

Narrative Transformations: The Spiritual Friends of Khri Srong Ide brtsan

The Tibetan emperor (*btsan po*), Khri Srong Ide brtsan (742–c.800), enacted state patronage of Buddhism in Tibet, not on his own, but in close collaboration with a host of his closest subjects. Hugh Richardson counted “[f]ifty-one persons in all including groups of inner ministers, outer ministers and governors (*sa-la-dbang-po*) of Mdo-smad and generals” swearing an oath to protect the religion in the bSam yas proclamation (Richardson 1998 [1980]: 93). The *sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* emphasises the importance of ministers and generals to the administration of the Buddhist institutions in Tibet (see below). They even exercise control over the translation of Buddhist texts. The role played by Spiritual Friends (*dge ba'i bshes gnyen, kalyāṇamitra*) is especially important to the spread and practice of Buddhism during the imperial period.¹ These religious figures held high office and were granted special status in Tibet as Buddhist teachers. The importance of certain Indic works at an early stage in Tibetan Buddhist historiography, such as the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* mentioned below, suggests that this term may have held divine connotations as well.

The histories covered later in this contribution, for example Pel-liot tibétain 149, increasingly emphasise the role of Khri Srong Ide brtsan's Spiritual Friends. The *dBa' bzhed* portrays these religious figures as predestined to spread the Dharma in Tibet, propelled by past karmic links forged in India. The *sBa bzhed's* extended narrative of the same events strengthens these bonds by incorporating into its narrative the well-known tale of three brothers who make aspirational prayers after constructing a *stūpa* for the Buddha Kāśyapa

¹ See Uebach 1990 on the identity and status of the Spiritual Friends, as well as the continuity of their lineage, from the ninth century onwards.

(‘Od srung). The twelfth-century *Zangs gling ma* replaces one Spiritual Friend in this triad, the Tibetan *dBa' gSal snang*, with the Indian tantric master, Padmasambhava. This substitution is part of the tendency of the *Zangs gling ma* to privilege India, the land of the Buddha, over its barbaric borderland. Gradually, Indian religious figures eclipse the Tibetan ruler as the primary agents who establish Buddhism in Tibet, and this forms part of a larger transformation of Khri Srong Ide brtsan from divine emperor into disciple-king.

IMPERIAL TIBET

In his “explanatory edict” (*bKa' mchid*) to the famous bSam yas inscription,² Khri Srong Ide brtsan claims that he patronises Buddhism against the wishes of some of his subjects, but in accord with the practice of his ancestors. As the name suggests, this proclamation contains a narrative explanation of the inscription's declaration. It records the construction of Ra sa 'Phrul snang monastery and the temple at Kwa chu in Brag dmar as setting the precedent for Khri Srong Ide brtsan's construction of bSam yas. It implicitly claims that

² See Doney 2013a: 69–72 on the bSam yas inscription. See Tucci 1950: 47–50 and 98–100, Richardson 1998 [1980], and Coblin 1990 for full translations and transliterations of an evidently faithful transcription of the *bKa' mchid* found in dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba's sixteenth-century *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (henceforth *KGT*). I have also consulted *KGT* vol. 1, 370–76 for a third transliteration of the text. See Kapstein 2006: 66–68 and Walter 2009: 72, n. 84 for divergent partial translations of the *bKa' mchid*. Hugh Richardson (1985: 27) dates this text, like the *bKa' gtsigs*, to between 779 and 782 CE (see also Scherrer-Schaub 2002: 267, n. 20).

erecting temples constitutes one of the traditional responsibilities of Buddhist *btsan pos*. It explicitly states that this practice faced strong opposition in Tibet during Khri Srong lde brtsan's reign:

From the time when the religion of the Buddha was first practiced with the building of the *vihāra* (monastery) of Ra sa in the reign of the fourth ancestor Khri Srong brtsan down to the practice of the religion of the Buddha with the building of the temple at Kwa chu in Brag dmar in the reign of the father, Khri Lde gtsug brtsan, five generations passed.

After the *btsan po* the father [of Khri Srong lde brtsan]³ went to heaven, some of the "uncle-ministers" had thoughts of rebellion and destroyed the practice of the religion of the Buddha that had been continuous from the time of [his] forefather. They objected (*snyad*) that it was not right to practice [according to] the southern gods and religion. Furthermore, they wrote a law forbidding its future practice.⁴

Then, when the [present] *btsan po* attained the age of twenty, at first there were bad prognostications and evil omens (*ltas shig ngan*). Whatever rituals were supposed to be practiced, the bad prognostications and evil omens [continued] for many months. So [Khri Srong lde brtsan] abandoned as illegitimate the law forbidding the practice of the religion of the Buddha. When [the Tibetans] acted according to the worship of the Three Jewels, immediately there was a change for the good. Then, accompanied by a Spiritual Friend (*dge ba'i bshes*

³ Weldon South Coblin (1990: 170–71) and Matthew Kapstein (2006: 67–68) construe the whole passage here in the first person, which is not supported by the text (and its use of honorifics like *zha snga*), but correctly expresses the sense that this constitutes a semi-autobiographical account that approximates the perspective of a living *btsan po*—and in that sense deserves the title "royal apology [for Buddhism]" (*bKa' mchid*).

⁴ Could this be a reference to 'Bal lDong tsab and Lang Myes zigs, mentioned in the so-called Zhol inscription and elsewhere (Doney 2013a: 65–69)? If not, then there were more intrigues at court than the Zhol inscription mentions. If the *bKa' mchid* does mean these two ministers, then it is interesting that it does not mention them by name, and also represents their conspiracies in religious terms—as an attempt to destroy Buddhism rather than (just) to overthrow the *btsan po*. The depiction of a generalised group of "anti-Buddhist ministers," whether or not it fairly represents the situation in 755 CE, becomes a hugely important literary *topos* in later Buddhist histories, as we shall see. These histories vilify Ngan lam Klu khong, whom the Zhol inscription praises, as a well-known anti-Buddhist minister; despite the record of his oath to protect Buddhism in the longer bSam yas edict (see van Schaik and Doney 2007: 199–200) and his mention in the *sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* (see below). There is an obvious discrepancy between earlier and later representations of Klu khong as, respectively, Khri Srong lde brtsan's most trusted minister and the main obstacle to the success of his Buddhist aspirations. This problem causes Shakabpa to posit (I think mistakenly) the existence of two Klu khongs (Shakabpa (D. F. Maher transl.) 2010 [1976]: vol. 1, 130–32).

gnyen), [the *btsan po*] heard the Dharma. After [this *bKa' mchid*?] document was brought into his presence, it was boxed (*sgroms*)⁵ so that the religion of the Buddha would be promulgated and practiced.⁶

The *bKa' mchid* claims that Buddhism is not a new threat to the empire's stability. It is rather a state-sponsored religion "that had been continuous from the time of [Khri Srong lde brtsan's] forefather." The text then states that Khri Srong lde brtsan simply returned to the Buddhism of his predecessors. He did so, it claims, after sensibly heeding the bad omens that followed the abandonment of the Buddha's religion in Tibet. Here augurs form part of both court life

⁵ Giuseppe Tucci translates terminative + *sgroms* as "advised also to [spread]..." with the note: "*sgroms*; cfr. *sgro*" (Tucci 1950: 48 and 82, n. 103). Richardson (1998 [1980]: 93) translates "there was deliberation how" but does not explain his choice. Perhaps he reads *sgroms* as *sgros* ("method") as in *gros bsdur ba* "to discuss" (lit. "to compare methods"). Coblin translates this as "concentrated upon (?)," with a note offering "*sgrims* 'to squeeze, tighten; concentrate one's energies upon'" in place of *sgroms* (Coblin 1990: 171 and n. 101). Kapstein ends his translation just before this phrase. Michael Walter translates: "[as an act for] propagating the Buddhaharma, [the Btsan po ordered them] boxed to accomplish that" (Walter 2009: 72 n. 84, his parentheses). Thus, for Walter *sgroms* = "boxed", presumably from the noun *sgrom bu* "box", which appears along with the same preceding *yi ge bris* in the preamble to the *bKa' mchid* (KGT vol. 1, 373.13–15—with divergences in Richardson 1998 [1980]: 96.35–37 in square brackets): *gna' da 'chad bod yul du dkond cog gsum gyi rten bcas te / sangs rgyas kyi chos mdzad pa'i lo drung gi yi ge bris pa / sgrom bu'i nang na mchis pa'i dpe' [dpe] //*. A Dunhuang text concerning funerary rituals, Pelliot tibétain 1134 (lines 63–64), appears to concur in using (*b*)*sgroms* as a verb: *ra skrom lug sgrom gyis ni bsgroms gshin / sgrom mar bar ni bcug ste* "the dead are(?) boxed with a goat box [and] sheep box, and placed in a red box." Walter (2009: 72, n. 84) translates *yi ge* as "texts" brought before the *btsan po*; but I believe that *yi ge* refers to the *bKa' mchid*, given the words of its own preamble.

⁶ KGT vol. 1, 373.15–74.7 (with divergences in Richardson 1998 [1980]: 96.38–97.12 in square brackets):

@ / btsan po bzhi mes khri srong lde [omits lde] btsan gyi ring la / ra sa'i pe har [bi har] brtsigs te sangs rgyas kyi chos thog ma mdzad tshun chad / btsan po yab khri lde gtsug brtsan gyi ring la / brag dmar gyi kwa chur gtsug lag khang brtsigs te sangs rgyas kyi chos mdzad phand chad gdung rabs lnga lon no // @ / btsan po yab dgung du gshegs kyi 'og du zhang blon kha cig gis hur 'dums kyi blo zhig phyung ste / yab mes kyi ring tshund chad / sangs rgyas kyi chos mdzad [mdzad mdzad] pa yang bshig go / de nas yang snyad [snyed] ni lho bal gyi lha dang chos bod yul du bgyi ba'i myi rigs shes / gzhan yang phyind chad bgyid du [tu] mi gngang bar bka' khrims bris so / @ / de nas btsan po zha snga nas lo (374) nyi shu bzhes pa na / thog ma ni phyag spring dang lhas [ltas] shig ngan te / cho ga ci mdzad pas bshad kyang / dgung zla du mar phyag spring dang ltas ngan nas / sangs rgyas kyi chos bgyid du mi gngang ba'i bka' khrims kyang khrims su mi bgyi bar dor / dkond cog gsum gyi mchod pa yang bgyi zhes bgyis na gzod bzang por gyurd to // @ / de nas dge ba'i bshes gnyen gyis bstangs te chos kyang gsan / yi ge yang spyang sngar brims nas / sangs rgyas kyi chos spel [dpe] zhing mdzad par sgroms so /.

and the resources afforded to *btsan pos* when making important decisions. Imperial Buddhism appears to coexist with divination, which plays a part in the administration of the empire.

Further, the *bKa' mchid* depicts Khri Srong lde brtsan's conversion as practical rather than philosophical. It records that the augurs' omens caused the *btsan po* to return to Buddhism and seek a structured explanation of the Dharma from a Spiritual Friend (*kalyāṇamitra*). The status of this *dge ba'i bshes gnyen* is clarified in the later Skar cung inscription, which indicates (as Brandon Dotson has remarked) "a privileged teacher of Buddhism, appointed as a personal Spiritual Friend to the emperor."⁷ The post is in the imperial period connected to high status religious figures like the great Indian Buddhist missionary Śāntarakṣita rather than to diviners, etc.⁸ Thus Khri Srong lde brtsan's rather pragmatic decision, based on augury, precedes what modern Westerners may consider the classic circumstances of conversion, explication of Buddhist scripture by a learned Spiritual Friend.⁹

Further evidence for Khri Srong lde brtsan's political intentions is found elsewhere in the *bKa' mchid*. It records that the *btsan po* established a council of ministers and petty rulers, not only monks, in order to codify the Dharma:

By inviting the minor princes under his dominion, the Lord of 'A zha and so on, and the ministers of the exterior and the interior, [Khri Srong lde brtsan] held a counsel and they considered in brief these things together: first, that trust should be placed in the commandment of the Buddha; second, that the example of the ancestors should be followed; and third, that help should be given by the power of Spiritual Friends.¹⁰

⁷ Dotson 2007: 6, n. 23. For other useful perspectives on the role of the *kalyāṇamitra* in Indic Buddhism and during the Tibetan imperial period, see David Snellgrove 1987: 177–80 and 411–14; Uebach 1990.

⁸ See below on the Dunhuang document IOL Tib J 689/2. I have yet to find an early text designating a *mo* diviner, for instance, as a Spiritual Friend.

⁹ Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (2014: 120–21, n. 11) offers an Indic narrative example of the latter principle in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* tale of the Buddhist king: "Gōpala, in his youth a weak character, eventually met a *kalyāṇamitra* and became a powerful (*mahābala*) ruler, 'sweet in speech' (*priyavādin*) and 'compassionate' (*ghṛīṇin*)."

¹⁰ *KGT* vol. 1, 375.14–18 (with Richardson 1998 [1980]: 98.3–7 in square brackets): 'bangs su mnga' ba rgyal phran 'a zha rje la sogs [bstgogs (*sic*)] pa dang / phyi nang gi blon po rnams la bka's rmas / bka' gros su mdzad nas / gcig tu na sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das kyi bka' lung la bsten / gnyis su na yab mes kyi dpe lugs la 'tshal / gsum du na dge ba'i bshes gnyen gyi mthus bstangs pa dang yang sbyar.

The spread of Buddhism is as much a political as a religious act here. The text suggests that hieratic Buddhism was gradually becoming entwined with the court hierarchy. The court already sent the *Annals*, legal edicts and tax collectors out to the furthest reaches of the empire. Now it began to send edicts in favour of Buddhism. Khri Srong lde brtsan apparently offered this organ of proclamatory power willingly in order to promulgate the practice of the Buddha's religion.¹¹ In return, these edicts naturally portray him positively, as patronising and promoting Buddhism in accordance with his ancestors and the pre-existing traditions of Tibet.

Khri Srong lde brtsan evidently played a leading role in deciding the character of Buddhism in Tibet. In the *sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*,¹² he even seeks to control the words of the Buddha by systematising the translation of Buddhism in Tibet. The main part of the text is a handbook for translating Buddhist terms from Sanskrit into Tibetan. Its brief opening narrative ascribes the handbook to Khri Srong lde brtsan, perhaps in order to give authority to the administration of religious orthodoxy throughout the empire:

In the year of the pig (783–4), the [*btsan po*'s] court resided in Zung kar. In the presence of the *btsan po*, the great monk [Bran ka Dpal gyi] Yon tan, the great monk [Myang] Ting nge 'dzin, chief minister [Mchims] Rgyal gzigs [Shu theng], and the chief minister [Ngan lam] Stag ra [Klu khong] and others, the lords and ministers conferred, [and] in his presence systematised the translation of terms from Sanskrit into Tibetan and decreed [thus]: ...¹³

¹¹ Again, see Scherrer-Schaub 2002, and now 2014 on the complex political relationships kept in balance between the *btsan po* and his military and administrative underlings as evidenced in these proclamations.

¹² Ishikawa (ed.) 1990. On the discovery of the fragments of the *sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* in Ta pho (Tabo) monastery, Spiti, see Panglung 1994. Translated and transliterated in Panglung *idem*: 164 and 168 respectively; and in Dotson 2009: 141. Transliterated in Scherrer-Schaub 2002: 319. Scherrer-Schaub (2002) further discusses this text within the context of the eighth- and ninth-century Tibetan empire and Buddhism. She suggests dating the original *bkas bcad* to 783 CE, rather than 793 CE, shortly after the *bka' gtsigs* and *bKa' mchid* (*idem*: 267, n. 20). Dotson (2009: 141) concurs: "The Tabo version of the *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* opens with a different annalistic entry that dates to the reign of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan, most likely 783–784."

¹³ Translation and transliteration following Dotson 2009: 141. *sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*, Tabo folio *ka*, *recto* lines 1–2 reads:

phag gi lo la pho brang zung kar ba (=na) bzhugs // btsan po'i spyang ngar ban de chen po yon tan dang ban de chen po ting nge 'dzin dang / blon chen po rgyal gzigs dang / blon chen po stag ra las stsogs pa' / rje blon mol ba'i spyang ngar rgya gar skad las bod skad du [ming btags pa] rnams / gtan la phab ste bkas bcad pa' /.

This short statement provides evidence of the power of Khri Srong lde brtsan, as well as his monks and ministers, over the interpretation of Buddhism in Tibet.

The Tibetan emperor not only worked in an executive capacity, through edicts. Certain early Buddhist works attribute their authorship to Khri Srong lde brtsan. One such text, the *bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* ("Criteria of the Authentic Scriptures") may genuinely have emanated from the court of Khri Srong lde brtsan and perhaps even be based on the teachings of a Spiritual Friend.¹⁴ Although analysis of this commentary would make a worthwhile article in itself, I can only mention it briefly here, before moving on to later texts that increasingly emphasise the importance of the Buddhist subjects of Khri Srong lde brtsan.

THE POST-IMPERIAL PERIOD

In narratives from the post-imperial period onwards, Khri Srong lde brtsan often needs to rely on what the texts suggest are his spiritual superiors in order to spread the Dharma. Over time, religious figures that he invited to translate and teach in Tibet begin to draw the focus away from the king. Tibetan histories also increasingly glorify India as the source of Buddhism, and therefore portray this eighth-century Tibetan borderland as inferior to the land where the Buddha became enlightened and taught.

¹⁴ The *bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma las mdo btus pa*, a commentary on the tenth chapter of the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, is found in the bsTan 'gyur (Peking no. 5839, Derge no. 4352). Ernst Steinkellner (1989) argues convincingly that Byang chub rdzu 'phrul, the attributed author of this commentary is none other than Khri Srong lde brtsan—in part because of the religious name 'Phrul gyi lha Byang chub chen po that Khri Srong lde brtsan's tomb inscription at 'Phyongs rgyas confers (*gsol*) upon him.

Kapstein (2000: 45) agrees that this text probably emanated from the court of Khri Srong lde brtsan. He also follows Steinkellner in noting that the tradition of Dharmakīrti, followed by the *btsan po*'s contemporary, Śāntarakṣita, is less evident in the *bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* than is a reiteration of earlier *Mahāyāna* formulations such as those of the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* itself (*idem*: 225, n. 53). Yet Kapstein does not rule out the possibility that Śāntarakṣita had a hand in the work (*ibid*). Kapstein quotes passages from the *bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma* concerning logic and *karma* (*idem* 45–46; see also his more extensive translation from this source in Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 119–23, from which I have borrowed the English translation of its title). This Buddhist commentary also contains a rejection of the teachings of Mani(chaeism), popular in Central Asia at the time (see *idem*: 95–6 for Kapstein's translation and discussion). R.A. Stein (1980: 334 *et passim*) suggests that the wording of this condemnation betrays some Tang influence. As Scherrer-Schaub (2014: 157, n. 97) has most recently pointed out, the text assigns the role of Spiritual Friend to Śāntarakṣita, "though possibly as a post-eventum narration" (see also *idem*: 144–45, n. 70 for further doubts concerning the date and author of this text).

Pelliot tibétain 149, one of the tenth-century manuscripts from the Mogao cave complex near Dunhuang, reserves the central roles in its history for religious masters rather than the king.¹⁵ This narrative, concerning the transmission of the *Āryabhadracaryā-praṇidhāna* prayer into Tibet, focuses less on Khri Srong lde brtsan than on the Spiritual Friends mentioned in the *bKa' mchid*, above. Although it does not directly designate any of the religious figures at the court of Khri Srong lde brtsan as Spiritual Friends, the first part of the narrative gives a condensed form of the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* narrative concerning 102 Indic *kalyāṇamitras*, described as such, and so apparently makes an implicit connection between India and Tibet as inhabited by Spiritual Friends. Another Dunhuang text, IOL Tib J 689/2, records the succession of the "Spiritual Friends" residing at bSam yas and Ra sa 'phrul snang temples.¹⁶ It shows that perhaps the earliest Tibetan Spiritual Friend, Ye shes dbang po from the dBa' clan, inherited the role from the Indian Śāntarakṣita and passed it on to another dBa' clan member, named dPal dbyangs. These Spiritual Friends must have wielded significant power over these important religious sites. The fact that a member of the dBa' family handed down power over bSam yas to another member of his family suggests that the role acquired potent and prestigious status among Tibetans too.

The Indic *kalyāṇamitras* in Pelliot tibétain 149, however, include deities such as Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra, suggesting a divine status above merely a high social position as teachers of Buddhism. Pelliot tibétain 149 represents Khri Srong lde brtsan as having privileged access to Śāntarakṣita. Here though, the latter is the *btsan po*'s spiritual superior, whom he approaches with humility. Unlike IOL Tib J 689/2, there is no mention of Ye she dbang po. Instead, Pelliot tibétain 149 reports the king as saying that dBa' dPal dbyangs "is a student (*slob ma*) of mine, a monk."¹⁷ Thus the text suggests that Khri Srong lde brtsan is a teacher, perhaps even a *kalayāṇamitra*, as does the prayer contained in another Dunhuang text, IOL Tib J 466/3.

¹⁵ See van Schaik and Doney 2007 on this text. I shall only briefly discuss its antiquity here. The archaic orthographic and linguistic features in the text itself indicate that it may be a copy of an earlier, possibly ninth-century text. These could all be conscious archaisms adopted to give the text an authentic flavour, yet there is no doubt that Pelliot tibétain 149 belongs to the earliest stratum of the post-imperial period, when Buddhist authors reformulated historiography as a narrative of the Dharma.

¹⁶ See Karmay 1988: 78–80, Uebach 1990: 407–13 and van Schaik and Doney 2007: 191–92.

¹⁷ Pelliot tibétain 149 recto, line 8: bdag gi slob ma dge sbyong zhig lags so zhes gsol ba dang /.

That prayer calls the *btsan po* a “Spiritual Friend of Tibet” (*bod khams kyl dge ba’l bshes gnyen*).¹⁸ This prayer suggests an increase in the religious status of Khri Srong Lde brtsan at some point in the later imperial or post-imperial period, from an emperor learning the Dharma with a Spiritual Friend to a religious teacher himself. This status is perhaps also echoed in Pelliot tibétain 149, but overall he is more of a patron than practitioner in this text.

In Pelliot tibétain 149, Khri Srong Lde brtsan leaves the actual task of teaching and transmission to two of the Spiritual Friends listed in IOL Tib J 689/2, Śāntarakṣita and dBa’ dPal dbyangs. In this narrative, Khri Srong Lde brtsan certainly knows the *Āryabhadracaryāprañidhāna* prayer, since he recites it when bidding farewell to his student, but he does not attain *siddhis* from it. The narrative focuses more on Śāntarakṣita and dBa’ dPal dbyangs than on the king. A post-imperial history that includes Khri Srong Lde brtsan does not have to centre entirely on him, apparently, but goes on to focus on the socially inferior but spiritually superior religious figures in the narrative.

The Testimony of Ba

The second diffusion (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism, from the tenth century onwards, brought with it the rise of conflicting religio-political powers in Tibet. This period also witnessed the growing influence of narratives detailing the decline of the Dharma and of the cult of Padmasambhava on Tibetan historiography. As a result, the eleventh-century *dBa’ bzhed* (“The testimony of the dBa’ [clan or one of its members];” henceforth *Testimony of Ba*)¹⁹ goes beyond the ninth- and tenth-century laudatory descriptions of Khri Srong Lde brtsan. It depicts him occasionally as inferior in status to the Buddhist masters that he invites to Tibet. This *Testimony of Ba* narrative was later expanded to form the perhaps twelfth-century *sBa bzhed*. The *sBa bzhed*’s redactors interpolated additional episodes into a pre-existing narrative that resembles the *dBa’ bzhed*, rather than creating a completely new representation of the imperial period. The *sBa bzhed* thus retains many imperial-era metaphors, but its depiction of Khri Srong Lde brtsan is dominated by later religious concerns. These different themes remain to be disentangled, and their exact dates and provenances assessed.

¹⁸ See van Schaik and Doney 2007: 195–96 and Doney (2016) on this text. Following a recent, more detailed investigation of IOL Tib J 466/3, I tend towards affirming the reading given in the former article against the doubts expressed in the latter.

¹⁹ See Doney 2013b on the *Testimony of Ba* tradition.

In the *dBa’ bzhed* and *sBa bzhed*, Buddhist transmission largely bypasses Khri Srong Lde brtsan. First, Śāntarakṣita is invited to become the Spiritual Friend of the king.²⁰ Mirroring the succession of Spiritual Friends evidenced in IOL Tib J 689/2 (above), Śāntarakṣita next transmits the Dharma to a Tibetan religious figure, dBa’ gSal snang.²¹ gSal snang then leaves the position of [*bcom ldan ’das kyī*] *ring lugs*, which is then bestowed on dBa’ dPal dbyangs by the *bt-san po* (*dBa’ bzhed* 18b4). Elsewhere, dBa’ lHa gzig and Myang Ros kong are also referred to as acting as Spiritual Friends, but not Khri Srong Lde brtsan (*dBa’ bzhed* 15a2–3). The *sBa bzhed* also uses the term Spiritual Friend to refer to deities (in this case Tārā), as in the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* and its condensed narrative in Pelliot tibétain 149, but again not the Tibetan emperor.²² Like Pelliot tibétain 149, the *Testimony of Ba* represents Khri Srong Lde brtsan primarily as a patron rather than a practitioner of Buddhism.²³ Both narratives apparently originated in the ninth or tenth century, as their presence in the Mogao library cave suggests. The story in Pelliot tibétain 149 seems to have been lost to later authors, but the *dBa’ bzhed* narrative, from at least the thirteenth century onwards, became one of the dominant paradigms of historiographical writing about the imperial period.

THE DHARMA’S PREDESTINATION

The *dBa’ bzhed* claims that Khri Srong Lde brtsan was predestined from a former life to spread Buddhism in Tibet, together with his Spiritual Friends. It records that Śāntarakṣita, dBa’ gSal snang and

²⁰ *dBa’ bzhed* 5b6; see also 6a2, 6a7, 10a3 and 10b1 where he is said to act as a Spiritual Friend.

²¹ In the *dBa’ bzhed* (17b6), he is called a Spiritual Friend (under his ordained name, Ye shes dbang po).

²² See *sBa bzhed* G 39, and another précis of the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* in *idem* 46.

²³ Both Śāntarakṣita’s higher status than the *btsan po* and also the importance of the dBa’ clan to the *dBa’ bzhed* narrative, are found in Pelliot tibétain 149 as well. In that lineage history, the *btsan po*, despite maintaining a higher symbolic position as ruler of Tibet, is primarily a patron of Buddhism. Both Pelliot tibétain 149’s narrative and the *dBa’ bzhed* each stress the importance of one (different) dBa’ clan member for the continuing practice of Buddhism in Tibet. Khri Srong Lde brtsan gives his royal blessing to this transmission, but plays only an ancillary role in continuing the tradition of reciting the prayers or performing the practice, as fits the purposes of lineage transmission narratives stemming from the period of dynastic fragmentation in Tibet.

Note also that in the *dBa’ bzhed* (18b4), Ye shes dbang po gives up his official role in order to meditate in a hermitage at lHo brag, which is similar to dPal dbyang’s decision in Pelliot tibétain 149. This is a further way in which the two narratives are structurally tied together, and suggest that religious life may only be fully followed away from the royal court or mundane responsibility.

he were born previously in India, instigating a karmic connection between them. This narrative of a previous life, in which a Buddhist aspires to become enlightened in a future rebirth, of course owes a debt to the long Indic literary (*avadāna*) heritage that precedes it, and the *dBa' bzhed* may be drawing on an Aśokan paradigm in its narration here.²⁴

Other evidence suggests that the idea of a predestined triad meeting in Tibet had by then gained some currency in oral or literary histories.²⁵ However, the *dBa' bzhed* is the first extant history to identify *these* three as predestined to spread the Dharma. As I shall show below, the expanded *sBa bzhed* version strengthens the bonds between them as a group, reincarnated in a *single* previous life. Later histories repeat and adapt this theme in order to pay tribute to India as the land of the Buddha. Whereas this tale was perhaps first intended to glorify Khri Srong lde brtsan by providing him with an auspicious previous life, eventually these histories praise India and its religious masters even to the detriment of Tibet and Khri Srong lde brtsan's imperial incarnation.

The *dBa' bzhed* tells the narrative of predestination in two stages. Śāntarakṣita first reveals that *dBa' gSal snang* was his disciple in a previous life:

Innumerable lives previously, you were my main disciple generating the Thought of Enlightenment and you were named Ye shes dbang po.²⁶

²⁴ See Strong 1979 and 1983: 56–70 on the Indic precursors to this narrative *topos*.

²⁵ Keith Dowman (2002: 12) relates that IHa btsun sNgon mo reportedly “discovered” the text wherein Padmasambhava, Khri Srong lde brtsan and Śāntarakṣita's build *Bya rung kha shor Stūpa*, as *gter ma* from bSam yas in the eleventh or twelfth century. The *gTer ston* apparently hid it again to be discovered again by Śākya bzang po in the fifteenth century, “because the time for its dissemination were (*sic*) not ripe” (*idem*: 32). Ronald Davidson (2005: 226) rightly expresses doubt as to the antiquity of this kind of *yang gter*, especially those attributed to IHa btsun sNgon mo.

However, it appears that a similar story was present in some form before the twelfth century. Kalsang Norbu Gurung (2009: 260–61) relates another story from the Bon *mDo 'dus*, which he dates to the eleventh century. The *mDo 'dus* records that Confucius (Kong tse) was predestined to build a castle with two helpers, because they were previously born as three brothers in India. Sørensen also outlines similar tales in the *bKa' gdams legs bam*, “most with oral roots in eleventh and early twelfth century Kadampa circles” (Sørensen 2008: 76). They narrate the previous lives of ‘Brom ston rgyal ba’i ‘byung gnas (1004/5–65). In them he usually forms as part of an Indian triad linked by *karma*. It is at present impossible to be sure which of these versions is oldest, and hence which three people originally made up the group.

²⁶ Translation following Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 40. *dBa' bzhed*

Śāntarakṣita then later tells Khri Srong lde brtsan that, in a former life, they prayed together for the sake of Buddhism in Tibet. He asks:

Did you forget that while adorning and guarding our temple at the time of the doctrine of Buddha ‘Od srung, we prayed together that the [holy] doctrine might be established in Tibet?²⁷

The *dBa' bzhed* emphasises that this bond is due to their past karmic link. As in Pelliot tibétain 149, where Śāntarakṣita interprets the *btsan po*'s dream as foretelling the transmission of the *Āryabhadracaryāpraṇidhāna* prayer, the Indian abbot is yet again in a position to elucidate the somewhat miraculous (but within Buddhist cosmology reasonable) grounds for the spread of Buddhist teachings in Tibet. In the *dBa' bzhed*, however, not only Khri Srong lde brtsan but also a Tibetan Spiritual Friend is in the privileged position to hear this explanation from Śāntarakṣita. Unlike the *btsan po* here, *dBa' gSal snang* was never the equal of the abbot in a past life. However, he was a practitioner, and received the teachings and lineage transmission from Śāntarakṣita. The rest of the *dBa' bzhed* cements this teacher-disciple relationship; the lineage transmission from India passes by the *btsan po* and flows instead to *dBa' gSal snang*.

The *sBa bzhed* combines the two speeches of Śāntarakṣita. As a result, the *btsan po*'s earlier life with Śāntarakṣita and the abbot's previous life with *dBa' gSal snang* refer to the *same* past life. It thus expands this “predestination” episode further, while reemphasising the importance of India over Tibet. Śāntarakṣita asks Khri Srong lde brtsan:

Did you forget that while [we were] three children/simpletons adorning and guarding the temple at [the time of] the doctrine of Buddha ‘Od srung, [we] made a sand *stūpa* and prayed together that I would become a *paṇḍita*, that you would become the king [of one of India's] border-lands, that *gSal snang* would become an emissary [between us] and that [we] would spread the holy doctrine in [that] border-land kingdom?²⁸

6a2–3 reads: tshe rabs du ma'i sngon rol nas sems bskyed pa'i nga'i sras kyi thu bo yin te ming yang ye shes dbang po dbyangs su gdags so zhes gsung (a note above the text apparently miscorrects this to dbang por gdags so zer).

²⁷ Translation following Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 46. *dBa' bzhed* 8a4–5 reads: mkhan po'i zhal nas sangs rgyas 'od srung gi bstan pa la 'o skol gyi gtsug lag khang gi rgyan srungs bgyis pa'i tshe bod yul du dam pa'i (lha) chos cig gzugs par smon lam btap pa mnyel dam zhes gsung pas /

²⁸ Here I quote mGon po rgyal mtshan's eclectic edition of three manuscripts (*sBa bzhed G*), but see the similar account in other versions in the next footnote.

Unlike the *dBa' bzhed*, all *sBa bzhed* versions agree that *dBa' gSal snang* shared a previous life with Khri Srong lde brtsan.²⁹ The *sBa bzhed* thus creates a new karmic link between *gSal snang* and the *btsan po*. This brings the minister and the king closer together in the *sBa bzhed* than in the *dBa' bzhed*. In the majority of later histories, this triad of important eighth-century figures includes Padmasambhava rather than *gSal snang*. Yet no version of the *Testimony of Ba* mentions him in this context.

THE ZANGS GLING MA

Compared to the *Testimony of Ba*, *dBa' gSal snang* plays a minor role in the *Zangs gling ma* biography of Padmasambhava by Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192).³⁰ The *Zangs gling ma* (henceforth *ZL*) instead identifies Padmasambhava as part of the triad predestined to spread Buddhism in Tibet. It often repeats this narrative, for instance when both Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita intend to return to India after building bSam yas. Padmasambhava reveals that Khri Srong lde brtsan, Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava spent a previous

sBa bzhed G 21.7–12 (with the parts where it loosely correlates with the shorter narrative in the *dBa' bzhed* 8a4–5 in italics) reads:

mkhan po'i zhal nas / sangs rgyas 'od srungs kyi bstan pa la gtsug lag khang brgyan bsrungs kyi byis pa gsum gyi tshe / bye ma'i mchod rten byas te / ngas pan ṭi ta bya ba / khyod kyis mtha' 'khob rgyal po bya ba / gsal snang gis bang chen byas nas nged gsum gyis mtha' 'khob rgyal khams su dam pa'i chos dar bar bya bar smon lam btap pa mnyel lam zhes gsungs.

²⁹ dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba's quotation of the *sBa bzhed* in *KGT* vol. 1, 315.14–18 reads:

mkhan po'i zhal nas sangs rgyas 'od srung gi bstan pa la gtsug lag khang rgyan srung gi byis pa gsum mchis pa'i tshe bye ma'i mchod rten byas te / ngas paṇḍita dang / khyed kyis rgyal po / gsal snang gis pho nya byas te mtha' 'khob kyi rgyal khams su dam pa'i chos spel bar smon lam btap pa ma nges sam zhes gsungs pas ...

Stein's *sBa bzhed* S 17.1–4 reads:

[mkhan po'i zha(l) nas omitted] sngon sangs rgyas 'od srung gi bstan pa la gtsug lag khang gi rgyan srung kyi byis pa gsum gyis bye ma'i mchod rten byas te / ma 'ong pa na ngas paṇ ṭi ta bya ba / khyed kyis mtha' khob kyi rgyal po bya ba / gsal snang gi pang chen byas la thang khob kyi rgyal khams su / dam pa'i chos dar bar bya bar smon lam btap pa de snyel lam gsungs pas / ...

The redactors of *sBa bzhed* S have quoted this part almost *verbatim*, and so we can clearly see the effect of transmission and/or dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba's modernised spelling in *KGT*.

³⁰ See Doney 2014 on the creation and redactional history of this work. Here I quote from one of the most complete exemplars of the earliest attested recension, *ZLh*, which I also reproduce in this work. It briefly mentions a lCas [=sBas] Mang po rje gSal snang, as one of the messengers whom Khri Srong lde brtsan sends to invite Padmasambhava to Tibet (*ZLh* 24b4ff.).

life together in “Ma ku ta”, which may or may not be identical with Magadha, as three brothers building a *stūpa* and making aspirational prayers to spread the Dharma in Tibet.³¹

Khri Srong lde brtsan maintains close relations with these two figures in *ZL*. Because of the king's connection with Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava in a previous life, he tearfully implores them to stay with him until he dies. This is Khri Srong lde brtsan's longest speech in *ZL*. It also constitutes a brief “autobiography” from the king's perspective. I shall only quote the beginning and end:

E ma ho! Please listen, both of you masters!
In that troubled period [we] made aspirations,
When we prayed in the land of India.
Again, through our wishes,
Both of you masters took birth in India,
The country of the sacred Dharma.
Due to the rule of *karma*, I was born as king,
[in] the land of red-faced ones...

According to the prophecy of Master Bodhisattva (Śāntarakṣita),
You arrived through the force of former vows
And in the Tiger [Year we] laid the foundations, in the Horse [Year we] completed [the building]—in five years.
Since your kindness has already been great,
Before I, Khri Srong lde brtsan, die,
Please do not depart, please stay.
I beg you to think of [your former] vow and give me your command.³²

ZL provides a strong sense of religious continuity by placing the aspirational prayers of the main protagonists in a previous life and in India. This differs markedly from the Tibetan royal tradition of Buddhist kingship displayed in the imperial documents described above.

³¹ *ZLh* 36a5: ma ku ta'i yul dag tu / mon phrug spun gsum dag du skyes / mcho rten gcig cing smon lam btabs /.

³² *ZLh* 37b1–38a2 reads:
e ma ho slob dpon rnam gnyis gson / ya nga'i tshe la smon lam btap / rgya gar yul du smon nas ni / yang ni smon lam btap pa yis / slob dpon rnam gnyis rgya gar yul dam pa chos kyi yul du skyes / bdag ni gdong dmar bod kyi yul / las kyi bdag {g}nas rgyal por skyes /... / slob dpon bo dhe sa twa'i (38a) lung bstan yin / sngon gyi thugs dam dbang btsan byon / stag la rmangs brtngs rta la lngas 'byongs / snga pa sku drin che yis kyang / dngos khri srong lde btsan ma gum 'tsher / bzhud par mi zhu bzhugs par zhu / thugs dam dgong la bka' gsang (= gnang in all other versions) zhu / zhes zhu ba phul.

The idea that, as Karmay says, “the characters who have a major role to play are all predestined”³³ is meant, perhaps, to reassure Tibetans that the Dharma was destined to come to Tibet; but it also seems to privilege India as “the country of the sacred Dharma” over Tibet, “the land of red-faced ones” where this Dharma needs to be spread.

PADMASAMBHAVA’S PRE-EMINENCE

The above *ZL* account of Khri Srong lde brtsan imploring two religious figures to stay in Tibet stands in stark contrast to his hasty dismissal of Padmasambhava in the *dBa’ bzhed*, since the Indian master decides whether or not to stay in Tibet, rather than the *brtsan po*.³⁴ *ZL* describes Khri Srong lde brtsan as a somewhat fallible royal disciple of Padmasambhava. It narrates that, when they meet, neither will prostrate to the other since each believes himself to be superior. Khri Srong lde brtsan ends up bowing to Padmasambhava, after the latter sings a song demonstrating his higher status, and magically burns the king’s robes (*ZLh* 29a4–30b2). In the song, Padmasambhava describes himself as many things, including a Spiritual Friend (*dge bshes*):

From the book of appearance, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*
I teach both the provisional and ultimate meanings,
I am the *kalyāṇamitra* Padmasambhava
Possessing the instructions on distinguishing *saṃsāra* from *nirvāṇa*.³⁵

This depiction of the role of a Spiritual Friend is quite reserved compared to the higher tantric teachings and practices also expounded by Padmasambhava in *ZL*, and accords more with a *kalyāṇamitra*’s description of Buddhism given in the *bKa’ mchid*.³⁶ Yet his enlightened and divine status as an emanation of Amitābha, as well as his miraculous power, is elsewhere made clear. In response to Padmasambhava’s displays of learning and power, the Tibetan king then becomes the Indian master’s disciple.³⁷ Though Khri Srong lde brtsan

³³ Karmay 1988: 32; though he is talking about the same story in the *’dra ’bag chen mo* the remark is easily transferable.

³⁴ *dBa’ bzhed* 13a–b, see Doney 2014: 4–7 on their contrasting depictions of Padmasambhava.

³⁵ *ZLh* 29b1–2 reads: snang srid ’khor ’das kyi deb cha la / drang don nges don gyi [b]shad pa byed / nga dge bshes padma ’byung gnas yin / ’khor ’das shan ’byed kyi gdam ngag bdog /.

³⁶ See *KGT* vol. 1, 374.9–75.14; Richardson 1998 [1980]: 97.17–98.3.

³⁷ *ZLh* 30b2–4, in which Khri Srong lde brtsan invites Padmasambhava to be seated on a high throne and praises him as his *guru* (*e ma na mo gu ru*). His speech

is himself an emanation of Mañjuśrī, he takes a subordinate position and Nyang ral depicts him as a fallible mundane figure in contrast with Padmasambhava throughout the remainder of the narrative.

In *ZL*, Padmasambhava is always the key to Tibet’s salvation. Khri Srong lde brtsan’s intention to build *bSam yas* does not detract from his comparatively deluded character and inferior status. While *ZL* draws on symbols of Indian kingship, it also privileges the religious aspect of life above worldly concerns, and endows Buddhist figures with higher status than royal figures in the social stratification of Tibet. It is tempting to speculate that this portrayal stems from Nyang ral’s need to stand out in the crowded marketplace of competing lineages in Tibet. He perhaps found in Padmasambhava a “culture-hero” far better suited than Khri Srong lde brtsan to attract followers from both old and new tantric traditions. Padmasambhava is a *siddha*, like Nyang ral, and *ZL*’s image of him, as a sorcerer emanated from Amitābha, could perhaps have appealed to people who value magical displays and/or Buddhist devotion. Yet it is also important to stress that, as the chief *guru* in Nyang ral’s system of Buddhism, his biography would naturally depict Padmasambhava as superior to anyone else with whom he came into contact.

CONCLUSION

Leaving aside such speculations, it is true to say that this depiction influenced the later portrayal of Padmasambhava, and his royal disciple Khri Srong lde brtsan. The trajectories of such depictions over time can reverse even the position of their original narration. *dPa’ bo gTsug lag phreng ba*, for instance, reverses the position of the *dBa’ bzhed*, when quoting the *sBa bzhed*.³⁸ He argues that no Indian religious figure would bow to a Tibetan king. But this is just what the *dBa’ bzhed* states did happen. This reversal of earlier historical representations of Khri Srong lde brtsan and Padmasambhava also influenced interaction between living religious figures and those in mundane authority in Tibet, such as the seventeenth-century relationship between Yol mo sprul sku bstan ’dzin nor bu and sDe srid gTsang pa Karma bstan skyong dbang po. The former (at least rhetorically) attempted to base his relations with the regent on those between the spiritually superior Padmasambhava and Khri Srong lde brtsan (see Bogin 2014: 328–30).

also emphasises that Tibet is a land of red-faced *srin* demons that are difficult to tame (*ZLh* 30b4–5).

³⁸ See Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: n. 152 comparing *KGT* 321 with *dBa’ bzhed* 11b1–2.

In an important sense Khri Srong lde brtsan becomes eclipsed in his own histories. Religious figures such as Padmasambhava displace him from the role of central protagonist in the narrative of his times. The *bKa' mchid* depicts the *btsan po* as the preeminent agent championing Buddhism in Tibet. After this very human, “first-person” narrative representation, Khri Srong lde brtsan is called a Buddhist king, a teacher, and a reincarnation predestined to spread the Dharma. There are indications in the Dunhuang documents that Khri Srong lde brtsan is being repositioned as a religious teacher rather than merely a patron. Had these depictions become the dominant stories passed down about Khri Srong lde brtsan, perhaps he could have become a fully enlightened royal figure like his seventh-century royal predecessor Khri Srong rtsan/Srong btsan sgam po.³⁹ However, the *dBa' bzhed* partially displaces him from the central role in its narrative, and focuses more on *dBa' gSal snang* and Śāntarakṣita. In *ZL*, Padmasambhava’s life provides the main narrative thread, since it is his biography. Khri Srong lde brtsan is a disciple of Padmasambhava, yet although he receives many teachings he does not become a *guru* himself. Between them, the *dBa' bzhed* and *ZL* influence how future generations view the eighth century—as dominated by religious rather than royal figures.

From the twelfth century onwards, Khri Srong lde brtsan is generally depicted as subservient to his contemporary religious masters. Thus it was inconceivable to *dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba*, in the sixteenth century, that Padmasambhava would have bowed to a symbol of mundane power—even if the king was also nominally an incarnation of Mañjuśrī.⁴⁰ Identifying the conflicting trajectories of the portrayals of Khri Srong lde brtsan, Śāntarakṣita, *dBa' gSal snang* and Padmasambhava over time can enable us to delve deeper into the culture of the text in Tibet. It also forms the basis for understanding Tibetan historiography’s increasingly Buddhist view of the past and the transformations that this wrought on protagonists in its narratives.

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³⁹ On the representation of this figure in Tibetan Buddhist historiography, see Sørensen 1994: 14–22.

⁴⁰ The superiority of one’s *guru* to even buddhas and bodhisattvas is a point that David Snellgrove (1987: 176–80) makes strongly in the context of Indic tantric Buddhism.

among others. Catalogued by the International Dunhuang Project online at <http://idp.bl.uk/>

IOL Tib J 689/2 List of the Spiritual Friends of bSam yas and Ra sa 'phrul snang. Catalogued by the International Dunhuang Project online at <http://idp.bl.uk/>

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