in the wake of the period of Mongol domination (which ended in the mid-14th century), see George FitzHerbert, “Gesar’s Familiars: Revisiting Shamanism as a Hermeneutic for Understanding the Structure and History of the Tibetan Gesar Epic.”

<sup>70</sup> Karma Pakshi was educated in the tradition of Kaḥ-tog, the Rnying-ma-pa monastery located south of Sde-dge.

<sup>71</sup> Neither Charles Manson, nor Matthew Kapstein were able to point to any such stylistic similarities when approached by the author.

<sup>72</sup> Prof. Samten Karmay, who kindly checked my translation of the text, expressed doubt about the attribution to Karma Pakshi, but suggested it could possibly be 15th century. Personal communication during one of Prof. Karmay’s visits to Oxford.

Interpreted in this way, a prime candidate for such a figure would be Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje (1628/41–1708), the 17th century *gter-ston* who was himself associated with three successive Karmapas (10th, 11th and 12th)<sup>73</sup> and whose enduring fame stems from his visionary encounter with Karma Pakshi, and the well-loved Karma Pakshi *sādhana* which came from it, known as the *Yongs dge'i zhal gzigs pak+shi bla sgrub*.<sup>74</sup>

Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje was himself born into a '*brog pa* ("highlander" or "nomad") community in the western Zal-mo-sgang, a region at the heart of Gesar-culture in Khams and close to Gling-tshang, which at that time had recently fallen under the ascendant power of the kingdom of Sde-dge. He entered monastic life at the Dzodzi (sp.?) monastery in nearby La-thog, and there received his first monastic name from the 4th Trungpa Rinpoche of the neighbouring Zur-mang gdan-sa-mthil monastery in Nang-chen (an important branch of the Pha-mo-gru legacy in this Gling-orientated part of Khams).<sup>75</sup> He was thus born and lived in the midst of Gesar-land, if we can call it that. Furthermore Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje's life and treasures epitomize the cusp between Bka'brgyud and Rnying-ma traditions which was a characteristic of many major lamas of that period, including for example Karma chags-med who was the primary guru of Rdzogs-sprul Padma rig-'dzin (mentioned above as the author of our oldest datable Gesar text, the TZNG). Karma chags-med and Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje also shared a very intimate mutual connection with the inspired and short-lived treasure-revealer Gnam-chos mi-'gyur rdo-rje (1645–67).<sup>76</sup> They were also likely both

<sup>73</sup> Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje is said to have identified the 11th Karmapa Ye-shes rdo-rje (1676–1702) on the basis of the previous Karmapa Chos-dbyings rdo-rje's instructions. He also confirmed the identity of the 12th Karmapa Byang-chub rdo-rje (1703–32). While Chos-dbyings rdo-rje was originally from Mgo-logs, his two successors were both born in Khams.

<sup>74</sup> It was Rob Mayer who pointed out this possibility, after reading an earlier version of this article.

<sup>75</sup> Yongs-dge's *rnam thars* are published in English translation in Je Tukyi Dorje and Surmang Tendzin Rinpoche, *Chariot of the Fortunate: The Life of the First Yongey Mingyur Dorje*.

<sup>76</sup> It was Karma Chags-med who championed and adopted Gnam-chos mi-'gyur rdo-rje and disseminated his revelations after his early death. And it was Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje who in some sense assumed the legacy of Gnam-chos mi-'gyur rdo-rje after his death as his own. Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje's biography (*Chariot of the Fortunate* see note above) cites Tshedbang Nor-bu, a great master of Kah-thog monastery, as having written that "Namchö Mingyur Dorje dissolved into this Lord Mingyur Dorje" (p. 15). The biographer goes on to state "I have heard that Drakpo Nuden Tsal [i.e., Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje] also declared this himself..." The biographer explains this by pointing out that Gnam-chos mi-'gyur rdo-rje had passed away prematurely before fulfilling his destiny of revealing earth treasures (*sa gter*) which he was due to do in his 23rd or 24th year. So it was following his death, in fulfilment of that destiny, that Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje began to "open the doors to earth treasure," as prophecied "by Longsal Nyingpo and others" (p.15).

connected to Bdud-'dul rdo-rje mentioned earlier in relation to the "conversion" in 1657, of the royal family of Gling-tshang to a Rnying-ma persuasion.

It is safe to say that the phenomenon in this period of a cross-over between Bka'brgyud and Rnying-ma traditions, as exemplified by the lives of these religious teachers, and by contemporaneous conversion of the Gling-tshang royals, was connected to the political context of the times. For these lamas were living in the wake of the Mongol lord Gushri Khan's (Bstan-'dzin chos-rgyal) fierce campaigns across the Tibetan world to assert the supremacy of the protestant Dge-lugs-pa order and establish the Fifth Dalai Lama as the ruler of a united Tibet (which was famously achieved in 1642). The primary victims of these campaigns were the various branches of the Bka'brgyud-pa which until then had maintained some kind of political dominance in various regions. In the wake of this new dispensation across the Tibetan cultural world, it was certainly expedient for local figures of authority with Bka'brgyud-pa lineages – whether lamas or local kings – to re-frame themselves in a Rnying-ma light, which was more acceptable to the new hegemon in Lhasa.

It would make historical sense for a Buddhist Gesar text to emerge at this historical juncture, celebrating Gesar as a symbol which could be used to promote the unity of the various religious schools while the elites negotiated their re-invention as Rnying-ma-pas in light of the new political dispensation.<sup>77</sup> It is interesting to note also what this text does not include: there is no reference in it to Hor, or to Gesar as the vanquisher of Hor. This might suggest something more about its patronage: the *rgyu sbyor yon bdag* "generous beneficiary" alluded to at the start of the supplication on fol. 19. Perhaps this patron was a Mongol lord seeking to rein in or flatter the local diversity of religious alignment? And perhaps our author felt that Gesar was an appropriate vehicle through which to harness and sanctify unifying expressions of local identity (in a traditionally unruly region), and bring with them the sympathies and pliancy of the people. The presence of Gushri Khan's grandson, Mkha'-'gro blo-bzang bstan-skyong in Rdza-chu-ka during just the period when Yongs-dge was also active in the area, might offer some grounds for further speculation in this regard. For Mkha'-'gro blo-bzang bstan-skyong was a Mongol prince renowned for his non-sectarianism, and whose rapprochement with the Karma Bka'brgyud-pa in particular (who were generally anathema to the family of Gushri Khan) so outraged his staunchly Dge-lugs-pa kinsmen in

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<sup>77</sup> From this time the Rdzong-'go monastery attached to the royal palace of the Gling chiefs at Gu-zi (*dgu-zi?*) south of 'Dan-khog, was aligned with the Rnying-ma school. And it was here, in the early 20th century that the heavily Padmasambhava-orientated LX edition of the Gesar epic was composed, by its then *mkhan-po* 'Gyur-med thub-bstan 'jam-dbyangs grags-pa.

<sup>78</sup> Karmay (trans.), *The Illustrious Play*, 5.

Kokonor, that in 1673 he was “surrounded in Rdza-chu-ka by an expeditionary force led mostly by members of his own family, and murdered” for his apostasy.<sup>78</sup> These however must remain circumstantial speculations, as there is no mention of either Gesar or Mkha’-’gro blo-bzang bstan-skyong in either of the anecdotal biographies of Yongs-dge (by Rje thugs-kyi-rdo-rje and by Zur-mang Bstan’dzin rin-po-che respectively).<sup>79</sup>

The provisional attribution of this text to Yongs-dge mi-’gyur rdo-rje is therefore far from certain, but it seems a fair interpretation of the *grub chen karmapa shes pa* found in the text’s colophon. It would also fit in terms of region (the Sde-dge-Gling-tshang region), in terms of period (when the *ris-med yogi* Buddhist cult of Gesar was first becoming apparent and entextualised), and in terms of orientation (the combination of Bka’bryud and Rnying-ma sensibilities). Fieldwork in the region could well clarify the colophon’s as yet unidentified reference to the place-name ’Dam-stod kha-shi-gong. This attribution to Yongs-dge is certainly also fitting in terms of this manuscript’s specific provenance, as the text was found in the library of Namkha Drime Rinpoche, head of the *ri-pa yogi* lineage which to this day is on the cusp of Rnying-ma and Bka-bryud traditions. Namkha Drime himself was recognized as an incarnation of Yongs-dge mi-’gyur rdo-rje by the son and heir of the famed Mahāmudrā/Rdzogs-chen ’ja’-lus-pa Śākya Shrī.

If the attribution to Yongs-dge Mi-’gyur rdo-rje is correct, and the text indeed dates to the late 17th century, this would still make it the oldest textual attestation to the Buddhist ritual cult of Gesar in Tibet, older than all the texts found in the

<sup>79</sup> Je Tukyi Dorje and Surmang Tendzin Rinpoche, *Chariot of the Fortunate: The Life of the First Yongey Mingyur Dorje*. These biographies depict Yongs-dge mi-’gyur rdo rje as a highly eccentric figure, in the style of “crazy *yogin*.” He lived as a layman cattle-herder (*brog-pa*), spending much of his time in the upper reaches of the Rdza river (Rdza-stod). His renown was primarily as a healer of humans, cattle and horses. However, he remained well-connected throughout his long life, his prestige bolstered by close connection with the 11th Karmapa Yes-shes rdo-rje (1676–1702). There is no mention of the Mongol prince Mkha’-’gro blo-bzang bstan-skyong in his biographies. However we do hear that at some point (the biographies are not chronological) his services as a healer were called upon when the “*taiji* (Mongolian lord) of ri-’od” became ill and was close to death. It is possible that this is a reference to Mkha’-’gro blo-bzang bstan-skyong. Je Tukyi Dorje and Surmang Tendzin Rinpoche, *Chariot of the Fortunate*, 64, 144).

<sup>80</sup> The oldest Gesar ritual texts included in the *Gling ge sar sgrub skor* collection compiled by Khams-sprul Rinpoche (the collection analysed by Gregory Forgues in his work), are attributed to Lha-rigs bde-chen ye-shes rol-pa-rtsal, who seems to be considered the font of the Gesar Rdzogs-chen alignment. The dates of Lha-rigs are uncertain. Forgues offers three possible dates for his Gesar texts: 1748/9, 1808/9 and 1868/9 (Gregory Forgues, *Materials for the Study of Gesar Practices*: 283–84). Even assuming the earliest of these is correct, a text by Yongs-dge mi-’gyur rdo rje would be considerably earlier.

*Gling ge sar sgrub skor* (LGGK) compilation.<sup>80</sup> However, unlike the attribution to Karma Pakshi, it would not push that boundary back very far.

If the suggestion is correct,<sup>81</sup> then this text might be considered part of the wider trend in mid-late 17th century Khams, amid tumultuous political events, in which Gesar was adopted (perhaps partly in deference to the ascendance of the kingdom of Sde-dge) as an object of propitiation by various tantric *yogis* who spanned what at that time was a fluid dynamic between the Bka'-brgyud and Rnying-ma traditions.

However, it is also worth remembering that this text is likely of a composite nature. Parts of it may be considerably older than this, and other parts considerably newer, as it is likely that the copying process may also have involved additions. Indeed, the sections added in *rgyugs* cursive script, for example, may well be very recent additions.<sup>82</sup>

But leaving aside all these historical claims about this text, what is most edifying about it is the richness with which it presents the figure of Gesar. It presents a totalizing heroism that spans clanic, shamanistic, royal, Buddhist and tantric registers. It thus constitutes a distilled essence of Gesar's multifaceted heroism as a Tibetan culture-hero. A full translation of the text is now presented below, not so much as a historical document, but as a text which stands on its own as a particularly good example of a praise to the epic hero.

## STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

- Homage and Evoking the Subtle Body (Iconography: Seated) (folios 1–5)
- Prayer for Attainment and Protection (folios 5–7)
- Calling the Deity (Iconography: Mounted) (folios 7–15)  
The Hero

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<sup>81</sup> At the time of publication, I have not been able to explore the life of Yongs-dge mi-'gyur rdo-rje in sufficient depth to be able to ascertain with confidence that the remaining pieces of the puzzle fit. For example, what can be made of the place-name in the colophon? Does it correspond with somewhere in Yongs-dge's life? And what do we know about Yongs-dge's patrons? What Mongol lords may have patronized him?

<sup>82</sup> Namkha Drimed has a personal scribe at Phuntsokling in Orissa who transcribes his visions and divination prognostications. I met this scribe when I visited Phuntsokling in 2006, when Namkha Drime himself was away. Unfortunately, I have not had contact with him since this text was made available to me. It is perfectly possible that parts of this text could have been added in modern times either by Namkha Drimed himself, or by his scribe. In this regard see also note 95 and 112 below.



The Horse, Saddle and Tack

The entourage:

Spirit Birth Companions

Kinsmen

Nine *wer-ma* and nine *dgra-bla*

- Prayer of Purification and Offering (folios 15–19)
- Supplication for Success of the Clan (folios 19–21)
- Colophon (folio 21)

### Full Translation<sup>83</sup>

[Title Fol. 1]:

*The Manner in which to Make Smoke Offering to Sengchen Norbu Dondrub*<sup>84</sup>

### [Calling the Deity and Evoking the Subtle Body]

[2] From the space-palace of the *dharmakāya*,  
 From the spontaneity-palace of Clear Light,  
 Enlightened emanation-body of all the refuge-Buddhas,  
 Changeless body, body of Jamphel,  
 Unceasing speech, speech of Thugjechenpo,  
 Mind without delusion, mind of Chanadorje,  
 Incarnation of the Rigsum Gonpo,  
 Mind-manifestation of the Five Transcendent Buddha Families,  
 Buddha who has arrived at the tenth *bhūmi*,  
 Destined god of the black-headed Tibetans, (*dbu nag bod kyi lha skal*),  
 Excellent in skilful means for the benefit of beings.  
 A *single refuge* for all living beings,  
 One who dispels the darkness of the world!  
 O Great Lion Jewel, Dondrub,  
 Invited with fragrant smoke, [3] please approach!

<sup>83</sup> For the sake of readability, phonetic renderings of names have been used, with Wylie spellings given in brackets or in the footnotes, where they are of interest. The full transcription of the Tibetan text is found after the translation.

<sup>84</sup> *Seng chen nor bu don 'grub la gsang* [sic] *mchod 'bul tshul lags so*. The spelling *gsang* (“secret”) *mchod* rather than *bsang mchod*, is also used in the title of an anonymous Bonpo Gekhod *bsang* ritual text analysed by Karmay, “The Local Deities and the Juniper Tree: a Ritual for Purification (*bsang*).” So this anomalous spelling in the title may be taken as a convention.

You, Great Lion Jewel Subduer of Enemies,  
On the 20,000, the 900,000 hairs of your head,  
As a sign of the assembling of the *mamo* and *khandro*,  
Dwell 20,000, sit 900,000 rainbows.  
Above the measureless conch-abode of your head,  
As a sign of the assembling of the *ma* and *khandro*.  
Sit fifty blazing blood-drinkers.  
With a sidelong gaze from the edges of wrathful eyes,  
A fierce gaze for the subduing of Rudra.  
On your thirty white teeth,  
As signs of your steadfast assistance,  
[obscure] Grow thirty naturally-born relics,  
[obscure] Reside sixty *skyes 'dzum*.

At the Enjoyment *cakra* of the throat,  
As sign of the spontaneous realization of *dharmakāya*,  
[4] Dwell the *dharmakāya* of the Five Buddhas.

At the Dharma *cakra* of the heart,  
As sign of realization of the *mudrā* of emptiness,  
Abides the sixth Buddha, Dorje Changchen (Vajradhara).<sup>85</sup>

Residing upon the right shoulder,  
As sign of the attainment of wisdom,  
Sits the noble Buddha Jamphel (Mañjuśrī).

Residing upon the left shoulder,  
As sign of the attainment of magical power,  
Sits the lord of magical power, Chanadorje (Vajrapāṇi).

Holding in the right hand,  
As sign of bringing the Three Realms under control,  
A wish-fulfilling jewel.

And in the left,  
As sign of the total defeat of the Four Enemies,  
An eternal turning *yungdrung*.

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<sup>85</sup> Here the 6th means the Five Transcendent Buddha Families plus one hence six.

At the Emanation *cakra* of the navel,  
As sign of the total defeat of demon-kind,  
Reside the nine emanated gods of Kyedor (Hevajra).<sup>86</sup>

[5] Upon the right knee,  
As sign of being completely endowed with the Ten Virtues,  
Sits Buddha Śākyamuni,  
Upon the left knee,  
As sign of being completely endowed with magical power,  
Sits *bon-ku* Tonpa Shenrab.<sup>87</sup>

At the wind *cakra* of the soles of the feet,  
As sign of turning the Three Realms to the *dharmā*,  
An eternal white “*a chung*.”<sup>88</sup>

**[Purification Prayer for Attainment and Protection]**

*Kye!*

May the entire divine entourage of the  
Great Lion of the World, Subduer of Enemies, be purified! [Buddha]  
Assembled speech, purify all assembled dharmas! [Dharma]  
Assembled mind, purify the assembled community! [Sangha]

[With] Good qualities, purify the fifty proficiencies in magic.  
[With] Meritorious deeds, purify fiery rages.  
Purify the master of the sacred word, *sūtra* and *mantra*!  
Purify the master of textual and oral transmissions!  
Purify the master of wisdom and skillful means!

For the spontaneous achievement of *dharmakāya* (*chos sku*),  
[6] Purify the divine hosts of Nangwathaye (Amitābha).

For the spontaneous achievement of *sambhogakāya* (*longs sku*),

<sup>86</sup> *Skyes rdor* (sic) *sprul pa'i lha dgu bzugs: kye dor*: Hevajra in whose mandala there are nine divinities.

<sup>87</sup> *Bon sku* is a Bon equivalent of the Buddhist *chos sku/ dharmakāya*, body of Ultimate Reality. However, in Bon tradition Ston-pa Gshen-rab is considered the *sprul sku* (like Padmasambhava) rather than *bon sku*. This may suggest the author of the text is not particularly well-acquainted with Bon systems.

<sup>88</sup> This is curious, having “*a chung*” standing for an “*a*” representing primordial purity.

Purify the divine hosts of Thugjechenpo (Avalokiteśvara).

For the spontaneous achievement of *nirmāṇakāya* (*sprul sku*),  
Purify the divine hosts of Padmajungpa (Padmasambhava).

For the attainment of wisdom,  
Purify the divine hosts of Noble Jamphel (Mañjuśrī).  
For bringing the Three Realms under dominion,  
Purify the divine hosts of Mighty Padma.

To make spiritual attainments fall like rain,  
Purify the divine hosts of Dorjephagmo (Vajravārāhī).

For overcoming negative influences and obstacles,  
Purify the divine hosts of the *yi-dam* and *maṅḍala*.

For cleansing the three poisons and disease,  
Purify the divine hosts of the Medicine Buddha.

So that obstacles to life do not arise,  
Purify the divine hosts of Tshepagme (Amitāyus).

For overcoming the king of male obstructing spirits,  
Purify the divine hosts of the Wrathful Guru.<sup>89</sup>

For overcoming Za (*gza'*) (Rāhu) and the elemental sprites (*'byung po*),  
Purify the divine hosts of Chanadorje (Vajrapāṇi).

For overcoming the Lord of Death Shinje (Yama),  
Purify the divine hosts of Dorje Jigche (Vajrabhairava- form of Yamāntaka).

For overcoming the harmful influence of *tsen* (*btsan*),  
[7] Purify the divine hosts of Yaksha Me-dbal.<sup>90</sup>

For overcoming the harmful influence of *lu* (*klu*),

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<sup>89</sup> *Gu ru drag po*: a wrathful *sambhogakāya* form of Guru Padma depicted with a vajra and scorpion.

<sup>90</sup> This looks like the name of a Bon divinity, since the *dbal* are an important class of divinities in Bon, whose chief is Ge-khod. However, Yaksha Me-dbal has not been identified.

Purify the divine hosts of the Blazing Garuda (*khyung chen 'bar ba*)

For overcoming the Four Enemies of the Four Directions,  
Purify the divine hosts of the five classes of *khandro*.

To gain mastery over the Eight Parkha trigrams,  
Purify the divine hosts of Jamphel (Mañjuśrī) and the Five Buddha Families.  
That the pollution of vow-violation be completely cleansed,  
Purify the hosts of Mewa Tsegpa (Rme-ba brtsegs-pa) (Bhurkuṃkūta).<sup>91</sup>

For the protection of the teachings of the Buddha,  
Purify the divine hosts of the Wisdom Deities.

In order to utterly annihilate bitter enemies,  
Purify the divine hosts of Palden Lhamo (Śrīdevī).

So spiritual attainments and the *yang* (*g.yang*) of Ma (*rma*) should fall like rain,  
Purify the divine hosts of Achi Chodron (A phyi chos sgron)!<sup>92</sup>

That food and wealth may be abundantly enjoyed,  
Purify the divine hosts of Dzambhalha.  
In order that disturbances and obstacles be cleared away,

<sup>91</sup> A wrathful form of Vajrapāṇi. Typically a Nyingma wrathful-protector figure.

<sup>92</sup> This appears to be a reference to the 11th century tantric adept and then protectress A-phyi Chos-kyi sgrol-ma, who is a principal protector of the Bri-gung Bka'-brgyud tradition, though Samten Karmay notes that "it is strange why she should here be connected with the Rma region." (However Daniel Berounský suggests an alternative explanation. He writes "I am inclined to consider *rma* in this case to mean the opposite of *g.yang*; something like "loss" or "decline", thus creating a compound meaning something like "a measure of well-being". Personal correspondence.) From Himalayan Art Resources (HAR) website: Achi Chokyi Drolma was "Born in the 11th century in Central Tibet, the Lady (achi) Chokyi Drolma was always preoccupied with spiritual practice. Believing that great things would come from her offspring and future generations she sought out and married a good man. She had four sons each of whom became a great ascetic or scholar. As a great Tantric practitioner herself and a great teacher in her own right, in a large cave before her many students, she once conducted a sacramental feast transforming a human corpse into a sacred offering. At that time she vowed to be a protector of Buddhism and composed a liturgy for invoking herself as a protector deity. Upon completion of the verses, appearing on the back of a blue horse she flew into the air and departed for a distant Buddhist heaven. Later, her great-grandson Jigten Sumgon (1143–1217), the founder of a large and influential tradition of Buddhism, Drigung Kagyu, also composed a liturgy for his famous great-grandmother and established her as a principal religious protector of the tradition." Himalayan Art Resources, [www.himalayanart.org](http://www.himalayanart.org), accessed Nov. 2016.

Purify the armies of the ocean of Oath-bound Protectors.

For the fulfillment of all hopes and desires,  
Purify the divine hosts of Sengchen Kyebu.

**[Calling the Deity: Iconography: Mounted]**

*Kye!*

Sengchen Kyebu Dondrup,  
Crying *Gi* and *bSwa*, we call you.  
[8] To attract your attention [we wave] arrows with silk tassles.

**[Hero]**

Emanation of the Rigsum Gonpo,  
Lord of Ling, King Gesar!  
Your upper body, resplendent in the realm of *lha* (*lha*),  
Surrounded by myriads of *lha* armies.  
Your middle resplendent in the realm of *nyen* (*gnyen*),  
Surrounded by myriads of *nyen* armies.  
Your lower body resplendent in the realm of *lu* (*klu*),  
Surrounded by myriads of *lu* armies.  
Body crowded with spirit entourages,  
Mind radiant with victory,  
Speech resounding with *Gi* and *bSwa*,  
[obscure: small soles of feet bearing six *dil*],<sup>93</sup>  
Adorned with the Seven Precious Ornaments,<sup>94</sup>  
The great *werma* weapons and armour (*wer-ma zog go chen*):  
On the head, the white helmet of the sun,  
On the body, the white armour of the stars,  
Carrying the moon shield on your back.  
In the right hand, a white cane whip,  
[9] In the left, a long white spear adorned with silk.

<sup>93</sup> A tentative rendering of *sdil zhabs la mthil chung sdil drug gsol*.

<sup>94</sup> *Rin chen sna bdun*. Usually these are the Seven Accoutrements of the Universal Monarch (*cakravartin*), the symbol of enlightenment in tantric Buddhism. The seven accoutrements are: wheel, jewel, queen, elephant, minister, horse, and general. However, since the list immediately following, called the *werma zog go chen* are also seven, this looks like a Gesaric adaptation of the “seven ornaments” to the mounted Tibetan warrior: helmet, armour, shield, whip, spear, quiver and sheath (counted as one) and sword.

Tigerskin quiver on the right, leopardskin sheath on the left.<sup>95</sup>  
 With [the sword] Tabpa Lenmo attached at the side.

You, Sengchen Norbu Drandul,  
 Body covered in white armour,  
 Are like a gateless iron fortress at the juncture of valleys.  
 With head covered by a white helmet,  
 Like a snow-topped mountain blocking the path.  
 With antelope horns planted atop,  
 Like the great Garuḍa (*khyung*) coming [to clear] obstacles.  
 With a silk pennant shining in the sky like a rainbow.  
 And the lord of shields on [your] back,  
 Like a great king, surrounded by his entourage.  
 With the three weapons at your waist,  
 [obscure] Attached to fish-scale armour,  
 [obscure] Like a braided whip handle.<sup>96</sup>

Expansive like the radiant pelts of tigers and leopards,  
 With *pho-lha* on the right and *dgra-lha* (sic.) on the left,  
 With *wer-ma* [10] on the right, and *cang-se* on the left,  
 With *za-lha* on the right and *zog-dor* on the left.<sup>97</sup>

### [Horse]

Riding white-muzzled tawny Kyangbu Nakar (*rkyang-bu sna-dkar*) as mount,  
 An emanation of Nangwathaye (Amitābha),

<sup>95</sup> *Stag ral g.yas la gzigs shub g.yon*. Note that this phrase almost identical to the very common formula in the (edited) recitations of the contemporary bard Grags-pa when invoking deities: *stag dong g.yas la gzig shub g.yon*. Could this be a recent/ contemporary scribal insertion?

<sup>96</sup> Two obscure lines: *skar sham nya la bcing ba'i dus// lcag gi zog ba dgu 'dril 'dra//*. Thanks to Charles Ramble for helping make an attempt at interpreting them. Reading *dkar sham* for *skar sham* we can get “pure fish,” or “shining fish.” The weapons attached to such “fish,” could possibly be a reference to the Tibetans’ “fish-scale” armour so praised by the Arabs. If for *zog ba* we read *dzog pa*, it could be talking about a braided whip handle.

<sup>97</sup> *Za lha* possibly “food god,” and *zog dor* probably a variant spelling of *zo dor*, the term still used for mountain deities (*gzhi bdag* or *yul lha*) in parts of contemporary Mgo-log (I came across it in use in the southern Mgo-log region between Gser-rta and Dga'-bde). This spelling suggests an etymology related to merchandise. The presentation of these four – *pho la*, *dgra lha*, *za lha* and *zog dor* looks here to be a variant of the scheme enshrined in some Buddhist texts as the “deities of leadership” or “deities of the head” usually schematized as five in number: *'go ba'i lha lnga*. These are the personal protective spirits for success in competition and conflict. Today in Khams, when a man makes a good shot with his gun during the galloping horse-runs popular at summer festivals, people often cry “*pho lha gsol, dgra lha gsol, yul lha gsol!*” in appreciation.

White-muzzled tawny Kyangbu Nakar, Protector of Beings!  
 White muzzle raised aloft, [sign that] sky (*gnam*) enemies will be subdued,  
 Red bloodshot eyes, [sign that] *tse*n (*btsan*) enemies will be subdued,  
 Mouth [open], teeth [bared], [sign that] wind (*rlung*) enemies will be subdued,  
 Mighty shoulders thrusting, sign that various enemies will be subdued.  
 Right ear of *kham-pa* conch shell,  
 Left ear of *kham-pa* silver,  
 Hair of his body shining, beautiful as a rainbow,  
 Four legs neatly arrayed and pliant,  
 [obscure] Like four lords, with helmets in combat,<sup>98</sup>  
 [obscure] *ske gyin* *bir chen phu ring 'dra*,  
 [obscure] Like a divination mirror wiped clean,<sup>99</sup>  
 [obscure] Ears spotted like clouds [spotted] by vultures,<sup>100</sup>  
 Eyes like the naked stars [seen from] the mountain pass.  
 On every hair of the head, an *Om*,  
 On every hair of the midriff, an *Aḥ*,  
 At the base of every hair, a *Hūm*.

[added in cursive:

As a sign that the Four Lords will subdue the four places,  
 As a sign of mind realizing emptiness,  
 As a sign of body achieving magical emanations.]  
 [11] Emanation of the body, speech and mind,  
 Purify the Protector of Beings, Kyangbu Nakar!

### [Saddle and Tack]

As for the completely perfect saddle and tack,  
 The small saddle of clear light Selwa'i Öden (*gsal ba'i 'od ldan*),  
 [obscure] It's saddle "egg" (*sga sgong* saddle-top?) with golden *patra* design,<sup>101</sup>  
 The front part made of precious gold,  
 Surrounded by blessings of Śākyamuni.  
 Purify the divine hosts of Śākyamuni!  
 The rear part made of *ba-le* conch shell,<sup>102</sup>  
 Surrounded by blessings of Thukjechenpo (Mahākāruṅikā).

<sup>98</sup> *Rje bzhi rmog phor brgol [rgol] ba 'dra*.

<sup>99</sup> *Spra ba me long phyis pa 'dra*, reading *spra ba* as *pra*.

<sup>100</sup> *Rna ba rgod kyis thig sprin 'dra*.

<sup>101</sup> *Sga sgong gser gyi pa dra [tra] la*. The "patra" design is one found evoked in several places in the *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed*. For example, it is used of Gesar's bow-sheath in a song by his girlfriend Mgar-bza' at HLYG II, 596.

<sup>102</sup> On *ba le dung*: see D. L. Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon: excerpts from the gZi-brjid*, 51.



Purify the divine hosts of Thukjechenpo!  
 The right and left [saddle-flanks] made of red sandalwood,  
 Surrounded by blessings of Tshepakme (Amitāyus).  
 Fore-saddle/ upper-saddle/ (*chibs gong*) of red-brown sardonyx,  
 Surrounded by blessings of Chanadorje (Vajrapāṇi).  
 Back saddle/ under-saddle (*chibs rnying*) of red copper.  
 Saddle girth of variegated agate (*gzi*).  
 Buckles of unassailable conchshell.  
 Great stirrups of *kham-pa* silver,  
 A long blue turquoise halter (*mthur*).  
 A golden bridle of the unchanging sun.  
 [12] Reins (*srab mda'*) adorned with myriad turquoise silks.  
 Woolen saddle-blanket radiating precious light,<sup>103</sup>  
 And covered with brocade.  
 Purify this completely perfect saddle and tack.  
 Surrounded by blessings of the Five Buddha Families,  
 Purify the Great Lion, man and horse both!  
 Accept this offering of purifying ambrosia!

### [Invoking the Entourage]

#### [Spirit Birth Companions]<sup>104</sup>

As for the Elder Brother Dungchuyng Karpo (*phu bo dung khyung dkar po*),<sup>105</sup>  
 With a human body and the head of a *khyung*,

<sup>103</sup> *Bal stan rin chen 'od 'phro la*. Alternatively: “depicting Rin-chen 'od-spro,” one of the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, but in this context the translation given here seems more appropriate.

<sup>104</sup> Here begins the list of birth companions born with the hero, who are found with slight variants across versions of the epic. Here we have quite elaborate visual depictions of the older and younger brothers – the *khyung* and the snake respectively. A fuller list of these birth companions is found on folio 16 below. The schematisation found here, whereby the two birth brothers, elder and younger, are combined with the birth “father” *gnyen* (sic.) Gerdzo to make the trio fit neatly with the three-tiered scheme of the *lha, klu* and *gnyan*, is also found in what is perhaps 'Ju Mi-pham's most influential Gesar ritual text: the *Gsol mchod phrin las myur 'grub* also known as the *Gsol lo chen mo* (SLCM). There, the same three-tier schematisation is applied to the birth companions, though without the visual elaboration of the figures found here. (SCPG:137–38) Clearly the birth companions encompass a kind of vertical “totality,” with the *khyung* above and the snake below, usually arch-enemies, united in their nurturing of the hero. For more on Gesar's spirit companions as “familiars” see George FitzHerbert, “Gesar's Familiars: Revisiting Shamanism as a Hermeneutic for Understanding the structure and history of the Tibetan Gesar Epic.”

<sup>105</sup> “Elder Brother Conch-White *khyung/garuḍa*.” The name of the elder brother is quite stable. The LX, Sichuan *thangka* series; and Mi-pham all use the same spelling as found here. The transcribers of Grags-pa's recitations opted for the less convincing spelling *dung skyong dkar po*.

*Khyung's* head with a turquoise mane,<sup>106</sup>  
On the body, conch-white armour glinting (*snyigs se snyig*),  
On the head, conch-white helmet [with pennants] flapping (*ldems se ldem*).<sup>107</sup>  
Riding a conch-white horse as mount,  
With silk-adorned arrows on the right, and silk-adorned spear on the left.  
[inserted in cursive font]:  
As retinue, myriad armies of *lha* (*lha*).

As for the Great *nyen* Royal Body-God (*sku lha*) Gerdzo  
With a human body and the head of a snow-lion,  
Lion's head with a turquoise mane,  
On the body golden armour glinting (*snyegs se snyeg*),  
On the head a golden helmet [with pennants] flapping (*ldems se ldem*).  
Riding a golden horse as mount,  
With silk-adorned arrows on the right, and silk-adorned spear on the left.]  
As retinue, myriad armies of *nyen* (*gnyan*).

As for the Younger Brother, Ludrul Öchen (*klu sbrul 'od chen*),<sup>108</sup>  
With a human body and the head of a snake,  
Head of a snake with a green medicinal (*sman*) tongue.  
On the body, turquoise armour glinting (*snyigs se snyig*),  
Riding a blue “water” horse (*chu rta*) as mount,  
Silk-adorned arrow on the right, [13] silk-adorned spear on the left,  
As retinue, myriad armies of *lu* (*klu*).

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<sup>106</sup> Note the similarity between this and the *sgra bla* called upon by Gshen-rab in the *Gzi brjid* (mentioned above), from the liminality between the *ye* and *ngam*, between “being and not being” and so on. There, the first *sgra-bla* called upon is also a *khyung* with a turquoise mane. See Adriano Clemente, *The sGra bla, Gods of the Ancestors of Gshen-Rab Mi-Bo; According to the sGra bla go bsang from the gZi brjid*.

<sup>107</sup> These kinds of gestural “-style” phrases are used impressionistically and are very characteristic of recitations of the Gesar epic, as well as in Bon mythic back-story (*smrang*) texts. *Ldems se ldem* generally connotes “flexibility” (see R. A. Stein, *L'Épopée Tibétaine de Gesar dans sa Version Lamaïque de Ling*, 397). Here however it is used of helmet. The suggestion is likely of the pennants protruding from the helmet fluttering in the wind. Such phrases should not be taken to have semantic weight, but are rather “gestural.”

<sup>108</sup> Also known in Gesar texts as *Klu-sbrul 'od-chung* (in LX); *Klu-sprul thod-dkar* (in the Sichuan Musuem *thangka* series published in Zhang Changhong, ed., *From the Treasury of Tibetan Pictorial Art: Painted Scrolls of the Life of Gesar*); and *Klu-sgrub 'od-chung* (in Grags pa's edited transcriptions).

May they be purified together with the retinues of *lha*, *lu* and *nyen*!  
Approach! Accept this offering of purification!

**[Kinsmen]**

As for the commander (*khri dpon*)<sup>109</sup> Gyatsa Zhälkar:  
His complexion white, the colour of the moon,  
His lofty eyes, as if adorned by stars,  
His teeth white as if made of conch,  
On his body, a white riding-cloak (*sher ber dkar po*),  
On his head, the white turban of kings,  
Surmounted by a white bird-feather crest.  
Tigerskin quiver on the right, leopardskin sheath on the left.  
[obscure] Holding a white cloud of *a-tsha* in the hand,  
Riding Gyaja Sokar (*rgya bya sog dkar*) as his mount.<sup>110</sup>

As for the Younger Brother Rangtsha Marleb (*nu bo rang tsha dmar leb*),<sup>111</sup>  
Complexion of white and red,  
Wearing red and brown brocade,  
Wearing a golden yellow helmet,

<sup>109</sup> As an administrative title, *khri dpon* (“myriarch”) along with *stong dpon*, is known from the period of the Tibetan Empire, or at least the period immediately following its demise. The term is found for example in PT1089 and PT 1297 (OTDO). It was also the title of the chiefs of the Thirteen *khri skor* established during the Sakya/Yuan period. Byang-chub rgyal-mtshan, for example, became *khri dpon* of Phag-mo-gru in the year 1322.

<sup>110</sup> A “mongolian white.” Rgya-tsha’s horse in the *Hor gling g.yul ’gyed* is called *rma bya* (“peacock”) not *rgya bya* (“pheasant”).

<sup>111</sup> Gesar’s younger half-brother in the epic who dies during a raid on Hor. In *Hor gling g.yul ’gyed* (HLYG), the thirteen year old Rong-tsha dmar-leb sets off to attack Hor. In his song to the Hor warriors he vows to avenge the deaths of Gling heroes and soldiers. He says that his father, *rgyal sras* Seng-blon, had three wives from Rgya (China), ’Gag and Rong. The first of these bore Rgya-tsha, the second Gesar, and the third Rong-tsha. Rong-tsha is later lasso-ed by three Shan-pa fighters of Hor during a raid. Although he fights free of two of them, Hor reinforcements then arrive, including Shan-pa Rme-ru-rtse himself, who stabs Rong-tsha to death. Rong-tsha dmar-leb is also mentioned in the Lingsang Xylograph (LX), when Rgya-tsha refers to him as his brother. Karmay (see his *The Arrow and the Spindle*, 491) has Rong-tsha Dmar-leb as a son of Khro-thung, and Rong-tsha skar-rgyan as the son of Seng-blon. Karmay credits this scheme to the *’Khrungs skor*, 5 (a Kansu edition of the second volume of the Lingsang Xylograph). However, I do not find this genealogy in any other editions of this text. “Rong tsha” means “nephew” or “grandson” of *rong*,” and is often found as epithet of various Gling kinsmen, in particular Spyi-dpon (Spyi-dpon Rong-tsha khra-rgan). In eastern Tibetan dialect *rong* means valley, and *rong pa* denotes “valley-dweller” or “farmer.” So “Rong-tsha” denotes “kinsman (lit. nephew or grandson) of the valley-folk.” The spelling here “rang” is unusual.

Surmounted with a vulture-feather crest.

[14] Tigerskin quiver on the right, leopardskin sheath on the left.<sup>112</sup>

Holding spear adorned with white silk in his hand,

Riding Drochung Thöcha (*gro chung thod skya*) as his mount.

Gesar and his brothers, three together,

Surrounded by Thirty Warriors (*dpa 'this*),

Approach! Accept this offering of purifying ambrosia!

May bitter enemies be cut off at the root!

### [Nine Werma and Nine Drala]

As for the armies of magical *werma*,

The “sky” *werma* (*a sngon wer-ma*), riding a dragon,

The “obstruction” *werma* (*bar chad wer-ma*) riding an eagle,

The “white snow” *werma* (*gangs dkar wer-ma*) riding a snow-lion,

The “perfected nature” *werma* (*ngang rdzogs ber ma*) riding a vulture,

The “rakta” blood *werma* (*khrag g.yas wer-ma*) riding a wild yak,

The “red and black” *werma* (*nag dmar wer-ma*) riding a wild ass,

The “black grove” *werma* (*nag tshal wer-ma*) riding a tiger,

The “river” *werma* (*chu bo wer-ma*) riding a fish,

The “earth” *werma* (*sa gzhi wer-ma*) riding a snake,<sup>113</sup>

Armies of the great magical *werma*, [15]

Approach! Accept this smoke offering and these offerings of barley and butter!

Purify the *drala* of the great magical *werma* (*mthu chen wer me'i dgra-bla*).

On the upper part of the face of the Red Mountain,

[obscure] On the *skyab zhab* of the *bang zhu* of the Red Mountain<sup>114</sup>

Is the *drala* (*dgra lha*) Nyentak Marpo,

A [fierce] red man with locks matted with red blood,

With a coral-red horse with a metal face,

And eight *drala* (*dgra lha*) brothers around him,

The magical *drong*, yak, and so on.

Surrounded by a myriad army of *drala* (*dgra lha*).

Approach! Accept this purifying smoke and these offerings!

<sup>112</sup> See note above. Possibly a recent scribal inclusion.

<sup>113</sup> This list of nine classes of “magical *werma*” is not one encountered elsewhere. But in common with other presentations (such as the elaborate one in LX II), the *werma* are described in association with different wild animals.

<sup>114</sup> [Obscure] *ri dmar bang zhu 'i skyab zhab na*.

**[Prayer of Purification and Offering]**

Great Lion Jewel, Subduer of Enemies,  
 And your entirely complete spirit entourage,  
 Host of Gesar, King of Armies (*dmag gi rgyal po*),  
 To you and your entourage without exception,  
 These offering materials are presented:  
 Ambrosia<sup>115</sup> of the six good medicinal qualities,<sup>116</sup>  
*mda'*, *mkhar* (fern), *shug* (juniper), *sel bu*,  
 Yak, sheep, goats and all animals which crawl,  
 [16] The “three white offerings”,  
 The “three sweet offerings”,<sup>117</sup>  
 Tea and *chang*.  
 Look kindly (*spyang gzigs*) upon this butter and barley flour (*phye mar*),  
 The best parts of the food!  
 May these ambrosiac offerings please your senses!

Bless and purify the root lamas of the Kagyu lineage,<sup>118</sup>  
 Purify the hosts of the divine *vidam*, source of all spiritual attainment!  
 Purify the *pawo* and *khandro* who clear away all obstructions!  
 Purify the Guardians and Protectors [with whom we] achieve all good deeds.  
 Purify Sengchen Norbu Drandul.  
 Purify Elder Brother Dungchuyng Karpo.  
 Purify Younger Brother Ludrul Öchen.  
 Purify Sister Thigle Ötso.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>115</sup> *Bzang drug sman sna bdud rtsi can*. In the Ge-khod purification texts analysed by Karmay (“The Local Deities and the Juniper Tree: a Ritual for Purification (*bsang*)”), the medicinal substances used in the *bsang* purification rite are the product of the goddess Gnam-phyi gung-rgyal (cognate, in Karmay’s suggestion, with the Ma-ne-ne Gong-sman-rgyal-mo etc of Gesar) spreading her spittle of ambrosia (*bdud rtsi*) on the earth. Samten G. Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, 401.

<sup>116</sup> *Bzang drug*: six medicinal substances: yellow myrobalan (*a ru ra*), beleric myrobalan (*ba ru*), emblic myrobalan (*skyu ru*), bamboo manna (*cu gang*), musk (*gla rtsi*), and (apparently) solidified elephant bile (*gi wang*) (JV).

<sup>117</sup> Three white offerings *dkar gsum*: curd, milk, butter; three sweet offerings *mngar gsum*: sugar, molasses, honey.

<sup>118</sup> *Byin rlabs bka' brgyud bla ma gsang [bsang]*.

<sup>119</sup> *Phu bo* Dung-khyung dkar-po, *nu bo* Klu-sbrul 'od-chen, and *sring mo* Thig-la 'od-mtsho. The spellings of all three spirit-sibling birth-companions correspond closely with those in the eastern Tibetan literary Gesar tradition. The spellings of the two spirit-brothers for example are identical to those found in LX, while the spelling of the sister is a little at variance. For example LX: Tha-le 'od-dkar. Sichuan *thangka* series: Sring-lcam thig-leg-ma; Bard Grags-pa: Thig-le 'od-'phro.

Purify the great god Lhachen Tsangpa Karpo.<sup>120</sup>  
 Purify all the great *lha* of the Upper realm!  
 Purify the great *nyen*, Royal Body-God (*sku lha*) Nyenchen Gerdzo.<sup>121</sup>  
 Purify the great *nyen* of the Middle realm, Nyenchen Thanglha.  
 Purify all the *nyen* of the Middle realm!  
 Purify the King of the *lu* (*klu*) below, Lugyal Tsugna Rinchen.<sup>122</sup>  
 Purify all the *lu* of the Lower realm!

Purify King Gesar, Lord of Ling!  
 Praise him! Praise King Gesar!  
 Make offerings! Make offerings to King Gesar!  
 Purify the Protector of Beings, Kyangbu Nakar.  
 [17] Purify the pure conch-white temple, beyond imagination.  
 Purify all the royal possessions (*sku chas*) of Ling.  
 Purify the thirty Sertong (*gser stong*) arrows.  
 Purify the bow Ragö Kyilwa (*ra rgod 'khyil ba*).<sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup> The hero's father in the realm of gods above, as found in most versions of the epic. Tshangs-pa dkar-po is the Tibetan name used for "White Brahmā," but the name has its origin in an old Tibetan deity, likely cognate with the Bonpo creation deity Sang-po 'bum-khri. This figure was adopted early in the Tibetan conversion to Buddhism as a personal protector of the first Buddhist *chos-rgyal* (Buddhist king) Srong-btsan sgam-po. Tshangs-pa dkar-po was the appointed protector of the first Buddhist temple built in Tibet at Khra-'brug. See Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod, *Thundering Falcon: An Inquiry into the History and Cult of Khra-'brug, Tibet's First Buddhist Temple*. As a pre-Buddhist high deity associated with the sky, Tshangs-pa also became associated with the other names for such inner Asian high sky-gods, such as Pe-har and Gnam-the dkar-po. See relevant entries in R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*. Tshangs-pa dkar-po features very prominently in the Gesar epic as the hero's celestial father. His role is underplayed in LX which is at pains to emphasise the Buddhist aspects of Gesar's divine descent as being not so much from the realm of worldly sky-gods, but the enlightened realm of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. On the layered traditional referentiality in the figure of Gesar's celestial father in the epic tradition, see George FitzHerbert, "Constitutional Mythologies and Entangled Cultures in the Tibeto-Mongolian Gesar Epic: The Motif of Gesar's Celestial Descent."

<sup>121</sup> See note on folio 12 above.

<sup>122</sup> Gtsug-na rin-chen is commonly found as the name of Gesar's grandfather ('Gog-bza's father) in the water-spirit netherworld of *klu*. Particularly in eastern Tibetan tellings, e.g., LX, and the published bardic recitations of Grags-pa and of Bsam-grub *inter alia*. The name is clearly of Indian derivation – a Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit name of the (Bodhisattva) *nāga* king, Mañicūḍa, who is a principal character, for example, in a play by Candragomin translated by Michael Hahn (*Joy for the World: A Buddhist Play by Candragomin*). Thanks to Ulrike Roesler for pointing out this reference.

<sup>123</sup> This is also the name of the bow found in the LX version of the epic, associated with the vulture-*werma* who guards the day and resides at the neck. See LX II, fol 29b.

Purify the sword Tabpa Lenmé (*btab pa len med*).<sup>124</sup>  
 Purify the tiger spear with nine stripes (*stag mdung ri mo dgu bskor*).  
 Purify the leopard-skin bow-sheath with nine spots (*gzig shub thig le dgu bskor*).  
 Purify the black armour breastplate Zilpa'i Thogdu (*khrab nag zil pa'i thog sdug*).<sup>125</sup>  
 Purify the mighty helmet, the white turban of kings (*rmog rje rgyal ba'i thod dkar*).<sup>126</sup>  
 Purify the mighty shield Bamar Lebchen (*phub rje sba mar leb chen*).<sup>127</sup>  
 Purify the spear with an eight-pointed pennant.<sup>128</sup>  
 Purify the iron *tshan* (*lcags tshan*)<sup>129</sup> which fulfills intentions.  
 Purify all the completely perfect personal effects!  
 [obscure] Purify the [plant substances?] *ghu*, the *bra spa*, the red *pra ba*.<sup>130</sup>  
 Purify the *gla*, the juniper (*shugs*), the wish-fulfilling trees.  
 Purify the lakes, springs and mountains of Ling!  
 Purify the messenger (*pho nya*) Gangbu Kyangring (*gang bu rkyang ring*).  
 Purify the *drala* (*dgra-bla*) Nyentak Marpo.  
 Purify the *drala* (*dgra-bla*) of Royal Tibet (*sku rgyal bod*).<sup>131</sup>  
 Purify the six *pawo* with the skill of children (?).

<sup>124</sup> Again, correspondence with the name of Gesar's sword as found in LX and elsewhere. At LX II, 29b, the spelling is *gtabs pa lan med* and is associated with the "yellow golden snake *werma*," described as "companion" and residing on the helmet.

<sup>125</sup> Again, as above, correspondence with LX II: 29b. There the armour *zil pa thog sdug* is associated with the "blue wolf *werma*." The corresponding weapon is the spear.

<sup>126</sup> *Rmog rje rgyal ba'i thod dkar*. Worth noting here the *thod dkar*, "white turban" attribute of the Tibetan Emperors of the Yarlung Pugyal Dynasty. Also Gesar in the form of the (seated) *yidam* Rdo-rje rtse-rgyal, as developed most influentially by 'Ju Mi-pham, is depicted with this white turban of kings. See Jeff J. Watt, "Ling Gesar: A Preliminary Survey of the Art & Iconography of Ling Gesar – A Tibetan Culture Hero" on the iconographic form of Rdo-rje rtse-rgyal which is Gesar's "ritual form" according to the Gesar ritual texts of 'Ju Mi-pham. The classic *thangka* based on 'Ju Mi-pham's ritual texts on Gesar depicts Rdo-rje rtse-rgyal below more conventional mounted form. This *thangka*, which is held in a private collection in Sichuan, is reproduced in , Jeff J. Watt, "Ling Gesar: A Preliminary Survey of the Art & Iconography of Ling Gesar – A Tibetan Culture Hero."

<sup>127</sup> Again, overlap with name of shield found in LX II:29b where it is called *sba dmar gling zab*, associated with the "white hare/rabbit *werma*," described as "having clear mind," and associated with the sling shot.

<sup>128</sup> *Mdung mo ba dan rtse brgyad*. This name for the spear is unfamiliar. In LX Gesar's spear is called *kham s gsum dgra 'dul*.

<sup>129</sup> The term *tshan* is found often in Bonpo rituals of purification. See *inter alia* Samten G. Karmay, "A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon," 145. I do not know the significance of the "iron."

<sup>130</sup> *Pra ba*: JV/IW: flower of the tree *aeschynomene grandiflora*.

<sup>131</sup> *Sku rgyal bod*: "Royal Tibet." This is the same epithet used for Tibet by the modern Gesar epic singer Bard bSam grub (1922–2011). It is perhaps an adaptation of the term found in Imperial era documents *spur rgyal bod*.

Purify the *drala* (*dgra-bla*) of Yemön Gyalpo.<sup>132</sup>  
 Purify the *drala* (*dgra-bla*) of the Six Tribes of the Little Men.<sup>133</sup>  
 Purify the *drala* (*dgra-bla*) of Iron Dragon (*a lcag 'brug*).  
 Purify the thirteen youthful wild yaks (*brong yag dar ma bcu gsum*).  
 [18] Purify the twenty magical *werma*.  
 With an entourage of five hundred and fifty,  
 (*thur?*) Purify the *werma* of the Upper realm.  
 With an entourage of three hundred and sixty,  
 (*thur?*) Purify the *werma* of the Middle realm.  
 Purify all one hundred and twenty,  
 (*thur?*) Purify the *werma* of the Lower realm.  
 Purify the *werma* of the *lha* (*lha*) above,  
 Purify the *werma* of the *nyen* (*gnyen*) in the middle,  
 Purify the *werma* of the *lu* (*klu*) below,  
 Purify the *werma* of Royal Tibet (*sku rgyal bod*)!<sup>134</sup>

Kye!  
 Emanation of Saraha,<sup>135</sup>  
 Purify the commander (*khri dpon*) Gyatsa Zhälkar!  
 Emanation of Kukura,  
 Purify the “old hawk” “lord of all” Shipön Rongtsa Tragän!  
 Emanation of Mitradzo,  
 Purify the younger brother Rangtsa Marleb!  
 Emanation of Shawari,  
 Purify the Father Senglön Gyalpo!  
 Emanation of Dorje Phagmo (Vajravārāhī),  
 Purify the Mother Gogza Lhamo (*mgogs bza' lha mo*)!

<sup>132</sup> *Ye smon rgyal po*. Primordial Bon deity. This is the king of light side in the dualistic cosmogony of Bon. See Samten G. Karmay, “The Appearance of the Little Black-headed Man.”

<sup>133</sup> *Mi'u rus drug dgra-bla bsang*. The “six little men” are proto-ancestors of the six ancient tribes of Tibet. For in-depth treatment of these clan names, see R. A. Stein, *Les Tribus Anciennes*. The Gesar epic likes to play on the theme of the six original tribes. Gesar and the Gling-bas belong to one of them: the *ldong*, specifically the *smug po gdong* (sic).

<sup>134</sup> This epithet for Tibet is also used frequently in the recitations of the contemporary bard Bsamgrub.

<sup>135</sup> It is common in the contemporary cult of Gesar, and in epic recitations, for the Thirty Warriors/Thirty Kinsmen to be regarded as emanations of the Thirty Mahāsiddhas (tantric adepts of India through whom the tantric teachings transmitted to Tibet are said to have passed). There is instability however in which mahāsiddha is regarded as emanating as which of the clansmen of Gling.



Emanation of Drolma Karmo (White Tārā),  
 Purify Kya-le (*skya le*)<sup>136</sup> Sengcham Drugmo!  
 Emanation of Green Tārā (*sgron ma sngon mo*),  
 [19] Purify Yudron (*g.yu sgron*), daughter of the Wolf (*spyang*) chief!<sup>137</sup>  
 Emanations of the thirty Mahāsiddhas,  
 Purify the Thirty Warriors (*dpa' this*) of Ling!  
 Emanations of the five classes of *khandro*,  
 Purify the Seven Beautiful Goddesses (*mdzes pa 'i lha mo spun bdun*)!<sup>138</sup>  
 Purify the blacksmith's daughter Aonmo Chöbum!<sup>139</sup>  
 Emanation of Tröma Nagmo (*khros ma nag mo*) (Black Vajra Yoginī),  
 Purify Meza Bumchi (*me za 'bum skyid*) of the upper regions of the north!<sup>140</sup>  
 Emanation of the White-dressed Goddess (*gos dkar lha mo*),<sup>141</sup>  
 Purify Rongza Amen Ketra (*a sman ke sprā*)!  
 In the Eighteen Famous Localities,<sup>142</sup>  
 Purify the Eighteen powerful Khandro!

<sup>136</sup> *sKya le seng lcam 'brug mo*. A reference to Drugmo's clan name in eastern Tibetan tellings of the epic. She is normally said to be the daughter of the rich chief known as Skya-lo Ston-pa rgyal-mtshan. This clan name is in Gesar-country associated with the lakes at the source of 'Bri-chu river (upper Yangtze) in 'Bri-stod, one of which is known as Skya-reng mtsho.

<sup>137</sup> *Spyang dpon bu mo g.yu sgron*. I am not familiar with this figure from my readings in the epic. But "wolf" (*spyang*) is one of the three clan lineages of Gling in the eastern Tibetan tradition: *dmu spyang sde bzhi*. This could also possibly be an allusion to Rdo-rje g.yu-sgron-ma (of PT307 fame) who is known from Mi-pham ritual texts as Gesar's consort in his role as the *yi-dam* Rdo-rje rtse-rgyal.

<sup>138</sup> This looks like another allusion to the mythology (described in PT307) of Padmasambhava and Rlangs Dpal-gyi-Seng-ge, converting the seven native demonesses of Tibet, one of whom, Rdo-rje g.yu-sgron-ma, comes to be associated with Gesar as his tantric consort.

<sup>139</sup> *Mgar ldan pa aon mo chos 'bum*. This looks like reference to Mgar-bza', Gesar's lover when he transforms himself into Chinese boy and takes up residence as a blacksmith's apprentice in the HLYG, before infiltrating the Hor chief's palace and wreaking his revenge there. Her name in HLYG is not Chos-'bum but Mgar-bza' Chos-sgron. For this section of the tale see HLYG II, 386–416.

<sup>140</sup> Identifying Me-za as the wrathful tantric deity Khros-ma nag-mo makes sense as Me-za plays an ambivalent role in the epic as the one who feeds the hero pills of forgetfulness in the demon land of the north.

<sup>141</sup> Sometimes *gos dkar mo* the white-clothed [goddess] refers to Paṇḍārāvāsini, consort of Amitābha/Amitāyus (thanks to Rob Mayer for this observation). The identity of Rong-bza' a-sman ke-spra is not familiar.

<sup>142</sup> *Sa mdo ming can bco brygad*. Reference to the sites, dotted around the landscape and pointed out by locals in various parts of Tibet, which are the "traces" of Gesar and his companions. Places are regularly schematized in the context of the Gesar epic (and in the context of eastern Tibetan culture of "geography" more generally) as eighteen in number. This is the number of "great dzong" (*rdzong chen*) incorporated by Gesar in his dominion in the epic.

Purify the all-knowing Diviners (*kun shes mo ma*)!  
Purify Jo'ö Chöki Gegyal (*jo 'os chos kyi dge rgyal*)!  
Purify the divine entourage of Sengchen Kyebu,  
Who arraign the land of Tibet in happiness.  
As a demonstration of offering to you,  
Purify the thirteen *Gul-lha*, the “mountain-neck” hunting gods of Tibet,<sup>143</sup>  
Purify the *Tanma Chunyi*, the Twelve Goddesses of the Teachings,<sup>144</sup>  
Purify the *Sidpa Chagpa'i Lha-gu*, the Nine Mountain Gods of Tibet.<sup>145</sup>

### [Supplication for the Success of the Clan]

On behalf of myself and generous beneficiaries,  
[20] Keep men safe and protect [our] fields and horses!  
When we go out to fight, be our commander!  
May we gain the hoped-for victory!  
When we go raiding for horses (*'jag la 'gro na*),  
Be our bandit-chief (*jag dpon*)!  
May we gain the hoped-for horses!  
When we do trade,

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<sup>143</sup> *Mgul lha*. See R. A. Stein, *Recherches sur l'Épopée et le Barde au Tibet*. These deities are often invoked in the eastern Tibetan tellings of the epic (HLYG, LX etc). *Mgul* literally means “neck,” and is used to refer to the upper reaches of a mountain, before it becomes rock and scree – hence the “neck” of the mountain. In old Tibet, these were the most fruitful areas to hunt for deer, antelope, bear, leopard and so on, and the places from which mountain divinities would be propitiated.

<sup>144</sup> *Bstan ma bcu gnyis*. These are an important set of protectors of the esoteric teachings in Nyingma tradition, who are analogous or overlapping with the seven native goddesses tamed by Padmasambhava and Rlangs Dpal-gyi-seng-ge as seen in PT307. See Cathy Cantwell and Rob Mayer, “Enduring Myths: *Smrang*, *Rabs* and Ritual in Dunhuang Texts on Padmasambhava,” 298. Gesar has long been cultically associated with this act of taming the indigenous goddesses. When the 5th Sle-lung, Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje, had his pure-vision of Gesar in 1729, he reports that the vision occurred “not long after the great festival to celebrate the joining of the Great Queen (*sman btsun chen mo*) Rdo-rje g.yu-sgron-ma and the great noble one of Ling (*gling skyes bu chen po*)” (LLDN). Well, Rdo-rje g.yu-sgron-ma is one *bstan-ma bcu-gnyis*, and also of the “original” seven goddesses converted by Padma and Rlang Dpal-gyi-seng-ge in PT307. She also appears at Gesar's side in various Gesar *sādhana*s by 'Ju Mi-pham.

<sup>145</sup> *Srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu*. This is a traditional designation of the important mountain deities of early Tibet. Dung-dkar's *Tshig mdzod chen mo* describes them as “O-lde gung-rgyal and his eight sons,” namely: Yar-lha sham-po; Gnyan-chen thang-lha; Rma-chen sbom-ra; Sgyogs-chen ldong-ra; Sgam-po lha-rje; Zhogs-lha rgyug-po; Jo-bo g.yul-rgyal and She'u kha-rag. These are the holy sites of Upper (Western), Middle and Lower (Eastern) Tibet respectively. Note the list always includes the holy mountain of Mgo-log, Rma-rgyal spom-ra, which is so central to the culture of Gesar.

Be our merchant-chief (*tshong dpon*)!  
 May get what we want from the trade!  
 When we do an enclosure hunt,<sup>146</sup>  
 Be the chief of the hunt (*ling* (sic.) *dpon*)!  
 May we get the meat we want!  
 When we travel, protect us from harm,  
 Kill the “heart vein” of the [animal] “hosts” male and female,<sup>147</sup>  
 Divide up the food, the wealth, the provisions of guts.<sup>148</sup>  
 When we are away from home, be our god of the road (*lam lha*)!<sup>149</sup>  
 When we are at home, give us protection!  
 May good things come to pass, and bad things be turned away!  
 Send laden horses [home] one by one with the *mdzo*,  
 Repulse harmful enemies, raiders (*jag chom*) and thieves!  
 Bring happiness for children!  
 May food, wealth and enjoyment increase!  
 [21] May the power and influence (*dbang thang*) of the clan (*rigs brgyud*) grow!  
 May fame, skill and strength increase!  
 By day [may we] take good care [of work],  
 By night [may we] amuse [ourselves] with talk!  
 When enemies come, take action [on our behalf]!  
 When illnesses come, medicine them!  
 Utterly liberate (i.e., kill) our bitter enemies!  
 Draw the strategies of foreign foes out in front,  
 [So] now enemies will be repulsed and tamed.  
  
 And in the places of we yogis,  
 May the never-setting banner of the teaching be planted!  
 May all wishes be fulfilled!

<sup>146</sup> *Ling* (sic: *lings*) *la 'gro na*. See Brandon Dotson, “The Princess and the Yak: The Hunt as Narrative Trope and Historical Reality in Early Tibet” for a philological and historical treatment of the importance of the *lings* “enclosure hunt” and the prescribed models for the division of meat, in the early Tibetan imperial ritual and “literary” culture.

<sup>147</sup> *Gnas po gnas mo snying rtsa 'gum*. “the host and hostess.” I understand this to refer to the *gnas* “residence” of numinal power, *bla*. The “hosts” here probably refer to animals killed. We see reference to “yak hosts” (*mgron g.yag*) in a range of texts, for example in relation to the *cang seng* spirits of the road in the *Gzi brjid*: vol. *kha*: 580. See Clemente, Adriano, *The sGra bla, Gods of the Ancestors of Gshen-Rab Mi-Bo; According to the sGra bla go bsang from the gZi brjid*, 12.

<sup>148</sup> *Zas nor rgyu ma'i zas kha phyas*.

<sup>149</sup> *Byis* [sic *phyi*] *la 'gro na*.

With a mighty  
*Ki bswol lha rgyal lo!*

### Transliteration of the Tibetan Text

[1] Title:

Seng chen nor bu don 'grub la gsang [sic: bsang] mchod 'bul tshul lags so

[2] kye/ chos sku dbyings kyi pho brang nas// 'od gsal lhun grub pho brang nas// skyabs kun 'dus sangs rgyas sprul pa'i sku// sku mi 'gyur 'phags pa 'jam dpal sku // gsung mi 'gag thugs rje chen po'i gsung// thugs mi 'phrul phyag na rdo rje'i thugs// rigs gsum mgon po'i skyes pa yin// rigs lnga thugs kyi sprul pa yin// sa bcu non pa'i sang rgyas yin// dbu nag bod kyi lha skal yin/ thabs kyis 'gro don byed pa'i mchog// skye 'gro yongs kyi bskyabs gcig po// 'dzam gling mun pa gsal [sel] byed pa// seng chen nor bu don 'grub kyi// bsangs [3] dang spyang 'dren gshegs su gsol // khyed seng chen nor bu dgra 'dul la// dbu skra nyi khri dgu 'bum la // 'ja' tshon nyi khri dgu 'bum bzhugs// ma dang mkha' 'gro 'dul ba'i rtags// spyi gtsug dung khang gzhal yas nas// 'bar ba khrag 'thung lnga bcu bzhugs// ma dang mkha' 'gro 'du ba'i rtags// spyang gi (sic: gnyis) khro ba'i zur kha nas// ru dra 'dul ba'i sdang mig lta// dung seb (sic: so) ba mo sum bcu pa // byon pa'i rin [sic: ring] sel sum bcu bzhugs// de la skyes 'dzum drug bcu bzhugs// khyed kyi kha 'dzin mdzad pa'i rtags// mgrin pa long spyod 'khor lo la// [4] chos sku rgyal ba rigs lnga bzhugs// chos sku da (sic: de) lhun gyis grub pa'i rtags// snying kha chos kyis 'khor lo la// drug pa rdo rje 'chang chen bzhugs// stong nyid phyag rgya rtogs pa'i rtags// phrag pa g.yas kyis gdan steng na// rgyal sras 'phags pa 'jam dpal bzhugs// mkhyen rab rtogs pa thob pa'i rtags// phrag pa g.yon gyi gdan steng na//mthu chen phyag na rdo rje bzhugs// mthu stobs rtogs pa thob pa'i rtags// 'chang ba g.yas kyi gdan steng na// dgos 'dod yid bzhin nor bu bzhugs// khams gsum dbang du 'dus pa'i rtags// 'chang ba g.yon gyi gdan steng na// mi 'gyur g.yung drung 'khyil ba bzhugs// dgra bzhi cham la phab pa'i rtags// lto ba (sic: lte ba) sprul pa'i 'khor lo la// skyes rdor (sic: kye dor) sprul pa'i lha dgu bzhugs // bdud rigs cham la phab pa'i rtags// [5] pus mo g.yas kyi gdan steng na// rgyal ba shakya thub pa bzhugs// sku la bka' bcu rdzogs pa'i rtags// spus mo g.yon gyi gdan steng na// bon sku ston pa gshen rab bzhugs// mthu stobs sku la rdzogs pa'i rtags// rkang mthil rlung gi 'khor lo<sup>150</sup> la// mi 'gyur a chung dkar po bzhugs// khams gsum chos la bsgyur ba'i rtags//

<sup>150</sup> Wind *cakra* at soles of feet.

kye/ 'dzam gling seng chen dgra 'dul gyi[sic: gyis]// lha 'khor yongs su rdzogs pa  
 bsang// gsungs 'dus [?] chos kun 'dus pa bsang// thugs 'dus pa dge 'dun kun 'dus  
 bsang// yon tan mthu stobs lnga bcu bsang// 'phrin las drag shul me 'bal bsang//  
 bka' mdo sngags gnyis kyi bdag [sic: po bsang]// lung man ngag gnyis kyi bdag  
 po bsang// thabs shes rab gnyis kyi bdag po bsang// chos sku lhun gyis grub pa la//  
 [6] snang ba mtha' yas lha tshogs bsang// longs sku lhun gyis grub pa la// thugs  
 rje chen po lha tshogs bsang// sprul sku lhun gyis grub pa la// padma 'byung pa  
 lha tshogs bsang// mkhyen rab rtogs pa thob pa la// 'phag pa 'jam dpal lha tshogs  
 bsang// khams gsum dbang du 'dus pa la// padma dbang chen lha tshogs bsang//  
 dngos grub char ltar 'bebs mdzad pa// rdo rje phag mo lha tshogs bsang// gdon  
 dang bar chad 'dul ba la// yi dam dkyil 'khor lha tshogs bsang// dug gsum nad  
 rnam sel mdzad pa// sangs rgyas sman lha'i lha tshogs bsang// tshe la bar chad  
 mi 'ong ba'i// tshe dpag med kyi lha tshogs bsang// pho gdon rgyal po 'dul mdzad  
 pa// gu ru drag po'i lha tshogs bsang// gza' dang 'byung po 'dul mdzad pa// phyag  
 na rdo rje'i lha tshogs bsang// 'chi bdag gshin rje 'dul mdzad pa// rdo rje 'jigs  
 byed lha tshogs bsang// btsan gdon gdug pa 'dul mdzad pa// [7] yaksha me dbal  
 lha tshogs bsang// klu gdon gdug pa 'dul mdzad pa// khyung chen 'bar ba'i lha  
 tshogs bsang// phyogs bzhi'i dgra bzhi'i 'dul mdzad pa'i// mkha 'gro sde lnga lha  
 tshogs bsang// (s)par kha bdud [brgyad] la dbang ba'i phyir// 'jam dpal rigs lnga lha  
 tshogs bsang// nyams grib ma lus sangs [sic: gsang] gyur pas// rme ba brtsegs pa'i  
 lha tshogs bsang// sangs rgyas bstan pa bsrung mdzad pa// ye shes mgon po'i lha  
 tshogs bsang// sdang dgra rtsa nas gcod pa'i phyir// dpal ldan lha mo'i lha tshogs  
 bsang// rma g.yang dngos grub char 'bebs pa// a phyi chos sgron lha tshogs bsang//  
 zas nor longs spyod spel mdzad pa// dzam bha lha'i lha tshogs bsang// snor [dang]  
 bar chad sel ba'i phyir// dam can rgya mtsho'i dmag tshogs bsang// ci bsam don  
 rnam grub pa la//seng chen skye bu lha tshogs bsang//

kye/ seng chen skye bu don grub la// khyed 'bod ni gi dang bswa yi 'bod// [8] g.yab  
 ni mda' dang dar gyi g.yab// rigs gsum mgon po'i sprul pa ni// gling rje ge sar rgyal  
 po ni// sku stod lha ris khyugs se khyug// lha dmag 'bum gyi 'khor gyis bskor// sku  
 sked gnyen ris khyug se khyug// gnyen dmag 'bum gyis 'khor gyis bskor// sku  
 smad klu ris khyugs se khyug// klu dmag 'bum gyis 'khor gyis bskor// sku la lha  
 'khor dpungs se dpung// thugs la rgyal kha lings se ling// gsung gi gi bswa [sic: kwi  
 bswa] lhangs se lhang// zhabs la mthil chung sdil [sic: sdim] drug gsol// rin chen  
 sna bdun rgyan cha byas// wer zog go chen brgyan pa yi[s]// nyi ma rmog dkar dbu  
 la gsol// skar ma'i khrab dkar sku la gsol// zla ba'i phug [sic: phub] chen rgyab la  
 khur// phyag g.yas sba lcags [sic: lcag] dkar po dang// [9] g.yon pas dar mdung dkar  
 ring 'dzin// stag ral g.yas la gzigs [sic: gzig] shub g.yon// btap pa len mod blo la  
 btag// seng chen nor bu dgra 'dul khyed// khrab dkar sku la gsol ba'i dus// sa mdo  
 lcags mkhar sgo med 'dra// rmog dkar dbu la gsol ba'i dus// ri mgo gang chags

thogs pa 'dra// de la rgo 'phru gtsugs pa...ni// bar chad khyung chen lhags ba 'dra//  
 de la dar 'phru gtsugs pa'i dus// mkha' la 'ja' tshon shar ba 'dra// phub rje rgyab la  
 khur ba'i dus// rgyal chen 'khor gyis bskor ba 'dra// 'khor gsum skad [sic: sked] la  
 bskor ba'i dus// skar sham [sic: shar] nya la bcings ba'i dus// lcag gi zog ba dgu 'dril  
 'dra// stag gzic 'dzums [sic: 'dzum] mdangs rgyas pa 'dra// pho lha g.yas la dgra  
 lha g.yon// wer-ma [10] g.yas la cang se g.yon// za lha g.yas la zog dor g.yon// chibs  
 su rkyang bu sna dkar chibs// snang ba mtha' yas sprul pa la// 'gro mgon rkyang bu  
 sna dkar chibs// sna ba dkar bas [sic: ba'i] gnam dgra 'thul// spyang rtsa dmar bas  
 btsan dgra thul// kha sos rlung dgra thul ba'i rtags// dpung pas dgregs [sic: dgra  
 rigs] thul ba'i rtags// rna g.yas khams pa dung la grub// rna g.yon khams pa dngul  
 la grub// lus spu sdug mdzes 'ja' tshon 'dra// rkang bzhi bka' thul bshibs pa 'dra//  
 rje bzhi rmog phor brgol [sic: rgol] ba 'dra// ske [sic: sko] gyang bir chen phu ..ring  
 dra// spra ba me long physis pa 'dra// rna ba rgod kyis thig sprin 'dra// spyang ni la  
 kha'i skar rjen 'dra// spu mgo re [sic: ro] la Om re byon// spu skad [sic: sked] re la  
 A re byon// spu rtsa re la Hum re byon//[added in cursive font: rjes bzhis sa bzhi  
 thul ba'i rtags// sems la stong nyid thob pa'i rtags// lus la rdzu 'o phrul 'byung ba'i  
 rtags// [11] sku gsung thugs kyis sprul pa la// 'gro mgon rkyang bu sna dkar bsang//  
 sga chas yongs su rdzogs pa ni// sga chung gsal ba 'od ldan ni// sga sgong gser gyi  
 pa dra [sic: tra] la// snga ru rin chen gser la byas// shakya thub pa'i byin rlabs  
 'khor// shakya thub pa'i lha tshogs bsang// phyi ru ba le dung la grub// thugs rje  
 chen po'i byin rlabs 'khor// thugs rje chen po'i lha tshogs bsang// yag g.yon tsan  
 dan dmar po byas// tshe dpag med kyis byin rlabs 'khor// chibs gong smug po chong  
 la byas// phyag na rdo rje'i byin rlabs 'khor// chibs rnying dmar po zangs la byas//  
 chibs glo khra ba gzi la byas// chab ma len med dung la byas// yob chen khams pa  
 dngul la byas// g.yu mthur sngon po rgyun ring la// gser srab nyi ma gyur [12] med  
 la// srab mda' g.yu la dar ma 'bum// bal stan rin chen 'od 'phro la// za 'og ra [sic:  
 dar] gyi thog kheb [sic: khebs] byas// sga chas yongs su rdzogs pa bsang// rgyal ba  
 rigs lnga'i byin rlabs 'khor// seng chen mi rta 'khor bcas bsang// bdud rtsi bsang  
 [sic: bsangs] gi mchod pa 'bul// pho bo dung khyung dkar po ni// mi lus khyung gi  
 mgo bo can// khyung mgo g.yu yis ral pa can// sku la dung khrab snyigs se snyig//  
 dbu la dung rmog ldems se ldem// 'og na dung rta dkar po chib[s]// mda' dar g.yas  
 la mdung dar g.yon// (inserted in cursive font: 'khor du lha dmag 'bum gyis bskor//  
 gnyen chen sku lha ger 'dzo ni// mi lus seng ge'i mg obo can// seng mgo g.yu'i ral  
 pa can// sku la gser khrab snyegs se snyeg// dbu la gser rmog ldems se ldem// 'og  
 nag ser rta chibs se chib// mda' dar g.yas mdung dar g.yon//) 'khor du gnyen dmag  
 'bum gyi 'bum// nu bo klu sbrul 'od chen ni// mi lus sbrul gyi mgo bo can// sbrul  
 mgo sman gyi lce ljang [sic: lcags] can// sku la g.yu khrab snyigs se snyig// 'og na  
 chu rta sngon po chibs// mda' dar g.yas [13] la mdung dar g.yon// 'khor du klu  
 dmag 'bum gyis bskor// khyed lha klu gnyen gsum 'khor dang bsang// 'dir byon  
 bsang gi mchod pa bzhes// khri dpon rgya tsha zhal dkar ni// sku mdog dkar po zla

ba'i mdog// spyen ni mtho ris skar rgyan 'dra// so dang son mo dung la [sic: las] grub// sku la sher ber dkar po gsol// dbu la rgyal ba'i thod dkar gsol// de la bya dkar ldem 'phru btsug [sic: btsugs]// stag ral g.yas la gzig shub g.yon// phyag na a tsha dkar sprin 'dzin// chibs su rgya bya sog dkar chibs// nu bo rang tsha dmar leb ni// sku mdog dkar dmar mdangs dang ldan// sku la za 'og dmar smug gsol// dbu la gser rmog ser po gsol// de la bya rgod lde 'phru gtsug [sic: btsugs]// [14] stag ral g.yas la gzig shub g.yon// phyag na mdung dar dkar po bsnams// chibs su gro chung thod skya chibs// ge sar mched gsum 'khor bcas la// 'khor du dpa' this [thul] sum bcu'i bskor// 'dir byon bdud rtsi'i bsang mchod bzhes// sdang dgra rtsa nas gcod mdzad pa// mthu chen wer-ma'i dmag tshogs ni// a sngon wer-ma 'brug la chibs// bar chad wer-ma glag (unclear) la chibs// gangs dkar wer-ma seng la chibs// ngang rdzogs ber [wer] ma rgod la chibs// khrag g.yas wer-ma 'brong la chibs// nag dmar wer-ma kyang [sic: rkyang] la chibs// nag tshal wer-ma stag la chibs// chu bo wer-ma nya la chibs// sa gzhi wer-ma sbrul la chibs// mthu chen wer-ma'i dmag tshogs rnam// [15] 'dir byon bsang dang gsur mchod bzhes// mthu chen wer-me'i dgra-bla bsang// ri dmar gdong gi ya tha [sic: mtha'] na// ri dmar bang zhu'i skyab zhab na// dgra lha'i gnyen stag dmar po ni// mi [sic: mig] dmar khrag gis [sic: gi] ral pa can// rta dmar byi ru'i gdong lcags can// 'khor du dgra lha mched brgyad dang// 'brong yag rdzu 'phrul la sogs pa// dgra lha'i dmag tshogs 'bum gyi bskor// 'dir byon bsang dang mchod pa bzhes// seng chen nor bu dgra 'dul gyi [sic: gyis]// lha 'khor yongs su rdzogs pa dang// ge sar dmag gi rgyal po'i tshogs// ma lus 'khor dang bcas pa ni// mchod pa'i yo byed 'bul ba ni// bzang drug sman sna bdud rtsi can// mda' dang mkhar shug sel bu dang// g.yag lug rwa gsum gzugs kyang 'gros// [16] dkar gsum mngar gsum ja chang dang// phye mar zas phud spyen gzig dang// 'dod yon bdud rtsi mchod pa 'di// byin rlabs rtsa ba bka' brgyud bla ma gsang [sic: bsangs]// dngos grub kun 'byung yi dam lha tshogs bsang// bar chad kun sel dpa' bo mkha' 'gro bsang// 'phrin las kun 'grub chos skyon srung ma bsang// seng chen nor bu dgra 'dul bsang// phu bo dung khyung dkar po bsang// nu bo klu sbrul 'od can bsang// sring mo thig la 'od mtsho bsang// lha chen tshangs pa dkar po bsang// steng gi lha chen thams cad bsang// gnyen chen sku lha ger mdzo bsang// bar gyi gnyen chen thang lha bsang// bar ma gnyen rigs thams cad bsang// 'og klu rgyal gtsug na rin chen bsang// 'og gi klu rigs thams cad bsang// gling rje ge sar rgyal po bsang// bstod do ge sar rgyal po bstod// mchod do ge sar rgyal po mchod// 'gro don rkyang bu sna dkar gsang [sic: bsang]// dgra-bla'i go cha sna dgu bsang// [17] dung ba lha khang bsam yas bsang// gling gi sku chas yongs rdzogs bsang// mda' mo gser stong sum bcu bsang// gzhu mo ra rgod 'khyil ba bsang// ral gri btab pa len med bsang// stag mdung ri mo dgu bskor bsang// gzig shub thig le dgu bskor bsang// khrab nag zil pa'i thog sdug bsang// rmog rje rgyal ba'i thod dkar bsang// phub rje sba mar leb chen bsang// mdung mo ba dan rtse brgyad bsang// lcags tshan bsam pa'i don grub bsang// sku chas yongs su rdzogs pa bsang// ghu bra spa pra ba dmar po bsang// gla

shugs dpag bsam ljon shing bsang// gling mtsho chu mig ri mo bsang// pho nya gang bu rkyang ring bsang// dgra-bla'i gnyen stag dmar po bsang// sku rgyal bod kyi dgra-bla bsang// byis thub dpa' bo spun drug bsang// ye smon rgyal po'i dgra-bla bsang// mi'u rus drug dgra-bla bsang// a lcag 'brug gi dgra-bla bsang// 'brong yag dar ma bcu gsum bsang// mthu chen [18] wer-ma nyi shu bsang// lnga brgya lnga bcu'i 'khor gyis bskor// thur [thar du] gong ma'i wer-ma bsang// gsum brgya drug bcu'i 'khor gyi bskor// thur [thar du] bar ma'i wer-ma bsang// brgya dang nyi shu tham pa bsang// thur [thar du] 'og ma'i wer-ma bsang// gong ma lha yi wer-ma bsang// bar ma gnyen gyis wer-ma bsang// 'og la klu'i wer-ma bsang//sku rgyal bod kyi wer-ma bsang//

kye/ ha [sic: sa ra ha] yis sprul pa ste// khri dpon rgya tsha zhal dkar bsang// ku ku ra yi sprul pa ste//

(interlinear addition in cursive, in palce of rubbed out text: spyi dpon rong tsha khra rgan bsang//) mi tra dzo'i sprul pa ste// nu bo rang tsha dmar leb bsang// sha ba ri'i sprul pa ste// yab gcig seng blon rgyal po bsang// rdo rje phag mo sprul pa ste// ma yum mgong/mgogs za lha mo bsang// sgrol mar dkar mo sprul pa ste// skya le seng lcam 'brug mo bsang// sgron ma sngon mo'i sprul pa ste// [19] spyang dpon bu mo g.yu sgron bsang// grub chen sum bcu'i sprul pa la// gling gi dpa' this sum bcu bsang// mkha' 'gro sde lnga'i sprul pa la// mdzes pa'i lha mo spun bdun bsang// mgar ldan pa aon mo chos 'bum bsang// khros ma nag mo'i sprul pa ste// byang kha stod sman za 'bum skyid bsang// gos dkar lha mo'i sprul pa la// rong za a sman ke spra bsang// sa mdo ming can bco brgyad na//

stobs ldan mkha' 'gro bco brgyad bsang// mo ma kun shes bi (illegible) pa bsang// jo 'os chos kyi dge rgyal bsang// bod khas [khams] bde la bkod pa yi// seng chen skye bu'i lha 'khor bsang// khyed rnam mchod pa'i ston [sic: yon tan] gyi// bod kyi mgul lha bcu gsum bsang// 'dzam gling bstan ma bcu gnyis bsang// srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu bsang// bdag dang rgyu sbyor yon bdag la// mi [20] la bsrung zhing rta la skyob// dmag la 'gro na dmag dpon mdzod// dmag gi rgyal 'dod rgyal dang sprod// jag la 'gro na jag dpon mdzod// jag pa rta 'dod rta dang sprod// tshong la 'gro na tshong dpon mdzod// tshong pa nas 'dod nas dang sprod// ling la 'gro na ling dpon mdzod// ling pa sha 'dod sha dang sprod// mgron la 'gro na mgon skyabs mdzod// gnas po gnas mo snying rtsa 'gum// zas nor rgyu ma'i zas kha phyese// byis na 'gro na lam lha mdzod// gzhis la 'dug na mgon skyabs mdzod// yag dang sprod la nyes dang bsnol// rta khal mdzo yis bags [sic: bang] sna bsring// gnod byed dgra jag chom rkun bzlog// byis don yid bzhin grub par mdzod// zas nor longs spyod 'phel ba dang// [21] rigs brgyud dbang thang rgyas pa dang// grags rtsal stobs dang rgyas par mdzod// nyin gyis dus su bya ra gyis// mtshan gyi dus su mel rtse mdzod// dgra rnam byung na bya gcig mdzod// nad rnam byung na sman gcig mdzod// sdang dgra thar ba rsted [sic: rtse] nas chod// phyi dgra byas sa drung na phyung



[sic: phyugs]// da lta dgra bo rtul [sic: rngul] du bslog [sic: rlog]// rnal 'byor bdag  
cag 'khor sa la//mi nub bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan tshug// kha brje bskyed la dbang  
thang spel// ci bsam don rnams 'grub par mdzod// ki bswo che'o lha rgyal lo//

[colophon]

mdo sgam sa yi thig le 'dam stod kha shis gong [sic: dgon] nas grub chen / karma  
pa shes pa ge sar skyes bu don 'grub gi zhal gzigs pa'i dus mdzad pa'o /

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### Abbreviated References for Tibetan language sources

HLYG I and HLYG II: *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed, The War between Hor and Ling*. Based on the 18th century work of Sde-dge *zhabs-drung* Ngag-dbang bstan-'dzin phun-tshogs. Edited in the early 1960s by Qinghai Province People's Literature and Art Association. The first edition of Part I (*stod cha*) was published in Qinghai in 1962. Publication of Part II (*smad cha*) was delayed until 1979. Since then the text has been published many times in Xining, Thimphu (Bhutan), Lhasa

and Beijing. The edition cited in this article is part of the series *'Dzam gling ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997); HLYG I: *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed, stod cha* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997). HLYG II: *Hor gling g.yul 'gyed, smad cha* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997).

LGGK: *Gling ge sar gyi sgrub skor* (Collected Gesar Ritual Texts), edited by Don brgyud nyi ma. Palampur, H.P.: Sungrab Nyamso Gyunphel Parkhang, 1971. TBRC W27926.

LPSR: *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru*. Gangs can rig mdzod Series, Vol. 1. Lhasa 1986: Bod rang skyong ljongs spyi tshogs tshan rig khang bod yig dpe nying dpe skrun khang.

LX: The "Lingsang Xylograph" edition of three volumes of the Gesar epic composed by 'Gyur-med thub-bstan 'jam-dbyangs grags-pa under the patronage of the Gling-tshang *rgyal-po* Dbang-chen bstan-'dzin chos-rgyal in the early 20th century. LX I: *Lha gling gab tse dgu skor*. Editions: Chengdu 1999: Si kron mi rigs dpe skrun khang. Also *inter alia*: Thimpu 1979, vol. 1; Sichuan 1980; Gansu 1982; Paris 1956 (R. A. Stein); LX II: *'Khrungs gling me tog ra ba*. Editions: Chengdu 1999: Si kron mi rigs dpe skrun khang. Also *inter alia*: Thimpu 1979 vol.1; Sichuan 1980; Gansu 1982; Qinghai 1986; Paris 1956 (RA Stein); LX III: *Rta rgyugs nor bu cha bdun*. Editions: Chengdu 1980: Si kron mi rigs dpe skrun khang. Also *inter alia*: Thimpu 1979 vol.1; Paris 1956 (RA Stein). Full English translation is published in Kornman et al., trans., 2012.

SCPG: *Gling ge sar rgyal po'i gsol mchod skor phyogs bsgrigs*. 'Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho. Chengdu (1996) 2006. Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang.

SLCM: *Gsol mchod phrin las myur 'grub* also known as the *gSol lo chen mo by 'Ju Mi-pham*. In SCPG (above): 127–40.

TZNG: *Stag gzigs nor 'gyed, The Distribution of the Wealth of Stag-gzig*. According to its colophon composed by Rdzogs-sprul Padma Rig-'dzin (1625–1697) in the Iron-Ox year (1661–62).