KAH THOG PA BSOD NAMS RGYAL MTSHAN (1466-1540) 
AND HIS ACTIVITIES IN SIKKIM AND BHUTAN

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The establishment of the monastery of Kañ thog in Eastern Tibet in the year 1159 marked an important step in the consolidation of the rNyung ma pa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Its founder, Kañ thog dbu brgyad rgyal ma (1122-1192), occupies a prominent place in the transmission known as the "Spoken Teachings" (bka' ma). This specific teaching tradition was further spread by a number of abbots, known collectively as the "Succession of Teachers (Consisting of) Thirteen [Persons]
" (bka' rabs bu cu gsum). According to one way of counting, the list begins with sphyin gna ba bSod nams 'bum [pa] (b. 1222) and ends with mkhas grub Ye shes rgyal mthchan (1395-1458); the two immediate successors of Kañ thog pa dbu brgyad, gTsang ston dbu tshes rgyal mthchan (1126-1216) and Byams pa 'bum [pa] (1179-1252), are not included in this particular list of successive regents of the glorious Kañ thog monastery.

In the historiographical literature of the rNyung ma pa school the period of the next series of abbots—called the "Succession of Attendants [Consisting of] Thirteen [Persons]
" (drung rabs bu cu gsum)—is characterized by an increasing influence of the tradition of the "Treasure Teachings" (bde gru, na), which led to a slight diminishing of the importance of the Spoken Teachings tradition. This event is linked to the journey of Drung Nam mkha' seng ge, the first in this list of abbots, to the region of lho brag, where he became the "master of

1 A different version of this article will appear in the Bhutan panel volume (Pommaret F. and J. Arducci eds), IATS Oxford 2003, Leiden: Brill.
2 See lha bral Rin po che Sangs rgyas rdo rje (b. 1913); dPal rgyal rgyal ba kañ thog pa'i gkan rabs brgyad 'dzin dang btsun pa'i byang bo brgyad pa rin po che'i phreng ba bsa ku'i gsum, s.n., n.d., fols. 31a5-37a4. The author states that this way of counting follows the mThon bod lugs 'debs of the teachers of Kañ thog composed by Kañ thog Sru Sras kyi gnos mThon (1880-1925); ibid., fol. 31b1-2. The same authority is acknowledged by mkhan chen 'Jan bphyin gyals mthchan (b. 1929): gSung chen brgyad pa'i chu 'go rgyal ba kañ thog pa'i t'o rgyus mdo brsab brgyad pa 'chi med bsa' nga sogs mthun ma ba'i dga' ston, Chengdu: Si khor mngag dpe skrun khang, 1996, p. 54,1-5.
the teachings" (chos bdag) of the treasure-cycles of Rig 'dzin Ratna gling pa (1403-1478). This particular phase of new spiritual developments within the teaching lineages of Kaḥ thog in the 15th century was also the period when the exponent who would later create a subschool known as the lhö mon Kaḥ thog pa or Mon lugs Kaḥ thog pa received his training.3

A first assessmant of the history of this subschool in Bhutan was provided by the late Michael Aris. He opened his sketch of the rNying ma pa in Bhutan with a treatment of the lhö mon Kaḥ thog pa, whom he called "[t]he first rNying ma pa to arrive in a formal sense". According to the historical sources available to him, it was one of the abbots of the above-mentioned first group of regents of Kaḥ thog, a certain dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa], who in the 13th century made his way to Bhutan on his way to Sikkim and founded in sPa gro TsTag tshang the monastery of Ö rgyan rtses mo; the location of this old residence of the Kaḥ thog pa tradition was immediately above the main shrine of TsTag tshang. It is further stated that this master had two disciples, namely bSod nams rgyal mtshan and the later's son rNam grol bzang po, who both settled at TsTag tshang in the sPa gro valley.4

It was further noted by Aris that there exists a biography of bSod nams rgyal mtshan by a certain rNam grol bzang po, and also an autobiography, but he was obviously not in a position to consult these works. As we now have access to the biographical tradition of this teacher from Kaḥ thog closely connected with the religious history of Sikkim and Bhutan, I want to readdress the issue of the arrival of the lhö mon Kaḥ thog pa in the Himalayan valleys, and in particular at the famous Padmasambhava shrine near sPa gro. This will be done in two steps: clarifying the identity of Ye shes 'bum [pa] from the Kaḥ thog monastery, and giving an overview of the life of bSod nams rgyal mtshan, with special reference to his activities in Sikkim and Bhutan.

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3 For the change in doctrinal emphasis from the Spoken Teachings to Treasure Teachings within the teaching lineages of Kaḥ thog in the 15th century see Ehrhard (1990: 88, note 20). For the counting of Nam mkha’ seng ge as the second drung and the difficulties of dating him see Eimer (2002: 311).

4 See Aris (1979: 153-154). There are two different sets of dates for dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa], the third member of the bka’ rabs bcu gsum according to the enumeration advocated by Kaḥ thog gi Stu tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho. As documented by Eimer (2002: 327-328 & 330), these dates are either 1254-1327 or 1242-1315. For the lhö mon Kaḥ thog pa in Bhutan compare also Aris (1994: 23): “The Kaba nga school of eastern Tibet operated from within the Nyingma and established an early branch in Bhutan”.
If one consults the biographical account of dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa] in modern works dealing with the monastery of Kah thog and its different successions of abbots, one learns that this master had a great number of disciples from dBus and gTsang in Central Tibet, but there is no record of travels to either Sikkim or Bhutan. What is remembered about this particular regent is his rapport with the Sa skya pa scion 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235-1280), who is said to have visited the nNyin ma pa monastery in Khams on his way back from the Yuan court and to have received on that occasion the sGyur phrub zhi khyo initiation from dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa].

A journey to Central Tibet and to the “Rice Country” ('bras mo lugs)—the name of modern-day Sikkim as known to the followers of Padmasambhava—is recorded in the case of still another master from Kah thog bearing the name Ye shes 'bum pa. This person is known as the “teacher from bZhab [bZhab bu], a region in the Nyag rong province of Khams, and his name turns up in the list of the “Succession of Scholars” (mKhan rabs) of Kah thog. One of the modern histories of the monastery provides the following account:

He who is called Ye shes 'bum pa, the teacher from bZhab [bZhab bu], Nyag rong, a disciple of Jñanakeśa, the one who is both learned and realized—this master of an ocean of the qualities of being learned, venerable [and] realized, in order to revitalize the stream of the doctrine in the regions of dBus [and] gTsang, and in order to search for the sacred site of the hidden valley “Rice Country”, proceeded to the regions of dBus [and] gTsang. In the end, after accruing marvellous benefit for the

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For biographical data on dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa] see Bha bral Rin po che (as in note 1, fol. 32a1-3b3), and Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1, pp. 42.20-44.12). Compare: mkha' spyin 'bras mo lugs ki gnyis nor sgrub pa'i rnal byor mchog btsi legs ldan don gtsug la byang ba byod pa his gnyis gshon ma'i dga'i ston [“A Saga of Sikkim’s Supremeley Revered Four Pioneer Nyingmapa reincarnates and their Torchbearers”] Gangtok: Khenpo L. Tsering, 2002, pp. 20.10-22.16, for an evaluation of the different historical sources concerning the person of dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa], and the conclusion that this regent of Kah thog could not have reached Sikkim. It also noted that the misidentification of dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa] and bZhab bu Ye shes 'bum pa is responsible for the view that one of the early abbots of Kah thog was already travelling to the south, see ibid, p. 22.1-4.
doctrines and the beings, he passed away at the place of his spiritual practice in gTsang.6

The person referred to by the Sanskritized name “Jñānaketu” is the previously mentioned [mKhas grub] Ye shes rgyal mtsesan, the last member of the bla rabs bcu gcum of Kaṅ thog. Both master and disciple; this belong to that phase in the history of Kaṅ thog when the influence of the Treasure Teachings was increasing, the cultural practice of the search for hidden valleys in the Himalayan border regions by rNying ma pa masters from Eastern Tibet being least partly attributable to the change in the doctrinal emphasis within the teaching tradition. At the same time, the transmission of the Spoken Teachings was restructured and new commentaries were written. This becomes especially clear from a transmission represented by mKhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtsesan and bZhad bla Ye shes 'bum pa. In the historiographical literature of the rNying ma pa school, this transmission is noted for having promulgated the sRgyud 'phurul drva ba and the rDo dgyongs pa 'dzus pa—the main tentras of respectively Mahāyāna and Anuyoga—as a unified system, and it was this particular tradition which was continued by rDo mon Kaṅ thog pa bsod nams rgyal mtsesan and his disciple rNam glo rig bzang po.7

Having identified bZhad bla Ye shes 'bum pa instead of dBo 'od Ye shes 'bum pa as the first scholar of Kaṅ thog, who directed his

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6 See Bya bral Rin po che (as in note 1), fol. 44a1-4 (… mKhas grub Jñānaketu 'i sdmdb na Ngyag mon bsngog bla ye shes 'bum pa zhes mKhas bstan grub pa yon tan rgya mtha’i snying ’bde dge rNing dbus gtsang phyogs su bstan rgyan las ba dngos ’shas yul ’bras mo ljonj kyi gcen ’thar phyug dbus gtsang phyogs su phels su bstan 'gro’i dom rma du lhyang ba mtha’na marak gtsang gi snying sa sras gshogs). The characterization of bZhad bla Ye shes 'bum pa by rNam dbyangs rgyal mtsesan (as in note 1, p. 73.13-20) contains nearly the same wording, but it leaves out the search for the “hidden valley” (’shas yul), while adding more information on the localities in gTsang: “At the end of his life he revived the doctrine in [place=n] like Zur ’Ug pa lugs pad gLong bsdangs gling, sogs kyi bstan pa nyams so sngags.”

7 The lineage of this transmission starts with Kaṅ thog dam pa lde gshogs, gTsang ston rDo rje rgyal mtsesan and Byams pa 'bum [pro], but includes only the second and the thirteenth members of the bla rabs bcu gcum, namely rDo mon sogs Nam mkha’ rdo rje (b. 1233) and mKhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtses; see Dzodgom Jakdrel Yenla Dorge (1991:699). Among the new commentaries of the Spoken Teaching tradition during that period, mention must be made of Ye shes rgyal mtses’s exposition of the Theg pa sgsit khyom of Kaṅ thog dam pa lde gshogs; see Theg pa sgsit khyon tena ’brol, Chengdu: Si khrun mi rigs dpØ skrun khang, 1997, pp. 34-417. For the writings of Kaṅ thog dam pa lde gshogs and the commentary of Ye shes rgyal mtses, see Dalton (2007: 109-129).
steps to the Himalayan border regions, we are able to date the arrival of the IHO mon Kaḥ thog pa to Sikkim and Bhutan to the end of the 15th century. The initial spread of this subschool can now be described on the basis of the biographical tradition of Kaḥ thog pa bSod nam srgal mstan.

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The autobiography bears the title “Rosary of Stainless Wish-fulfilling Jewels” (Dri med yid bshin nor bu'i phreng ba) and was completed by bSod nam srgal mstan in sPa gro's Tshag tshang O rgyan rtse mo in the year 1539. Added to it is a work by his disciple Nam grol [Ye shes] bzang po which covers the final events of his teacher’s life; this text must have been composed in the year 1541, since it mentions an “ox year” (glang lo) for the consecration of the reliquary shrine of bSod nam srgal mstan. The place of composition of the latter work is given as “the upper part of dGe rgyas ‘Jag ma lung, below the great glacier mDzod lnga stag rtse, the western gate of the glorious Rice Country.” This seems to suggest that the first representatives of the IHO mon Kaḥ thog pa had their residences in both Sikkim and Bhutan, and became influential in these regions at about the same time.

In the following I will make use only of the autobiography, which is divided into three chapters, dealing respectively with prophecies concerning the person of bSod nam srgal mstan, with the teachers he relied upon during his spiritual training, and with the salvational means he had recourse to both for himself and for others. The second and third chapters are subdivided into five and eleven subsections respectively.

The initial part of the first chapter quotes from the dGongs ’dus lung bstan bu’ rgya ma, that is, from “the cycle of the sealed pronouncements of prophecies for the future” (ma ’ongs lung bstan bu’ rgya ma’i skor) of the Bla ma dgyongs pa ’dus pa, a treasure-cycle of Rig ’dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396). The works of this

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1 See the dPhu med text in Shar kha thog pa bSal nams srgal mstan dpal bzang po'i rtom par tshar pa, Gangtok & Delhi: Deonggar Tshangkay Khyentsey Labrang, 1979, p. 40.2-3 (dpal ’bras mo bshangs (+gshangs) kyi nab sgo gnang chen mDzod lnga stag rtse’i zhdal / dGe rgyas ’jag ma lung gi phu). The name “Great Glacier mDzod lnga stag rtse” for the Kangchenjunga range is already attested in the writings of Rig ’dzin dGe dmos ‘khyung and Pphu Can (1337-1406), one of the earliest and most prolific writers of literature concerning the hidden valleys; see his sTus yul ’bras mo dgyongs kyi gnas yig dbaus pa in Rare Texts of the dPal s Mang Tradition, Gangtok: Sherab Gyaltse, 1981, p. 374-5. For the different gates leading to Sikkim as a hidden sanctuary see note 10.
treasure-discoverer, along with ones of mNga' bdag Nying ral [Nyi ma'i 'od zer] (1124-1192), Guru Chos [kyi] dbang [Phug] (1212-1270) and especially Fig. 'dzin Rama gling pa, are listed at the beginning of the second chapter as those religious traditions which dominated the studies of bSod nams rgyal mtshan up to the age of seventeen years. The names of his teachers during that period include Kun dga' 'bum [pa], Brag mgo rDo rje dpal, öje 'dam blo gros and a certain LA rgyab Shes rab dpal who transmitted the teachings of Klong chen Rab 'byams pa (1308-1364) to the young student. But the first and most important teacher was his own uncle, whom he accompanied up to lhila sa when the latter embarked on a journey to the regions of dBcs and gTsang. This uncle is called in the autobiography mKhas grub Ye shes 'bum [pa], and he is none other than bZhab bla Ye shes 'bum pa from Nyag rog province in Khams.5

For the next three years bSod nams rgyal mtshan stayed in the "land of the gorges" (rongo yul) where he was advised by two further teachers how to follow the life of a yogin and practice austerities. It was only after this experience, at the age of twenty years, that he entered the monastery of Ka' thog and took up his studies with the Great Ačārya Nam mkha' dpal. This teacher imparted to him the classic works of the Spoken Teachings tradition and its exegetical literature, such as the Theg pa spyi beongs of Ka, dam pa bDe gugs; it is noted in the autobiography that this exposition was in the tradition of mKhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan. In addition, Nam mkha' dpal instructed his disciple in the different Indian and Tibetan commentaries on the 'gro 'phyud 'bras bu; the authority of the Ačārya being based on the fact that he had penned an important commentary on this tantra. This course of study having been mastered over a period of seven years, there followed further studies under a number of teachers, all associated with Ka' thog monastery; among these we find the First Druk Nam mkha' senge and the Third Druk rGyal mtshan rdo rje.6

5 See the dgu med text of the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 45.6-57.3, for the studies up to the age of seventeen years. Only after his return from lhila sa did bSod nams rgyal mtshan attend upon other teachers than his uncle. His own biographical account has been given as the "land of gZhab (yul) of Nyag rong [in] Khams" (... mdo khyoms nyag rong gZhab g yul); see ibid., p. 47.3-4. This description has already been noted as an early reference to the "toponyms" (mi 'gros) "Nyag rong"; see Tsersing (1993:101).

6 For the seven year study period with the Great Ačārya Nam mkha' dpal, see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 60.2-65.5. The list of further teachers begins with the First Druk Nam mkha' senge and the Third Druk rGyal mtshan rdo rje; see ibid., pp. 65.5-72.2. A short biographical sketch of Nam mkha' dpal can be found in the Ka thog history written by Yjam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1), p. 72-4.
At the age of twenty-seven years, during a visit to the monastery of bZhaṅ gyal dGon gser in his home region, bSod nams rgyal mtsan saw in a dream his uncle bZhaṅ bla Ye shes 'bum pa who urged him to come to Central Tibet and, more especially, to join him in opening dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, that is, Sikkim. He left soon afterwards for dBus and gTsang, the autobiography giving as the date for this departure the tenth Tibetan month of the year 1493.

Without going into the details of the journey, the autobiography relates next the meeting with the uncle at his residence, called Theg chen chos sde, at the “northern gate” (byang sgo) of the hidden valley known as Rice Land. There follows an interesting account of the difficult process of finding the proper entry point into the sanctuary, with no success being met at the “eastern gate” (shar sgo) and the “southern gate” (lho sgo). It is also stated that bSod nams rgyal mtsan took up this search in place of his uncle bZhaṅ bla Ye shes 'bum pa, who had supplied him with the necessary guidebooks. The mission finally went to the “western gate” (mub sgo) and there came upon a site called dGe rgyas ‘Jaṅ ma lung; having passed through the “inner gate” (nang sgo), which bears the name g.Ya’ ma sTag ri, the small group under the leadership of bSod nams rgyal mtsan arrived in the inner region of the sanctuary, said to be like a realm of the gods.11

20. The title of the commentary of the sGyur ’phral dgra by is given there as gTsang snying rgya lla dang ma long and is considered to be in the same class with the commentaries of Rong zon Chos kyi brang po (b. 1040), Khlong chen Rab ’byams pa and g.Yung ston dDo rje dpal (1285-1364). A biographical note on Nam mkha’ seng ge, pointing out his role as a disciple of Rig ’dzin Rama gling pa, is contained ibid., pp. 66.10-67.13. Bya bral Rin po che’s work (as in note 1), fol. 42a/1, remarks that the First Drung came from the same family as the 23rd member of the bRa rabs lha kyi.”

11 This subsection of the second main chapter has the title “Account of the Opening of the Gate to the Hidden Valley, [Which Is] a Sacred Site” (chigs yol gnas sgo phyed pa’i rnam thar); see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 72.2-82.5. The conception of “gates to the sacred site” (gnas sgo) in the four cardinal directions leading to the centre of a hidden land conceived as a maṇḍala is known from further cases; see, for example, the “four large gates” (gso chen po bzhis) topographically located around the valley of Glang ‘phrang—present-day Langshaling—in Ehnhard (1997a: 342-344). An elaborate description of the four entry points to the hidden valley of Sikkim can be found in sRabs yul ’bras mo lugs kyi gnas yig phan yon dang bstan po rgyal mtsan stag mtshar gi’er med (block print), fols. 19a-b:20b-2 & 42b-3:44b/4. This work is the scriptural basis for the observations by Brauen-Dolma (1985: 248-249) that the gates should be approached depending on the time of the year (in autumn
The remaining two sections of the chapter, dealing with the
teachers of bSod namgs rgyal mtshan, describe activities after the death of bZhi tag bla Ye shel 'bum pa, beginning with the funeral ceremonies
on his behalf. The passing away of his first and most important teacher
postponed for the time being a fuller engagement in the Himalayan
valleys, and he discarded the idea of settling permanently in the inner
part of the hidden valley just opened by him.

Travelling instead to lHa sa and to bSam yas in order to make
offerings for bZhi tag bla Ye shel 'bum pa, bSod namgs rgyal mtshan
came across the Seventh Karmapa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454-1506)
in the Yar klungs valley, and while still in the valley, at the site of Chu
mig dGon gsal, he received teachings from a certain Grags pa 'od zer.
As this master was a member of the family of Rig 'dzin Ramta gling pa,
bSod namgs rgyal mtshan was able to receive those cycles of the
treasure-discoverer's teachings which he had not obtained before. The
next two teachers mentioned in the autobiography also imparted
learning traditions of the nying ma pa school to him. In gTsang dMus
ston chen po Kun brang dpal gave the "reading authorization" (lung) of
the "Collected Tantras of the Old (School)" (gNying ma rgyud 'bum), a
detailed list of the contents of the 35 volumes being contained in the
autobiography; from the same teacher he also received the bKa' brgyud
bde gshungs 'dus pa cycle of mNgag' dbang Nyal ral [Nyi ma'i 'od zer].
Finally, in lHa sa to lHLo, bSod namgs rgyal mtshan received the treasure-
cycles of Rig 'dzin rGod idem 'phu can from a teacher called Chos rje
sTon chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan; this master also transmitted to him
the treasure-cycles of Rig 'dzin Shes rab me 'bar (1267-1326), a

from the eas, in winter from the south, in spring from the west, and in summer from
the north). The text in question is a compilation of different prophecies, consisting for
the greater part of a long quotation from the ones of Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa;
see the relevant section in bSha ma dkonags pa 'bras pa las / ma 'longs lang bsam bla' rgya ma's skor, Gantok & Delhi: Sherab Gyaltsan, n.d., pp. 404.2-448.3 ["bSls yel
'bras mo rgyas kyi gnas yig phyun yon dang bkas pa ngo mtshan gio gnos / fol. 3a-5-46 b/3]. It should be noted that Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa pays no attention
to the western gate. A description of the entry through this gate can be found in the
writings of Rig 'dzin rGod idem 'phu can; see his gNyas 'bras mo 'dcongs
("gshong gi lam yig (manuscript), Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project,
red-no. 1. 27K), fols. 3b ff.; this text also mentions an inner gate with the name Ya
ma lTag rtse (sic). For the observation that the text sPrul 'tshem byung of Rig 'dzin
rGod idem 'phu can—a work dealing with hidden valleys in general—contains
numerous references to dpal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, compare Chihia (1999: 111, note 13).
After a three-year period from 1502 to 1505, devoted exclusively to the spiritual practice of these different teaching traditions at a site known as [Theg chen] chos sdings Yang dben rDo thang—obviously located in the vicinity of the former residence of his uncle bZhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa—bSod nams rGyal mshan pondered the idea of returning to his home region in Kham and to the monastery of Kaṭ thog. At that time repeated invitations arrived at his hermitage in northern Sikiin from sPa gro sTag thang, having been sent by a person named Bla ma Ngang brgyud rGyal ba. He finally took up the invitation. The autobiography records a request made by the Bhutanese disciple when his guest arrived for the first time at the celebrated Padmasambhava shrine of sTag thang:

The regions of dBu gtsang, mDo kham, [and] especially [the monastery of] Kaṭ thog—they are pure lands, [and] the Dharma will always spread [there]. [Here, in] ou Land of the Mos, a barbarous border country, the Dharma has not been diffused: the beings who are foolish [and benighted] like animals—take care of them with [your] great affection! [And] especially at the pilgrimage site of the Great One from Oddityana, at [this cave known as] 'Tiger Den, Where Lions’ Thoughts Are Accomplished’, erect to completion a place for spiritual practice [this] we request [you]!"
The teacher from Kāl thog provides the detailed story of the circumstances of the establishment of this site, to which he later gave the name “Tiger Den, the Peak of Ōdālāhā” (ṣTag tshang o rgyan rse mo). A translation and edition of this part of the autobiography, which closes the second subsection of chapter three and covers the years 1508 to 1508, will be given on a later occasion. There remain nine subsections, dealing with the spiritual achievements of bSod nams rgyal mtshan and his further travels and teaching activities. I select three of them in order to sketch a rough picture of this part of his life-story.

The first one bears the title “An Account of How [the People of] Mon in the South Became Established in the Dharma” (lho mon chos la bkod pa’i rnam thar). At the beginning one finds the interesting statement of bSod nams rgyal mtshan that he was a recipient of all the Spoken Teachings of the rNying ma pa school and, although not a treasure-discourser himself, had also obtained most of the Treasure Teachings available in his time. It was the transmission of the collection of Tantras from both these teaching traditions which he gave to his disciples at the start of his effort to spread these lineages in Bhutan:

In the beginning, at [sPo gro] sTag tshang, the meeting ground of the Dākimis, headed by dBang phyug rgyal mtshan, the sky-yogin, and by the teacher Ngang brgyud rGyal [ba] and so forth—for an assembly of about five hundred [persons] with the proper karmas—I performed in their totality [the transmission of] the Collected Tantras of the Old [School].

cag mon yul mtha’ khab chos mi dar / ded ’gro lha bu’i blun rmongs sms can la / brtse ba chen po rje tsu tung bu / ’tshang bu dang / khyul par o rgyan chen po’i gsum chen sde / stag tshang seng ge bsam grub ’di nyla du / brgyud (sgrugs) sde cig Kyung rab tu ’zugs par zin). For the gDung family of Nyang and their genealogy, see Aris (1979: 138-139); a person named rGyal ba is listed in the accompanying tables; see (ibid.: 136). At the beginning of the 16th century sTag tshang was the most important pilgrimage site associated with Padmasambhava in the sPa gro and Had valleys. See, for example, the biography of the ’Brug pa bka’ brgyud pa yugin Grags pa mtha’ yas (1406-1531), who paid visits to these sites after the death of his teacher lTa bsam Kun dpa’ chos kyi rnying mtho (1432-1503). He, too, referred to sTag tshang under the name of the Seng ge bsam grub cave; see riKid ’byor gyi ’dungs phyug grags pa mtha’ yas dpal bzang po’i rnam thar mgar ’bun ngt mthar nor bu’i phreng bu, Gangtok: Gongpo Tseten, 1977, pp. 190.4-194.2.
these auspicious occasions, there were downpours of flowers, and marvellous signs and countless blessings appeared.\footnote{See the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 232-6-133.3 (shog mar stags zhabang mkha’ ‘gro ’das sa ru ’nam mkha’ rna’ bhyur dzang phug rgyal mtshan dang / blo ma ngang brgyud rgyal rgyas gser byas pa’i / la sras lugs brgya tshams gcig ’zhogs pa las / rnying ma’i rgyud ’bsam yongs tu rtsugs par byas / dus lceang rnam tu mo tag chur babs thong / ngo mtshan las dang byin rabs dpag med byung). This seems to be the first reference to the transmission of the sthungr ma rgyud ’bum in Bhutan; surprisingly, it was a transmission from gTsang and not from Khe thog monastery. In the following period the main source for the diffusion of this collection of Tentras was bLo dra blys lha lung, the main seat of the teaching tradition of Rig ’dzin Padma gling pa (1450-1521). For the importance of the Third Pad gling gsang sras Tshul khrims rdo-rje (1598-1669) in this process, see Bherent (1997:236, note 8).}

After these initial transmissions is the western part of the country, bSod nams rgyal mtshan accepted an invitation from a certain Rgyal mtshan ye shes, affiliated to a monastery called Kun bzung gling. This is one of the monasteries founded by the great Klong chen Rab ’byams pa in Bhutan, and is located in the skur stod valley. As the teacher from Ka’thog travelled afterwards through the region of sNan lung, where another of Klong chen Rab ’byams pa’s foundations can be found, one may surmise that he visited on this journey the sites associated with the famous codifier of the bzogs chen doctrine; and in fact, besides transmitting the cycles of the Spoken Teachings collectively called sGyu phrad zhi khro phur gsum, he also gave empowerments and instructions of the sthungr thig cycles of Klong chen Rab ’byams pa.

Another invitation having arrived from the valley of Bum thang from a person named Thse dbang rgyal po, sSod nams rgyal mtshan gave once again teachings including the sGyu phrad zhi khro phur gsum. On that occasion he encountered Rig ’dzin Padma gling pa, who had just established his temple of gl’ams zhung in Bum thang. Further travels seem to have been mostly undertaken in the western valleys of Thim phu and spa gro. For example, he was active in Glang ma lung and in rKags zim Thog kha; these two places, located in Thim phu and spa gro respectively, are known to have been residences of the gNas rnying pa, a school of Tibetan Buddhism which was firmly established in western Bhutan at the time.

But it was, of course, at O rgyan rts mo that bSod nams rgyal mtshan chiefly propagated his teaching traditions, including the bKhra’ brgyud bdle gshogs ’dus pa, the blo ma dbangs pa ’dus pa, the “Southern Treasures” (bsho gter) and the “Northern Treasures” (byang
At the same place, for the spiritual practice at sPa gro sTag tshang, he gave a second time the transmission of the Tantras of the Old School, on this particular occasion for people both from Mon yul and from Tibet. Among the group of about one hundred disciples, a Tibetan lady of noble origin is mentioned who offered the teacher a 35-volume set of the bNyung ma rgyud 'bum. The autobiography suggests that although there existed at that time diverse reading authorizations of this collection, the complete one as maintained by the master from Kah thog vas quite rare.

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The subsection titled “An Extensive Account of Teachings [and] Initiations [Which Are] of Benefit for the Disciples of the Regions of dBus [and] gTsang” ( dbus gtsang phyogs kyi gdal bya la / chos dbang gnyo don rgyas pa / tshaum thar) describes first travels to Bar’ brog in Lha stod, to ’Brin mtshams, and to mGye yul. In the latter area mNod nam rgyal mtshan gave public discourses to a great number of people, headed by the “princess” (don sa) bDag mo’i drung. He also revisited eastern gTsang, where his teacher Chos rje Gling chen, that is, Kun bzang dpal from the monastery of Gling nu, had since passed away. On that occasion he gave the complete initiations and instructions of the mBa’ brgyud bde gshegs ‘dus pa cycle in mPos khang Iha steng in Nyang smad.

Concerning his travels in dBus, the autobiography states that they began in the year 1529—at the age of sixty-two—when he was invited by a teacher known as dKar chen Kun rda’ gcags pa to the bSam yan vihāra. There he was called upon to consecrate a colossal statue of the

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[7] The travels in the eastern and western valleys are related in the autobiography (as is note 7), pp. 133.3-142.2. For the eight monasteries founded by dKon chen Rab byams pa in Bhotan, see Aris (1979:315, note 19); compare Ehrhard (1992:54-56) for the part of his family line descending from bTum thang Thar pa gling. For a description of the erection of gNam thong based on the biography of Rgya’ bzin Padma gling pa see Aris (1986b:33-37); the consecration of the temple took place in the year 1505. The history of the gNam mKwyin pa in Bhotan and their residences in Gling ma lung and Gags zam Thong kha is also treated by Aris (1979:191-192 & 322, note 133). Concerning the second transmission of the bNyung ma rgyud ‘bum at dBa’i rgyan rise mo, see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 142.3-143.6. The name of the Tibetan lady is given as bNyung ma rgyud ‘bum, see ibid., p. 143.1-2 (dong yung byung sngags-mKhyung ma’i rgyud ‘bum/ long’ shes la chen shes yod pa vong’ dbog byung / sngags sngags bdag triin mMin pa skye pa ’dpe).
Precious Guru Padmasambhava. The project of erecting such a huge icon had been initiated for the "explosion of armed forces" (dmar bzlog), a danger that was quite real at the time in Central Tibet. After the consecration from a throne in front of the bSam yes pillar, he imparted teachings and initiations, among the disciples are mentioned lhod brag [DrO rje gdan] Chos rje lhag ro ba and [bSam yas] gDan sa [pa] Rab 'byams pa dGe ba'i bIe gros, both representatives of the teaching lineage of the master dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa.10

Having visited the different sacred sites in the surroundings of the bSam yas vinārā, including [Ching phu (sic)] and Brag dmar g.Ya ma lung, the teacher from Kaṭh theg proceeded on to lIla sa, where his local patron was a person called bKor gnYer dpun or bKor dbag gYal po. After giving teachings in lhag ro sa skyid shed, he returned via La stod to his residence in the sPa gro valley of Bṣutan, and there stayed in retreat for a longer period. In this period, he was also the chief of the rGyag rtses. In front of an assembly of seven hundred people he imparted teachings and initiations from the traditions of the Spoken Teachings and the Treasure Teachings, including the cycle Zab chos zhi lku ba sgongs pa rtags grol of Rgyi 'dzin Karma gling pa (14th century).17

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10 For the travels in gTsang and the events in bSam yas, see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 144.1-156.1. dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa is known to have been a lineage-holder of the treasure-cycles of Sangs rgyas gling pa and of Dri med Kun dga' (b. 1347). For his position in the lineage of Dri med Kun dga' and the epithet "whitely dressed one" (dkar po ba), see the historiographical work of Sthod stags sngags mKhas mchog [Ngag dbang blo gros] alias Guru bKra shis (18th-19th cent.): bsTan phu'i snying po gtsang chen sngo 'gyur nyes don mI chos kyi 'byung; ba gsal bar bsdus pa'i legs bshad mKhas pa dga' byed ugo mchog gSugs gi rol mtho, Hsingao, 1990, pp. 486-497. In order to spread the teachings of Sangs rgyas gling pa, this master kept up four "residences" (gdan sa). They were known as Dzags pa gSungs 'don gling (in the east), lhag ro rdOs rje gdan (in the south), gTsang gi zha bu gling ("zhab phu lung" in the west), and bSam yas ri bo rtsi (in the north); see Karma M.'gyur tila'ang gi 'byang po (17th cent.): gTsang ri bShad frou phu'is mKhas idam grol las bsus chos rgyal bka' rtsi stobs rgyal got mchog pa'i grol po in rgyas gter bston chos 'byung. Darjeeling: Taklung Tseral rLimpoche Pema Wangyal, 1978, pp. 136.4-127.3. According to this passage dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa was famous for renovating shrines and temples, among whom the cave known as Nyi dga' khla shes phag in lSa gro stags tshang. For the erection of the colonial statue of Padmasambhava in lhod brag by the treasure-discoverer mChog idam mgon po (1497-1531), a disciple of dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa, and the dangers of armed forces in Central Tibet during this particular period, see Ehrenreich (2000:35-37).

17 The second part of the journey to dBus and the last visit to gTsang can be found in the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 156.1-162.3. The period between these
As a kind of overview of the disciples who continued his teaching tradition, bSod nams rgyal mtshan lists about a dozen names in the subsection called "An Account of the Assembling of the Great [Spiritual] Sons Who Transmitted the Dharma" (chos brgyas ba chen dus pa'i 'rnam thar). The enumeration starts with dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa and includes both lHa ro Chos rje—now qualified as being a member of the family of Guru Chos [khy] dbang [phug]—and Rab 'byams pa dGe ba'i blo gros, namely the respective representatives of dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa's teaching lineage from lHos brag and lSa'bsam yas. Two of the disciples were at the same time bSod nams rgyal mtshan's own teachers: dMus ston chen po Kun bzang dpal from gTsang and Chos rje ston chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan from lHa stod lHos. The noble Tibetan lady dPo snam sa'i bdag mo drung is now identified as an "emanation of [Ye shes] mkha' 'gro rgyal" (mtshan rgyal sprul pa), the Tibetan consort of Padmasambhava. The list also contains the name g.Yang lung [Chos rje] Kun dga' legs pa'i 'byung gras; this person is always mentioned as being in the company of the female patron of bSod nams rgyal mtshan in the different episodes noted above.

One also finds in the list the name of Chos rje Grags pa rgyal mtshan, one of the sons of Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa; he was that offspring of the great treasure-discoverer from Bhutan who had inherited the temple of gTan zhung in the valley of Bum thang. Another disciple of the teacher of Ka'h thog was Rig 'dzin bTan gnyis gling pa (1480-1555), whose alternative name is given in the autobiography as the "treasure-discoverer [from] Chu bzang" (chu bzang gter ston). The list closes with the names of two brothers,
simply referred to as the "ones from mNga' ris" (mnga' ris pa). This designation refers to mNga' ris Pa'chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487-1542) and to mNga' ris Rig 'dzin Legs dan bdud 'joms rdzogs rje (b. 1517). If one consults their biographies from a later historical tradition, one finds references to meetings of these teachers from Western Tibet with both the founder of the Iho mon Kag thog pa and with rNam grol brang po, his immediate successor.19

The final advice offered by bSod nams rgyal mtsahan before he passed away at O rgyan rtses mo called for his disciples to follow their spiritual pursuits.

19 see the biography of mNga' ris Pa'chen Padma dbang rgyal written by rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1610-1718). "Dus pa mdo dbang gi blo ma bskyedrabs: rnam thar nga mskar phad pa'i phyang bs ("Sman tshis Sheg Rig Phug Spod, 37), Lex. S.W. Tashi gnyenpa, 1972, p. 223.2 (ka brag pa chos rje byod nams rgyal mtsahan go pis nas khye 'ba ree mdud); this meeting with bSod nams rgyal mtsahan occurred in 1529 during the latter's sojourn at the bSsam yas vshara mNga' ris Rig 'dzin Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje was regarded as an incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod Idem 'phu can and, like his predecessor, undertook to open dba gti 'bras mo lhongs. This happened after the death of his elder brother in the year 1542; for a meeting with rNam grol brang po at the former residence of bZag la Ye shes 'bum pa in [Theg chen]chos dongs, located at the northern gate of the hidden valley, see ibid., p. 371.6 (las snyang 'bras grongs phyogs su phelbs tse ya gro stog thang mar rin po che kap thog pa rnam grol brang po dang lugs chos zanggu su phelbs dangs dpyad). mNga' ris Rig 'dzin also stayed for some time in sPags rTag shang and obtained there an "introduction certificate" (kha byang) for a trance-cycle which he later retrieved from the bSsam yas vshara. See rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las: 'Khor gya dbyangs saga'i khrigs yig chos don gsal ba lim brang stong cing po ("Sman tshis Sheg Rig Phug Spod, 66), Lh. S.W. Tashi gnyenpa, 1973, p. 477.1-2 (sogs rgya stag ston du byrgogs du o rgyan chen po chad rnam sngon rdo rje dbang spyan drangs chung dber gnas snon yas mchama pha legs par thugs snares su bstan).
practice at such sacred sites in Tibet as Zab phu Long and 'Ching phu (se) in the vicinity of the bSam yas vitaha. But first and foremost they were urged to stay at the "great hidden valley" (sbras yu, chen po) called dpal gyi 'bras mo gshongs and at sPa gro sTag tshang; and in the latter case at a site called Nyi zla dmar mo, which obviously refers to the previously mentioned Nyi zla [bla shyor] phug. If one consults, in addition to the autobiography, the account by Rin grol [Ye shes] byang po, it becomes clear that in 1539 the master from Kah thog had a dream of the country known as Rigs Land, and that this particular vision resumed in his handover to his disciple a written scroll describing the entry through the western gate.29

Although the literary sources are quite reticent about the activities of the following representatives of the Ho non Kah thog pa in Sikkim and Bhutan, it is known at least that in the middle of the 17th century the western gate was entered once more by a teacher from Eastern Tibet in order to gain access to dpal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, and that this time the journey resulted in the permanent presence of this sub-school of the Nying ma pa in the hidden valley of Sikkim. Such a settlement process had already occurred in Bhutan at the beginning of the 16th century, and one may attribute this to the fact that the memory of Padmasambhava and the expectation that his prophecies would be fulfilled were very much alive at the sacred shrine in the sPa gro valley during that particular period.

REFERENCES


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29 For the section of the final advice dealing with the sacred sites see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 220-221. The dream of the year 1539 is to be found ibid., pp. 15-3.16-5. Concerning the "Four Great Yogins" (ma'i byor thu) or the "Four Great Yogins [Who Are] Brothers" (ma'i byor mchod byul) associated with the definitive opening of dpal gyi 'bras mo gshongs—including Phun thog rnam rgyal (1604-1670), the first Buddhist ruler of Sikkim—see the work of Iya bai Rin po ché (as in note 1), fols. 133b-133a/2. Additional information on Kah thog pa Kun tu bzang po, who at that time entered through the western gate and founded in Sikkim a "site for a monastic commune" (dgyi 'dun gyi rje), is contained in the work of Khenpo L. Tsering (as in note 5), pp. 231.17-232.16.
