

PART 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1.I THE "ANCIENT TANTRA COLLECTION" AND THE TWO TEXTS

The rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum

The *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* (NGB) – the "Ancient Tantra Collection" – is a large corpus of Tantric scriptures that has a special canonical status for the rNying ma school which is traditionally associated with the earliest transmission of Buddhism into Tibet that took place during the Tibetan Imperial period (7th to 9th centuries CE). As a typical Tibetan canonical collection, a *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* collection looks much like a Kanjur (*bka' 'gyur*) collection, which is the main orthodox Tibetan scriptural canon, and it uses the same methods of physical reproduction. Also like the Kanjur, the texts it contains are all considered to be *bka'* or *buddhavacana* – the transmitted teachings of the Buddhas and other enlightened beings. However, it differs from the Kanjur in that its texts are exclusively Vajrayāna: it does not contain exoteric Sūtrayāna texts.

Moreover, its texts are all those of the three classes of Inner Tantras as classified by the rNying ma pa: Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga (*rnal 'byor chen po; rjes su rnal 'byor; rdzogs pa chen po shin tu rnal 'byor*). These are the highest three categories within the rNying ma pa enumeration of the Nine Yānas; the three lower tantras of Kriyā (*bya ba'i rgyud*), Ubhaya (*upa'i rgyud*) or Caryā (*spyod pa'i rgyud*), and Yogatantra (*rnal 'byor gyi rgyud*), are thus not included in the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, not to mention the three non-tantric vehicles of Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna and Bodhisattvayāna.

Some sections of the texts within the NGB also circulate as independent smaller collections: for example, many rDzogs chen texts of the Sems sde category circulate separately in a collection called the *Bairo rgyud 'bum*; and separate collections of the Seventeen Tantras of rDzogs chen's Man ngag sde class (*rgyud bcu bdun*) also circulate separately. There is additionally a separate collection called the *rNying ma bka' ma* which contains some materials in common with the NGB, but which is much more varied, since it also contains numerous commentarial literatures.

A small proportion of NGB texts are also shared with the Kanjur. A handful, like the *Guhyasamāja* and *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, occur in the main body of the Kanjur, while a slightly larger number, including the *Guhyagarbha*, occur only in special *rNying rgyud* sections of the Kanjurs, which vary in their extent according to how sympathetic the particular Kanjur editors were to the inclusion of rNying ma tantras. The sDe dge Kanjur has quite a large *rNying rgyud* section, as do some of the Peking editions, and the Tawang Kanjurs from Arunachal Pradesh (as described by Jampa Samten) are something of a curiosity, since they have so many *rNying rgyud* texts that they are almost a hybrid between a Kanjur and a *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*. Nevertheless, the majority of NGB texts were originally excluded by the compilers of the Kanjur, on the basis that no Sanskrit originals for them were ever found. This was one of the major reasons why the NGB had to be compiled as a separate collection.

Thus the origins and status of the NGB texts are shrouded in controversy. For almost a millenium, a few Tibetan voices have derided them as apocryphal forgeries, while most have revered them as authentic translations from the Sanskrit and other Indic languages, many from the times of Padmasambhava and the great emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan. Yet even if their origins and authenticity have occasionally been controversial, the historical actuality of their compelling cultural and religious power is quite beyond question. For well over a thousand years, the rNying ma tantras have exerted a remarkably profound and pervasive influence within Tibetan religion, and their potency remains quite undiminished into present times.

Traditionally, in actual social usage, NGB collections have mainly been understood as concrete repositories of Dharma to rest on a shrine, or as potent sources of blessing for conferring of *lung* by a mechanical reading aloud. Another less tangible function is normative – in a very broad sense, they serve as the measure and model for new *gter ma* revelation, which in general should not deviate too much from the NGB in style and contents. These are the main uses of the NGB texts, and with only a few exceptions, they

have not generally been understood as texts for systematic analytic study. One consequence is that over the centuries, their comprehensibility or incomprehensibility has not been a life or death issue to the tradition, whose true scholarly base draws instead on the parallel commentarial tradition.

Ritualistic usage of texts is often seen as an ancient and widespread pattern in Buddhism, notably in Mahāyāna. Gregory Schopen and Paul Williams, for example, argue that early Mahāyāna comprised a collection of textual cults, each taking as their primary religious practice the reverential worship of a specific sūtra as sacred object and source of blessings (Schopen 1975; Williams 1989:21-22). A variant of the pattern also persists in contemporary Mahāyāna traditions like Nichiren Shoshu and related groups, where devotional worship of their scripture, the Lotus Sūtra, is even more important than its study, and where study of the Lotus Sūtra is largely approached through the medium of Nichiren's commentaries (but rNying ma pa lamas directly consult their NGB scriptures far less than Nichiren Shoshu followers do the Lotus Sūtra).

Most Tibetan canonical corpora retain various features of such ritual usage to some degree, but the NGB perhaps retains them more completely than many. This is partly because of the NGB's unusually esoteric nature as a collection comprising exclusively the tantric scriptures of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. This esotericism has also entailed that direct access to NGB texts has always been limited by stringent initiatory qualification. This is not unique to the rNying ma pa of course – such initiatory secrecy is so important to esoteric Vajrayāna in general that ignoring it constitutes the seventh of the well-known Fourteen Common Tantric Root Downfalls. Nevertheless, the upshot has been that extremely little of the NGB has ever been the subject of regular monastic classroom study and very few lamas (let alone the general public) ever read widely within it.¹ The only exceptions are a tiny handful of texts that were for technical reasons somewhat less esoteric and widely recited by laity and clergy alike (notably the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*); and a further tiny handful of seminal more esoteric initiatory texts that were widely studied by groups of initiates, typically in closed environments such as retreats or restricted teachings.

It is important to recall how extremely few indeed among the approximately 1,000 NGB texts proper have their own individual commentaries: perhaps only three that could be considered genuinely widespread, i.e. the most famous of the many *Guhyagarbha* tantras, the *mDo dgongs 'dus*, and the *Kun byed rgyal po* (including component parts of it that can stand on their own).² Yet even within this very reduced essential selection where commentaries on specific texts do exist – explicating the three core texts of the Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and rDzogs chen Sems sde traditions respectively – the situation is remarkably parlous. The *mDo dgongs 'dus* and its commentaries are nowadays almost never studied in the classroom, and its rites are only rarely performed. In fact, the study of the *mDo dgongs 'dus* and its commentarial literature has been in serious decline since the advent of *gter ma* in the 12th century (Dalton 2002:11). To be truly realistic, it might be more accurate to say that among the many NGB texts, only the *Guhyagarbha* tantra nowadays survives as a specific text for classroom study, with its own living commentarial tradition.³

As well as the three famous root texts above, especially in monasteries that specialise in the sNying thig cycles, the Seventeen Tantras of the rDzogs chen Esoteric instruction Class (*Man ngag sde rgyud bcu bdun*) are also nowadays studied: yet here also, the Seventeen Tantras themselves remain somewhat

¹ In general, the rGyud section of the Kanjur bears some general resemblance: only few of its texts were regularly studied in the classroom, although slightly more than the NGB.

² Sometimes one finds ritual texts associated with a specific NGB text – for example, there are some such associated texts of the Buddhasamāyoga in the rNying ma bKa' ma – but these are not usually commentaries on the root tantra.

³ In the Preface to the modern reproduction of the gTing skyes NGB edition, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche tells us that thanks to masters such as mNga' ris paṅ chen, sMin gling gter chen and their students, the commentarial tradition of the *sGyu 'phrul* (of which the *Guhyagarbha* is the main tantra) remains intact, while the other NGB tantras retain their traditions for empowerment and reading transmission ("mnga' ris paṅ chen sku mched dang/ smin gling gter chen yab sras kyi bka' drin las da lta'i bar sgyu 'phrul gyi bshad rgyud dang/ gzhan dbang lung gi rgyun ma nyams par bzhuḡs pa rnam" 1v.4-5). Although Khyentse Rinpoche stops slightly short of the point, the clear implication is that these tantras *only* retain their ritual transmissions, and not their explanatory teachings.

incomprehensible, and can only be approached through their general commentaries, especially those by Klong chen pa.⁴

More recently, the new expanded *rNying ma bka' ma* collections have turned out to contain commentaries on no less than six of the *Yang gsang rDzogs chen* tantras. Commentaries on the other eleven have been lost, but seem to have existed at some stage. There are also a few tiny commentaries on some Sems sde texts, and some interlinear notes on Klong sde texts.⁵ However, the fact that the recent discovery of these small commentaries came as something of a surprise merely underscores how rare it is for individual NGB texts to have their own commentary.

In addition, of course, there are another two texts placed in both the Kanjur and the NGB—the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* and the *Guhyasamāja*—which have copious commentarial literature in the Tenjur (*bstan 'gyur*) and elsewhere, but these two most popular of Tantric scriptures are not specifically NGB texts.

It is only in the last few years that external pressures of globalization and modernization have begun the process of transforming notions of the NGB from a ritually secret repository of spiritual blessing to a collection of texts for analytic study and reading. Modern technologies of text reproduction and Western understandings of the nature and purpose of text have contributed a great deal to this process. With possibly the sole exception of Tarthang Tulku's deluxe new votive editions, recent NGB reproductions by modern technologies have generally been made by methods that implicitly suggest the collection as an intellectual rather than devotional or ritual item (perhaps even when this was not intended). It is unclear what the consequences of this ongoing transformation will be, and it seems an interesting and important topic within the study of religion and the anthropology of literature, which we hope to return to elsewhere. But here, we are more concerned with exploring another facet of globalisation – the technicalities of philological analysis and critical editing of NGB texts by modern scholarly methods.

Why study the NGB?

Modern scholarship has not yet come to an understanding of these fascinating texts, and the purpose of our present research is to begin to address this more systematically than has so far been possible. Our approach has been philological, because out of the almost one thousand extant NGB tantras, not more than three or four texts of any significant length have so far been subjected to detailed philological analysis. This situation in modern academic scholarship closely reflects that of traditional scholarship, where the NGB texts – as we have seen – were predominantly materials for occasional ritual recitation. Nevertheless, we believe a great deal can be learned from philological analysis.

Even at such an early stage as this, philological analysis of the NGB has already yielded definite results. It shows us that the NGB very likely has the unique distinction of concealing within its vast bulk much of the oldest extant esoteric tantric literature in the Tibetan language – a large quantity of it probably dating from between the 8th and 10th centuries. This makes the NGB an extremely important historical source for the analysis of the formative years of Tantric Buddhism in Tibet – quite possibly, our most important and substantial single source. In brief (we are dealing with these issues at greater length elsewhere), the evidence for the NGB containing such early materials is as follows:

- A significant number of major NGB titles are cited within the ancient manuscripts recovered from Dunhuang. These include not only those well-known and unarguably Sanskritic NGB titles shared with the main body of the Kanjur, such as the *Buddhasamāyoga*, the *Guhyasamāja* and the *Śrī Paramādya*, but also some titles of texts rejected by the Kanjur compilers and unique to the *rNying ma*. Among these are the

⁴ Germano reports that close scholarly understanding of the 17 Tantras is nowadays well beyond the range of traditional scholarship. He illustrates nicely: “. . . one of the foremost living Longchenpa scholars, 'Jigs med Phun Tshogs, told me that many years ago in his youth he had thought to write an extensive commentary on the *Direct Consequence of Sound Tantra* (traditionally viewed as the root of the other sixteen Tantras), but ultimately had to abandon the idea because the commentarial and oral tradition simply wasn't sufficient to fully resolve the many problematic passages in that text.” Germano 1992:42.

⁵ Jean-Luc Achard, personal communication, 10 February 2004.

Kīlaya bcu gnyis and its *phyi ma*;⁶ the *Glang chen rab 'bog*; and the *sNying rje rol pa*. We are not yet sure how these titles relate to the surviving NGB texts of the same name.

- Significant passages of esoteric tantric text found within the ancient Dunhuang manuscripts also occur within the extant NGB texts – including some of the above named. The Dunhuang text IOL Tib J 331.III, for example, shares one substantial passage with one of the *Kīlaya bcu gnyis* texts (which we will analyse elsewhere); and a further one with the *Phur bu Myang 'das* (which we will also present here).
- The early Tibetan polemical works, from the 11th century onwards, condemn as Tibetan-originated apocrypha many titles that we still find extant among the NGB collections – including the *Phur bu Myang 'das* that we will study here.
- A well-known Tibetan historical tradition, attested in such very old proto-canonical texts as the *'Phang thang ma* catalogue, indicates that while such exoteric Tantras as the *Mahāvairocana* or the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* were included on the official registers, the more esoteric tantras were listed elsewhere (Karmay 1998: 5-6; Mayer 1996:15) – in other words, that at least some esoteric texts of the type later collected in the NGB were transmitted during the imperial period, even if not openly (if this had not been the case, it would be very difficult indeed to account for the substantial esoteric Tantric finds at Dunhuang).
- We know that the widespread production of new scripture was integral to Indian tantric practice of the eighth to eleventh centuries; and that Indian tantric practice provided the role model for early Tibetan tantric Buddhism.

Taken as a whole, existing evidence therefore indicates that the NGB includes substantial amounts of esoteric tantric materials of considerable antiquity, often predating the Dunhuang deposits; in other words, the oldest extant esoteric literature in Tibetan.

Moreover, while some of this apparently 8th to 11th century material was Indic in origin, some was quite likely also of Tibetan compilation, even if usually based on Indic models and textual sections: the early Tibetan polemicists and the learned Kanjur editors were probably not always mistaken on this score. While admittedly only little material has so far been subjected to detailed philological analysis, that which has shows unmistakable signs of some Tibetan redaction or construction on the basis of existing Indic material (Karmay 1988 passim; Mayer 1996: 91-148).

The Phur pa Tantras

If it is a characteristic of most NGB tantric material to be Tibetan compilation or reconstruction (some of it early) based on Indic models and materials, two sections within the NGB perhaps demonstrate this feature most obviously: rDzogs chen and the rDo rje Phur pa tantras of Mahāyoga. Arguably the most popular among all rNying ma traditions, rDzogs chen and Phur pa alike are clearly derived from predominantly Indic materials; yet in India, neither enjoyed anything remotely resembling the huge prominence and quantity they so very quickly achieved in Tibet. While some excellent work has already been done on the origins of rDzogs chen, notably by Samten Karmay, less has been done on the equally remarkable indigenous expansions of Tibetan Mahāyoga. Moreover, since Karmay (1988 passim) found that rDzogs chen itself developed out of Mahāyoga, investigation into the development of Tibetan Mahāyoga seems all the more important at this juncture. Hence we chose for analysis, from out of the vast and uncharted breadths of the NGB, two Tibetan Mahāyoga Phur pa texts that we expected might encapsulate the features we were interested in: comparatively early indigenous Tibetan compilation, that was closely dependent upon Indic materials.

⁶ Take note that there are actually three quite separate tantras named *Kīlaya bcu gnyis* or *Phur pa bcu gnyis* in the extant NGB editions – a fact that has misled scholars as varied as R.A. Stein (1978:437-8) and more recently, Jake Dalton (2005).

The rDo rje phur bu mya ngan las 'das pa'i rgyud and the rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud

Since virtually no commentarial literature exists on individually named NGB Phur pa texts, and since so few modern scholarly analyses have been made, our choices were unavoidably blind to some degree. Nevertheless, they proved excellent.

(i) The first text we chose was the substantial *Kīlaya Nirvāna Tantra*, or *rDo rje phur bu mya ngan las 'das pa'i rgyud chen po* (*Myang 'das*). This text initially looked interesting for two reasons: firstly, it is one of the most widely quoted in the Phur pa commentarial literatures both old and new. It has been referred to as especially significant for its teachings on the Completion Stage Lord (*rdzogs rim gtso bo*).⁷ Moreover, it has clear importance for both the rNying ma and Sa skya Phur pa traditions.⁸ Secondly, it might well have been well-known in the formative period of the rNying ma Phur pa teachings. A text of this name stands at the head of all the Phur pa tantras selected for condemnation as Tibetan-composed apocrypha by Pho brang zhi ba'i 'od in his polemic of 1094.⁹ Zhi ba 'od's criticism can not *in itself* constitute incontrovertible evidence for assuming a Tibetan origin for the *Myang 'das*; he includes many texts we have good reason to believe were in fact Indian, as well as texts which were always explicitly authored by Tibetans.¹⁰ Yet, ironically, it can now serve to demonstrate that the *Myang 'das* was already of some importance or renown in the late eleventh century, even though we must add the caveat that we cannot be certain of the relationship between the text as we now have it and the long and short versions of it to which Zhi ba 'od refers.¹¹ Nonetheless, we hoped it might illustrate more doctrinal aspects of the NGB Phur pa literature, and those which have become central for the commentarial literature, while also illuminating features of critical importance in the early development of the tradition. It did. As we worked on editing the *rDo rje phur bu mya ngan las 'das pa'i rgyud chen po*, we discovered that it also shares a substantial passage of text in common with a Dunhuang manuscript, IOL Tib J 331.III, further confirming the antiquity of at least some of its contents.

(ii) The second text we chose, the *Vajra Wrath Tantra* (*rDo rje khros pa*), was inspired in part by our reading of the introductory notes to the *dPal rdo rje phur pa'i bsnyen sgrub gsal byed bdud rtsi'i 'od can*, a popular Sa skya pa sādhanā from the *sGrub thabs kun btus* (vol Pa, p.140ff). According to this source (141.3), the famous Sa skya pa or 'Khon lugs Phur pa tradition claims descent from a scripture called the *rTsa ba rdo rje khros pa'i rgyud*, and it also considers the Kanjur's one and only Phur pa text, the very short *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu* as translated and arranged by Sa skya Paṇḍita, to be an excerpt from the *rTsa ba rdo rje khros pa'i rgyud*. It is on the basis of the *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu*, says this introduction, that Padmasambhava composed a text called the *rDo rje lam rim*, in accordance with which Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216) then composed the various Phur pa sādhanā outlines and explanations now collected in the *Sa skya bka' 'bum*. The long, medium and short sādhanās of the 'Khon lugs Phur pa were composed by Dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan, (15th throne-holder of Sa skya, 1312-1375), on the basis of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's works.

The famous commentary on the Sa skya Phur pa cycle by A myes zhabs (1597-c.1660) similarly mentions a text he calls the *Phur bu rtsa ba'i rgyud rdo rje khros pa*, linking it to the *Bi to ta ma la* [ie *Vidyottama-la*]

⁷ Kong sprul's *rgyud 'grel* (66.2-3) says: bskyed rim gtso bor ston pa phur pa gsang rgyud/ rdzogs rim gtso bor ston pa phur pa myang 'das kyi rgyud/. Similarly, in the *'Bum nag* (37.1 [270.2] Gonpo Tseten edition with bDud 'joms bka' ma variants in square brackets) we find: bskyed pa'i rim pa phur pa gsang rgyud nas bton/ [ston/] rdzogs rim thamd [thams cad] phur pa myang 'das las [nas] ston/.

⁸ The commentary of A myes zhabs, which is extensively relied upon in the Sa skya tradition, notes (20.6) that there are thirty-seven tantras which established their tradition (rang gzhung) of rdo rje phur pa, and he goes on to list these. The first of the five "*la bzla ba'i rgyud*" is given (21.7) as, "*phur bu bla ma chen po mya ngan las 'das pa'i rgyud*", which is presumably to be identified with our *Myang 'das*. A little later, in emphasising the centrality of the *phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu* as a root tantra in the early transmissions, he gives (24.4) the "*myang 'das*" as the first of a list of explanatory tantras (*bshad rgyud*).

⁹ Karmay 1980: 14-15; see also Karmay 1998: 135-6.

¹⁰ See the comments of Dan Martin (2001: 110).

¹¹ "mya ngan las 'das pa che chung la sogs pa" (Karmay 1980: 18).

'bum sde,¹² the extraction of the *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu* and the contribution of Sa skya Paṇḍita. It is clear that these two, the *rTsa ba rdo rje khros pa'i rgyud* and the *Phur bu rtsa ba'i rgyud rdo rje khros pa*, are to be equated, and that this text must be considered a significant foundation for the entire Sa skya phur pa tradition, since the features of this tradition could hardly have derived exclusively from the very brief *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu* alone. Thus, a study of this text seemed highly desirable; and given the Sa skya pa concern with Indic authenticity, we hoped this text might illustrate the more Indic aspects of the NGB Phur pa literature.

Furthermore, Phur pa commentarial texts of both rNying ma and Sa skya traditions widely cite one or more texts variously referred to as the *rTsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa*, the *rDo rje khros pa'i rtsa rgyud*, or the *rDo rje khros pa'i rgyud*. In particular, the *rTsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa* is attributed with explaining central categories of the Phur pa teaching. Some of these categories – such as the Four Phur pas/ Phur bus,¹³ and the Ground, Path and Fruit Vajrakumāra¹⁴ – are ubiquitous throughout all Phur pa practice traditions of both rNying ma and Sa skya descent, yet we had found scant reference to them in the Phur pa tantras in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* which we had read previously (nor in the brief *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu*). Moreover, the specific three-headed, six-armed form of the deity visualised in all the sādhanas is said to derive from the form given in the *rTsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa* (Khenpo Namdrol: 55; see also Kong sprul: 91). If this *rTsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa* should be the same as the *rTsa ba rdo rje khros pa'i rgyud* or *Phur bu rtsa ba'i rgyud rdo rje khros pa* referred to by the Sa skya texts, as seemed quite likely, it might help to illuminate key facets of the common heritage of the tradition as a whole. A text of very similar name – the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* – is found in the sDe dge NGB as the very first or leading text within the entire sDe dge NGB's Phur pa section (in vol. Wa). Similarly, 'Jigs med gling pa placed a *Phur ba [sic] rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa* (in 17 chapters, like the text we edit here, and with the same colophon), at the head of all the Phur pa tantras – in Volume Zha of his famous Padma 'od gling NGB¹⁵ – and 'Jigs med gling pa probably knew the NGB phur pa tradition better than anyone else, before or since. It looked promising. Unfortunately, it proved not to be the text we were seeking, which may once have existed but has most probably been lost.¹⁶ Fortunately, however, the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* did prove to be the source

¹² This is the cycle of Phur pa teaching which Padmasambhava was reputed to have brought from Nālandā. The account is preserved in a Dunhuang document, Pelliot Tibétain 44. See Kapstein 2000: 158-9. We are currently working on this short text, and a full study of it will be included in our forthcoming book on Dunhuang Phur pa materials.

¹³ Quotations of the *rTsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa*, with reference to the *four phur palbus* are found, for instance, in A myes zhabs (142.6-143.1), and in the *'Bum nag* (bDud 'joms bKa' ma edition: 438; Boord: 260).

¹⁴ The same citation on this is found in Kong sprul (90.4), in the bDud 'joms *gnam lcags spu gri bsnyen yig* (88.6) and in the *'Bum nag* (bDud 'joms bKa' ma edition: 330; Boord: 181).

¹⁵ See Jean-Luc Achard 2002: 83.

¹⁶ There may be two or even more lost texts (or various versions of one text)! First, there is that mentioned as responsible for the genesis of the Sa skya Phur pa tradition, and second, the *rTsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa*. We can be sure that the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* found in the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* is neither of these, for the following reasons. In the case of the text from which the *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu* was extracted, the *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu* does not exist as a chapter within the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*'s text. A myes zhabs is explicit (22.4-5, 24.1-2) that the text which is now known as the *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu* had been the "vajra family chapter" (*rdo rje rigs kyi le'u*) within the *phur bu rtsa ba'i rgyud rdo rje khros pa*. The introduction to the *dPal rdo rje phur pa'i bsnyen sgrub gsal byed bdud rtsi'i 'od can* (141.3) also specifies that the extract concerned was a chapter of the text (*rdo rje khros pa'i rgyud kyi le'u*). This would thus seem to rule out our text as the Sa skya text, since our text contains a significant proportion of the *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu* verses, but the excerpts are in various chapters throughout the text, and not in the same order as they are given in the *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i dum bu*. Secondly, our text does not include anything resembling the citations of the *rTsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa* given in wider commentarial literature. Furthermore, even the few references we have found which specifically refer to a text with exactly the same title as ours, ie the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, do not in fact seem to relate to our text! For instance, A myes zhabs (21.2) speaks of the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* as one of the three root tantras, but he notes that the text is in four chapters. Our *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* has seventeen chapters. The *'Bum nag* (bDud 'joms bKa' ma edition: 426-7; Boord: 252) gives a citation on the Approach and Accomplishment maṇḍalas which it attributes to the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, and this citation is not found in our text. Also, the *'Bum nag* (bDud 'joms bKa' ma edition: 250; Boord: 129) mentions that a citation it gives from the *Myang 'das* on Rudra's origins is exactly paralleled in a text called the *rTsa ba rdo rje khros pa'i rgyud*. Again, nothing like this quote occurs in our text. Khenpo Namdrol (32), possibly following

of other very interesting discoveries of a quite unexpected nature – as we will explain later, it shares text in a rather interesting way with the *Myang 'das*; and it did also seem to exhibit an Indic appearance – or perhaps one should say, to be free of any obviously Tibetan features.

Moreover, our simultaneous work on the *Myang 'das*, along with cross-referencing from our previous study of the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, has drawn attention to interesting relationships between our different *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* sources, as we shall see.

the *'Bum nag*, also refers to a similarity between the *Myang 'das* account of Rudra and that found in the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*. However, it is possible in this case that rather than a dependency on the *'Bum nag* suggestion, Khenpo Namdrol might actually be referring to our text (or another with the same name as ours!), since he is speaking in very general terms about the taming of Rudra account rather than a specific citation. But since the account of Rudra's taming is found in so many Phur pa tantras, and all have so much in common (as well as their own distinctive material), we cannot draw any clear conclusion here. What would seem remarkable from all this, however, is that the commentarial tradition has apparently preserved a very clear memory and detailed information on one or more texts which may have been unavailable for generations as sources in their own right!

CHAPTER 1.II TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE *RNYING MA'I RGYUD 'BUM* TRADITION

Anyone who has compared texts from the NGB in their different versions will be aware of the importance of critically editing them. The surviving NGB tradition is often highly variable. Different editions of the same text can quite often have differing chapter arrangements and differing numbers of chapters, different colophons, even quite different passages of text. More rarely, we also find two versions of the same text (or very nearly the same text) within the same NGB edition. In addition, all NGB texts have numerous smaller textual variants of every kind. An average from collating the two fairly typical Mahāyoga Tantras examined here from the six available editions found in the NGB (ignoring such accidentals as punctuation) yielded one variant every six or seven syllables. If we include punctuation, we get an average of one variant every three or four syllables.¹ Collating additional editions of these two texts would inevitably yield yet more variants. In short, not only are all original NGB documents long lost to us, but the surviving copies differ from one another. A corollary of this is that the extant NGB tradition is frequently unreadable through textual corruption, which takes many forms: longer lacunae, interpolations, displaced passages and displaced folia affecting long passages, as well as all the usual briefer more routine scribal errors of orthography, dittography, haplography, and so on. Eyeskip and the confusion of homophones are probably the two greatest causes of error. The notorious technical obscurity of much NGB subject matter has also contributed to scribal difficulties, so that the density of errors and variants typically rises in direct proportion to the conceptual difficulty of a passage. The sad situation we find ourselves in today is that a great many NGB text versions have very substantial portions incomprehensible even to the most learned Tibetan lamas of the particular traditions concerned.

In general, it seems incontrovertible that if we want to render the NGB texts fully readable—which we think is a goal broadly shared by Tibetan lamas and academic scholars alike (even if there might sometimes be sharp differences regarding preferred modes of publication and usage)—we usually need to edit them first. That is not to deny that Tibetan scholars themselves engaged in editorial activity: on the contrary, we know from both historical and text-critical evidence that Tibetan scholars did apply highly erudite and sophisticated editorial methods. Nor are we saying that Tibetan scribes were terrible: there are whole chapters where even the most careful collation can find hardly any differences between some copies, irrefutable evidence that Tibetan scribes could be wonderfully accurate. Nevertheless, the NGB has fared little better than most other manuscript traditions of nearly 1,000 years duration, and is probably in as much need of editing as any Western tradition of such antiquity. And it is our belief that modern Western editing has a lot to offer NGB scholarship that traditional editing techniques cannot – ultimately, for the simple reason that traditional methods of transport and of text reproduction did not permit the gathering together of all representative NGB editions into one place for a single team of editors to consult. Hence no traditional editors could ever engage in the fully representative collation which is generally seen to be the indispensable foundation of any adequate textual criticism. This had the further consequence that sophisticated techniques based on exhaustive collation never developed. But undoubtedly, many lama editors of the past would have rejoiced at bringing all extant representative NGB editions together to assist their work: unfortunately, with such a massive collection, the possibility was probably never available to them.²

¹ Although we take words as more primary than syllables in editing, our software made a count by syllables much easier to achieve; we leave it to the reader to estimate an equivalent statistics in words.

² A sophisticated appreciation of text critical issues was certainly not unknown to traditional Tibetan scholarship, and there is no doubt they understood the value of collation. Verhagen (JIABS 24.1) introduces his study of Si tu Paṅ chen's textual criticism as follows: "Throughout the works of Situ Paṅ chen we also find evidence of his personal indefatigable efforts aimed at establishing reliable readings for the numerous texts he has worked on. By collating different manuscript versions and comparing different interpretations, he approached this in a manner very similar to the techniques of modern day philology and textual criticism." Likewise, dPa' bo Rin po che VII, gTsuk lag dga' ba (1718-1781), tried to consult every available edition of the devotional prayers to Padmasambhava known as the *Le'u bdun ma* in his efforts to restore the regrettably variable text to its original single form. He lamented the failure of Kaḥ thog Rig 'dzin Tshes dbang nor bu (1698-1755) to recover the original

Modern Western textual criticism has evolved over many centuries of intensive practice and methodological debate into a highly sophisticated and varied discipline with numerous brilliant exponents. Western textual criticism co-exists with a group of related textual disciplines, such as palæography and the various kinds of bibliography, each with its own highly developed methods and rich literature. Major Western texts are typically critically edited several times over, often in various different ways, and even minor texts receive detailed text-critical attention.

Part of the present work consists of identifying the most useful contributions that modern text-critical methods might offer NGB texts. Inevitably we find that some of the modern techniques have little to offer the NGB, all the more so since leadership in textual scholarship has since the mid-20th century moved away from Classical and Biblical studies, into the field of Renaissance and later literature in English, most of which has little in common with NGB studies.³ In addition, we are constantly reminded of what E. J. Kenney (1974:98) has called 'the only completely and universally valid principle of textual criticism ever formulated'—i.e., A.L. von Schlözer's dictum, so powerfully amplified at a later date by Pasquali, that 'there is something in criticism which cannot be subjected to rule, because there is a sense in which every case is a special case.' In looking at NGB texts, we are constantly reminded that no single method can ever be applied successfully across the whole collection, nor even across a single text: every text and every problem within every text can be unique and must be approached on its own terms, beyond any simple recourse to method. As West points out (1973:5), criticism is understood far more through application and observation than through theory. Nevertheless, we need to develop general, historically and textually rational perspectives through which to approach these difficult and obscure texts, if only to make sure we avoid making needless mistakes.

In general, Buddhist notions of Dharma, a term encompassing spiritual reality as well as text, differ profoundly from modern Western notions of authored literature, and these have to be taken into account when editing NGB texts. Fundamental to Buddhist notions of Dharma as text is the idea of expressing in language self-existent spiritual realities that persist eternally and independently of anyone's beliefs about them – yet remain immensely elusive, accessible only to the most subtle and enlightened minds. It is the ongoing purpose of the Sangha, the Buddhist community, to maintain the provision of a clear expression of these elusive truths. Hence, Tibetan religious literature takes the form of an ongoing communal project: authors lovingly reproduce previous successful texts word for word, seeing no benefit in altering these except on those often quite few points where they see some distinct advantage or improvement in presenting a slightly different formulation. To the predominant Western sensibility of recent centuries, this is redolent of plagiarism and an institutionalized lack of originality; but to the traditional Tibetan sensibility, such a communal approach to religious composition seems vastly preferable to the unrealistic vanity of attempting a wholesale rewriting of already well-taught truths, merely for the sake of it. If the modern Western author seeks to articulate the voice of their unique individual genius, traditional Tibetan religious authors more typically sought to articulate (only where necessary, often silently, sometimes anonymously) some small repair, rearrangement or further contribution to a vast communal literary undertaking that had already received the full attention of the best minds of the Buddhist Sangha and its scholarship stretching back over the millennia.

In addition to the above considerations that apply to much Buddhist literature, approaches to textual criticism of the NGB should also be founded on an understanding of the particular *rNying ma* notions of

ger ma yellow scroll from its place of re-concealment, because recovering this mystical scroll would have enabled the variations in the extant versions to be ironed out (Zangpo 2002:213).

³ For example, the recent orthodoxy of the Greg-Bowers eclectic edition, which was for many years considered excellent for much modern literature, seems of little use to NGB scholars. Greg's key distinction between accidentals and substantives has nothing like the same implications in NGB literature; we have no copy-texts with authorial accidentals; and no authorially sanctioned later states of the text from which to infer substantives; nor are we even dealing with single-authored texts, as the Greg-Bowers philosophy of fidelity to authorial intention largely presupposes. On the contrary, our texts need not be composed in a single historical period, let alone by a single author. However, it is not inconceivable that some works by modern authors such as Gendun Chopel might benefit from an adaptation of this treatment.

Dharma, which can vary from those of other Tibetan traditions in their more dynamic understanding of Dharma as an ongoing revelation through *gter ma*. But even *gter ma* generally reproduces a very great deal of earlier text, and in fact probably differs as much or even more in its framing narrative than in its underlying basic principles of literary composition. Very little work has yet been done on the various presuppositions of Tibetan religious literature in general or of rNying ma literature in particular, and here also we see a major need for a sustained study, which we hope to achieve elsewhere.⁴

More contemporary text critical scholars in English like D.F. McKenzie and Jerome McGann have moved towards an understanding of texts as social constructs, emphasising the role of the 'interpretive community' over authorial intention, or seeing text production as part of a much broader horizon of meanings. This general approach is in many ways better suited to the anonymous, composite, NGB texts that typically developed by the adaptation and reworking of previously existing text by many different authors at different times, usually to meet new demands or needs. The two major theorists, McKenzie and McGann, both mainly address more modern texts, where the problems faced are very different from ours.⁵ However, a number of English Medievalist scholars like Charlotte Brewer, T. W. Machan and A.J. Minnis have also begun to apply these perspectives to editing Middle English literature. Here the overwhelming concern has been to question radically the basic assumptions of distinction between author and scribe that informed much previous Middle English textual criticism. They argue that while most Middle English texts were completely anonymous, and most Middle English scribes were understood to be an integral part of the creative process rather than mere mechanical copyists, established Middle English critical editing (such as Kane and Donaldson's *Piers Plowman*) is predicated on a humanistically-derived false assumption of a radical separation of roles between author and scribe. Hence the newer scholars demand a much greater appreciation by text editors of social, historical and cultural factors in the production of medieval texts.

There are certain similarities (also immense differences) between Middle English and NGB textual cultures; nevertheless editors of Buddhist works of many kinds have for the last great many years already been approaching texts much as these recent thinkers suggest. Consequently, the proposed revolution in editing Western texts is to some degree already taken into account by those involved with Buddhist texts. For complex reasons of academic history, Buddhist scholarship is better placed with regard to historical-anthropological textual analysis than are Western literatures—it does not have so many centuries of intellectual baggage to unburden, its exponents have tended to be less specialised, and the very otherness of Buddhism has invoked social, historical and cultural analysis from the outset. One should add, Mahāyāna Buddhism itself approaches significant aspects of the current post-structural ideas in textual criticism with its pervasive hermeneutics of Dharma as polysemous skilful means. However, little of this contemporary debate addresses a more basic consideration for the NGB: to render its often highly corrupt manuscript transmission comprehensible by anyone at all.

Stemmatic analysis and the NGB

One editorial technique as far as we know not applied in Tibetan monasteries but widespread in the West over recent centuries—especially in Biblical and Classical scholarship where all early texts are long lost—is stemmatic analysis. This involves systematic analysis of the textual variants found within different versions of a text—more specifically, analysis of what Paul Maas has called their indicative errors (*Leitfehler, errores significativi*)⁶—with a view to ascertaining the relationships between them. One outcome is often a genealogical tree that tries to show which manuscripts descend from which, a so-called *stemma codicum*. In many cases, people have tried to work back to an archetype text (the ancestor of the extant tradition) on this

⁴ Griffiths 1999 addresses some of these issues within Indian Buddhist literature and with some reference to Tibetan practice, but his perspective is slightly different from the one we propose.

⁵ With the exception that perhaps some aspects of McKenzie's work on literacy in 19th century New Zealand are occasionally pertinent to contemporary transformations of NGB literature.

⁶ Maas 1958:42

basis. Stemmatic analysis has its roots in Renaissance Humanism: in 1489, Politian famously worked out the relationships between different manuscripts of Cicero's letters by tracking the appearance of a significant error through different editions over time. Gradually gaining in strength and sophistication, stemmatic methods became hugely influential after Lachmann's dramatic presentations in the 19th century, and stemmatic analysis has remained central to Western critical editing ever since. Despite periodic waves of controversy about its effectiveness, one is nowadays unlikely to find credible modern textual critics unable to do stemmatic analysis, just as one is unlikely to find many major modern painters with no drawing skills at all, whether they choose to use them or not. Stemmatics seems to be an area where Western techniques can be helpful in editing NGB texts, although with important limitations. We hasten to add that this is not the only area of Western textual criticism that is useful to us. For example, Kane and Donaldson's techniques of 'deep editing' Langland are also very promising,⁷ McKenzie's sociological outlook is important, the European approaches to constantly changing text through 'Genetic Editing'⁸ has important points of contact with our work, and the more recent cladistic analysis might also have something to offer in due course. But it is stemmatic analysis that we will discuss here, since it seems for several reasons the obvious first starting point for an exploration of how to edit NGB texts. It was developed for the Western literatures whose transmissional problems most closely resemble those of Tibetan canonical literatures, and it has already successfully been applied to several Kanjur texts, most notably by Helmut Eimer and Paul Harrison. In this chapter, we want to look at what stemmatic analysis can and cannot offer NGB scholarship at the moment, what it has already offered NGB scholarship, and what it potentially might offer NGB scholarship in the future.

Currently, only seven NGB collections survive in available form, and one more is currently becoming accessible. Already available are the sDe dge xylograph (**D**), and the manuscript collections of mTshams brag (**M**), sGang steng-b (**G**), gTing skyes (**T**), Rig 'dzin tshe dbang nor bu (**R**) (formerly W for Waddell), Kathmandu (**K**), and Nubri (**N**).⁹ A research project based at Oxford has photographed the sGang steng-b manuscript in Bhutan; the sGang steng-a manuscript will soon be available as part of a current project to digitise the entire sGang steng monastic library, and we also know of a further Bhutanese manuscript collection at sGra med rtse, which we hope will be photographed soon. We also hear rumours of further survivals in Tibet. Some of these seven available collections represent separate editions of the NGB; others

⁷ 'Deep editing' involves profound 'distrust' of the text – and each error is tackled individually, there is no basis upon whole editions. However, there are major differences between our subject matter and Kane and Donaldson's, so that while they ultimately (and controversially) relied on aesthetic judgments to distinguish between Langland's own work and that of later scribes, any NGB 'deep editing' must instead rely on an encyclopaedic and historically accurate knowledge of Tantrism. Moreover, our texts are usually anonymously created composites built from existing Tantric materials, and only rarely if ever the outpourings of an individual poetic genius like Langland (as Kane and Donaldson believed). This somewhat alters the target of the entire editorial process—we can and often must seek out several strata of text as important parallel objectives of textual criticism, while Kane and Donaldson sought only the various authorially sanctioned outputs of the single poet Langland himself. Nevertheless our editorial experience has shown it is abundantly clear that all surviving editions of some NGB texts are scribally corrupt at some points—often sharing the same corruption. The 'deep editor' would thus cite materials from entirely outside the extant NGB sources—such as Dunhuang texts—to propose elucidations or even emendations. This should never ever be done silently, of course, especially since such proposed elucidations or emendations might have been quite unknown to the original anonymous author-redactor of the text being edited, but it should be done nevertheless, usually in the form of notes to accompany the text. Traditional text-critical notions of 'work' and 'text' need careful redefinition for the NGB, where newer texts are almost always compiled from recycled blocks of earlier texts, which might themselves have been corrupt! But Tantric literature is at the same time both highly technical and highly repetitive, which makes such elucidations or emendations much less radical than they might at first appear. Hence the value and importance of 'deep editing' for NGB texts; yet its effective application is possible only in proportion to the extent of our knowledge of NGB Tantrism down to its minutest details, and so very little of this has so far been explored.

⁸ 'Genetic editing' looks at a text in movement over time; it is used, for example, to look at Balkan oral epics that are still evolving as of now. A similar process has also been used by Gabler, Steppe and Melchior for Joyce's *Ulysses*. The difficulty is a horribly impenetrable apparatus – but this might be remedied with digital presentations.

⁹ We list them in our editions in the following order: DMGTRNK. The non-alphabetical ordering highlights the regional associations (outlined below) which so frequently results in shared variants.

seem to be simple copies. We are still in the process of working out which are which, and to what degrees.

Although we remain very far off indeed from a comprehensive enumerative bibliography of pre-1950s NGB collections, we can see that this small surviving sample represents a catastrophic loss – probably over 90% – of the collections that existed 50 years ago. E. Gene Smith once suggested that NGB collections might have numbered in the hundreds, since every major monastery following rNying ma rites would have felt they needed one. In his sDe dge NGB catalogue, Thub bstan chos dar (2000) also writes of numerous and varied collections in the past, but nowadays we only know the names of some of the more famous ones, as Thub bstan chos dar lists (his record is more complete and detailed than earlier enumerations by F-K Ehrhard and Dan Martin).¹⁰ These include an early proto-NGB collection made by Kun spangs sgrags rgyal and kept at gTsang 'ug bya lung, the foundation of Zur po che Shākya 'byung gnas (984-1045). Many people date this as early as the 11th or 12th century; yet it apparently still remained extant as late as 'Jigs med gling pa's (c. 1730-1798) day, since he reports having consulted it. We read of a collection written in gold in the opening years of the 13th century, commissioned by mNga bdag 'gro mgon dpal as a funerary offering for his father Nyang ral nyi ma'i 'od zer (to this day, many NGB editions include Nyang ral's *gter ma*); a NGB made in the 14th century by Zur bzang po dpal, said to have been after his second visit to Buyantu Khan's court in Peking; one made by Ratna gling pa in the 15th century; three made by Gong ra lo chen gzhan phan rdo rje in the 17th century;¹¹ one that was kept at O rgyan smin grol gling, of unknown date; a further one made by sMin gling gter chen in the 17th century and also kept at O rgyan smin grol gling; one made by the 5th Dalai Lama and taken to Kokonor; one kept at sTag bu brag dmar dgon; one made by 'Jigs med gling pa; one made by the second rDzogs chen incarnation in the 17th century; an older one kept at Kaḥ thog which predated dGe rtse Paṇḍita's early 19th century sDe dge xylograph; one made by a lama from Go 'jo at an unknown date; one made by the mTsho na chief Padma bstan skyong with followers of rDo rje snying po; one made by 'Bri gung rig 'dzin chos kyi grags pa; and one kept at dPal spungs. No doubt there were many others – it is hard to imagine major rNying ma foundations like Zhe chen or dPal yul without at least one NGB edition.

But such severe truncation is not unusual among old manuscript traditions of many sorts (for example, the Greek and Latin classics); and while it determines that only a small fraction of the total set of relationships can be shown, it does not in itself preclude stemmatic analysis.

More problematic for stemmatic analysis than the loss of witnesses is horizontal transmission, or the use of different exemplars to make a single new edition, which complicates stemmatic analysis considerably. Historical sources tell us this certainly did happen in NGB production. Thub bstan chos dar tells us the surviving sDe dge xylograph was made using exemplars from the monasteries of rDzogs chen, Kaḥ thog, sTag bu brag dmar, and dPal spungs; as well as those made by 'Jigs med gling pa, a lama from Go 'jo, and the Fifth Dalai Lama. All seven of these dGe rtse Paṇḍita comprehensively reviewed, re-ordered and edited to make the famous edition of 414 texts (including his own dkar chag) in 26 volumes that serves today as an editio princeps. Likewise the now lost edition by 'Jigs med gling pa of 388 texts (also in 26 volumes) used exemplars from the ancient Zur 'Ug bya lung manuscripts, those from Ratna gling pa's seat lHun grub pho brang, one or both of the editions from O rgyan smin grol gling, the edition made by Gang ra lo chen, the edition from Kong po Thang 'brog monastery, and the 5th Dalai Lama's edition; and from these 'Jigs med gling pa created his own edition. As Achard has shown (2002), 'Jigs med gling pa's approach was highly eclectic and very meticulous: aware of the differences between the various versions available to him, he made his choices between them carefully. However, not all major new NGB editions were conflated in this way: the Fifth Dalai Lama seems to have taken as his sole source the edition made by his rNying ma pa Guru sMin gling gter chen; but then sMin gling gter chen's edition was itself based on several earlier editions, including the ancient 'Ug bya lung manuscripts, two of the copies made by Gong ra lo chen gzhan phan rdo rje, an earlier sMin sgrol gling edition, and others.

We do not yet know very much about the exact forms of horizontal transmission that occurred in the

¹⁰ Much of their material was unpublished; for a survey, see Mayer 1996: 223-232.

¹¹ Ehrhard (1997:253) gives his dates as 1594-1654.

NGB traditions—there are many different forms that could (and probably did) occur, with different implications for stemmatic analysis. For example, in some cases, individual texts might represent comprehensive confluences from several witnesses, which is of great consequence to stemmatic analysis; in other cases, doxographical outlines from a preferred authority might be used at a structural level only, leaving textual content unaffected, with zero impact on stemmatic analysis. At the moment, we do not know the exact patterns or frequency of horizontal transmission in the NGB tradition – but we think we must now take as our working assumption that significant levels of horizontal transmission in some form or another did occur at several important junctures in the NGB transmission, and that this will impact on stemmatic analysis.

As every student soon learns, some prominent scholars (notably Maas) believed that according to its theory, stemmatic analysis could not at all easily accommodate horizontal transmission.¹² Others, notably Pasquali, showed that contamination was so ubiquitous in real life that it must be accommodated, while West explored practical ways in which stemmatic analysis could try to work with it. Other scholars—such as the medievalists Kane and Donaldson working on Langland's *Piers Plowman*, or many Biblical scholars—have found themselves dealing with manuscript traditions seemingly too complex to stemmatise. Yet others have denied the validity of stemmatic analysis altogether; we will come to those shortly.

In the particular case of the NGB, according to our current understanding, we believe that the best way to proceed is to attempt stemmatic analysis in most cases, while distinguishing clearly between what we shall call historical and pragmatic stemmata. These terms might be used differently by different authors, so to be clear, we must define our terms.

By "historical stemmata" we mean the scheme of manuscript dependencies and relationships as they were in historical fact. This can be associated with the classic and more ambitious form of the process that gained such popularity from the 19th century. It seeks to establish a genealogical tree that represents proven historical relationships of the texts, in such a way that enables the recovery of earlier readings. In other words, it produces a stemma that can (or logically even must) be taken as the basis of editorial choices (Kenney 1973:134). It also sometimes implies the possibility of the reconstruction through stemmatic analysis of an archetype (i.e. the latest common ancestor of all surviving manuscripts); in other cases, only some such readings can be established. All of this, we believe, is extremely difficult with the NGB tradition at our current level of knowledge. The loss of about 90% of our witnesses, when combined with the prevalence of horizontal transmission and the paucity of external historical data, makes this whole approach too hazardous for now.¹³

In other words, the exact scheme of NGB manuscript dependencies is often unknowable because of actual or possible lacunae in the evidence. Hence we use the "pragmatic stemma", which is one which can be constructed from the extant evidence and used as a valid tool for evaluating variants. Hence by pragmatic stemmata we mean diagrams merely demonstrating the relationships of surviving witnesses according to clear patterns of shared variants, without being able to achieve an exact enough representation of the text's history that would permit reconstruction. Following Timpanaro's suggestion, in certain cases we could even make several alternative pragmatic stemmata to show different possible scenarios. In other words, even if we cannot use such stemmata to reconstruct earlier readings, we certainly can and should use them to show what the existing patterns of shared variants look like.

Pragmatic stemmata should not be undervalued. It was only by such a process of making a pragmatic stemma that we have discovered evidence highly suggestive of several distinct areas or groupings within the

¹² 'No specific has yet been discovered against contamination' (Maas 1958:49) ('Gegen die Kontamination ist noch kein Kraut gewachsen')—the famous last words of Maas's celebrated work.

¹³ The problem of open recensions that can arise in Kanjur scholarship – where the Tibetan tradition derives from multiple translations from Sanskrit that interact with one another over time – will not usually take exactly the same form with NGB texts, many of which we believe to originate with a Tibetan composition that was presumably unitary at its first inception. But there are quite different possibilities for open recensions, which we will discuss at length elsewhere. We have already looked at some of these in Mayer 1996:195-203.

extant NGB tradition (we can best describe this as three groupings, one of which in some cases subdivides into two – see below). This is of course extremely valuable information, which no one has discovered before, and which no one could ever discover except through the process of collation. We hope to refine our understanding of it further by more collations. The charting of variants and the minute examination that precedes stemmatic analysis also exposes invaluable data on separate recensions, redactional events, marginal notes, corrections to the text, comparative readability of texts, lacunae, paleography, and so on. All this is so helpful to scholarship that it seems inconceivable to us to attempt an NGB text in any truly sensitive way without such data. Pragmatic stemmata can thus give indispensable focus to scholars who need to consult different editions for variant readings – of which there are so many – even if they cannot give the exact data of a historical stemma.

While all NGB texts we have looked at so far seem amenable to stemmatic analysis and the construction of pragmatic stemmata, only one of them has produced a stemma enabling anything resembling the classic stemmatic goal of reconstruction of archetypal readings – and even these are slightly doubtful. In all other cases, stemmatic analysis allows us nothing better than the reconstruction of hyparchetypes.

But why do we feel the more ambitious process of recovering some archetypal readings through stemmatic analysis is possible with some texts, while only the more modest recovery of hyparchetypal readings is possible for other texts? This is a question we first encountered when making the preliminary stemma of the *Phur pa bcu gnyis* (Mayer 1996:243-262): as is well known, the reconstruction of archetypal readings through stemmatic analysis cannot work properly where the stemma is ‘bifid’ – that is, where it bifurcates into only two branches from the *origo*. Without further branches, stemmatic data per se has no logical basis to influence the choice of archetypal readings. But so far, only the most recently analysed of the three NGB texts we have edited – the *Myang 'das* – has more than two branches from its *origo*.¹⁴ The first two substantial texts we edited – the *Phur pa bcu gnyis* and the *rDo rje khros pa* – were inescapably bifid.

Stemmatic bifidity has been a major issue ever since the famous critique of stemmatic analysis made by Joseph Bédier in 1928. In analysing 110 stemmata made by textual scholars up to his day, Bédier found no fewer than 105 of them to be bifid trees – where the original archetype always divided into two branches, and only two branches. Yet common sense tells us it is highly unlikely that each archetype which ever gets copied is copied twice and only twice. This, Bédier and his modern followers have argued, was a device of dubious validity that has allowed editors to avoid being forced into difficult decisions, by positing two branches of equal stemmatic validity between which one could not choose rationally through stemmatic logic; hence one remained free to choose whichever of the two one preferred – a retreat from the objective evidence of stemmatics to the subjective evidence of simple eclecticism. Bédier's critique was powerful enough to irrevocably dent the aura of certainty that had previously accompanied stemmatic analysis, but certainly not powerful enough to sink it altogether. Hence it remains a central issue of debate today, and prominent scholars such as the late Sebastiano Timpanaro and Michael D. Reeve have continued the debate in similar terms into our time.

Bédier's criticism focused on the implausibly high incidence of bifidity at the initial branching out from the original archetype; yet many stemmata tend to branch into two all the way through, not only from the archetype. Paul Harrison's stemma of the *Drumakinnararājaparipṛcchāsūtra*, for example, is bifid not only from the archetype but also at six out of its total of ten junctures (Harrison 1992: xxxvi). The stemma of the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, the very first NGB text we edited, was similarly bifid both at its origin and at all three of its junctures (see p.284), and that was a concern. Perhaps, we thought at the time, bifidity was inherent to the logic of stemmatics, just as some of its critics maintained. Note that stemmata made by computers using cladistic analysis tend to excessive bifidity, branching into two at many junctures even where human scholarship knows this to be false. As Robinson and O'Hara point out (1996:6), if pure logic is pursued too mechanically, it manufactures spurious bifidity, because chance coincidences of shared errors can be

¹⁴ At the time of writing Mayer 2005, this was not yet clear. *The Myang 'das* changed our outlook by proving more amenable to historical stemmatic analysis.

mistaken for evidence of a shared hyparchetype where none actually existed. We address this concern and the case of the *Phur pa bcu gnyis* in the Appendix.

Yet our present situation, beyond doubt, is that our collations of NGB texts have so far yielded only one non-bifid stemma: that of the *Myang 'das*, which has three branches from its *origo*. Collations of the other two, the *Phur pa bcu gnyis* and the *rDo rje khros pa*, have both proven inescapably bifid. While we absolutely reject the possibility that we subconsciously forced those two collations into a bifid mould to evade the constraints of stemmatic logic, it does indeed mean that we have no possibility of using stemmatic evidence as a basis for reconstructing archetypal readings in any text other than the *Myang 'das*.¹⁵ Nevertheless, even if our bifid stemmata of the *Phur pa bcu gnyis* and the *rDo rje khros pa* do not allow us to reconstruct any archetypal readings, they do enable us to reconstruct, if we so wish, some potentially interesting hyparchetypal readings (such as a shared ancestor of TRNK, and a shared ancestor of MGTRNK).¹⁶

Our attempt to reconstruct at least some archetypal readings in the *Myang 'das* by using stemmatics is not without risk. Five objections could be raised by the cautious:

- i. The loss of about 90% of our witnesses.
- ii. We are not 100% certain that the *Myang 'das* stemma is amenable to stemmatic logic, since it might in fact be bifid (there might have been a shared ancestor of MGTRN, the existence of which is very hard to ascertain).
- iii. The prevalence of horizontal transmission.
- iv. The paucity of external historical data.
- v. We have not yet established if the *Myang 'das* recension is open or closed.¹⁷

Nevertheless, we have decided to chance our arm in this case: when two of the three branches of the *Myang 'das* stemma agree against the third, we have usually followed the majority reading, thus giving editorial weight to stemmatic evidence. This process seems to work: it does indeed seem to us that we are recovering some genuinely old readings. Clearly, we are not reconstructing an entire archetype, but we are getting a little closer to it. We feel we can approach the above objections as follows:

- i. Regarding the paucity of surviving witnesses, as we have already pointed out, such loss has not proven an insurmountable obstacle to the stemmatic analysis of the Western classics.
- ii. We deal with this question at length below, in the chapter on the stemma of the *Myang 'das*: in the light of current evidence, it appears more likely to be tripartite than bifid, so much so that taking a calculated risk seems the best way to serve NGB scholarship at this juncture, to help us establish what we can and cannot do with stemmatic logic.
- iii. Regarding the problem of contamination, in the specific texts we are editing, we only have certain evidence for this in the sDe dge xylograph, which we believe to be a conflated single witness; but since it constitutes on its own one of the three branches of the *Myang 'das* stemma, this does not impinge on the logical capacity of the stemma to yield text-critically usable data.
- iv. Of course, having more historical data would be useful, but we do have some historical evidence, and the quantity and quality is growing fast. Perhaps therefore something can be gained by allowing stemmatic analysis to speak with its own voice at this juncture.

¹⁵ However, the *Myang 'das* is a quite a long text, representing about 25% of the total NGB material we have edited so far. We sincerely hope that further texts will follow the pattern of the *Myang 'das*, since, contrary to Bédier's supposition, we find the successful application of stemmatic logic vastly more interesting than its frustration; NGB texts are sometimes so difficult and obscure that stemmatic logic is experienced more as a support than a constraint!

¹⁶ The reconstruction of such hyparchetypes is a task we hope to return to at a later date.

¹⁷ The problem of open recensions that can arise in Kanjur scholarship – where the Tibetan tradition derives from multiple translations from Sanskrit that interact with one another over time – will not usually take exactly the same form with NGB texts, many of which we believe to originate with a Tibetan compilation that was presumably unitary at its first inception at least, even if different versions may have developed quite quickly. But there are several quite different possibilities for open recensions in the NGB, which we will discuss at length elsewhere. We have already looked at some of these in Mayer 1996:195-203.

- v. While we have no proof that the *Myang 'das* recension is closed, neither do we have any evidence it is open.

Weighing up all the options, we feel that taking a calculated intellectual risk is preferable to playing safe, especially since electronic methods of text production mean that critical editions are no longer carved in granite, unchangeable once published, as they were in the day of the typesetter. On the contrary, they are becoming ever closer to ongoing works in progress that can be updated continually, if desired. If our experiment eventually proves to be a failure, we can always rewrite it. On the other hand, we restrict ourselves to a much less ambitious approach with the *rDo rje khros pa*, since it has a bifid stemma.

Geographical factors

In the 1990s we made a preliminary pragmatic stemma of an important Mahāyoga text called the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*,¹⁸ using the five editions of the NGB then available. Since then we have seen four major developments: (i) all of the Nubri and (ii) all of the sGang steng-b editions are now available for collation;¹⁹ (iii) we have made great advances in descriptive bibliography because all of the available NGBs are now catalogued or at least substantially understood doxographically,²⁰ as is one of the important lost editions;²¹ (iv) and largely thanks to Thub bstan chos dar and Jean-Luc Achard, we know much more about the external histories of the NGB tradition as a whole. Hence we now have a fuller basis on which to make pragmatic stemmata of NGB texts and to interpret them. We will show below how the picture now looks for the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, in the light of our more recent information (see Appendix).

Interestingly, of the three other NGB texts we have collated since then – a very short text called the *Sho na dkar nag gi rgyud*, and the two texts presented here – two appear to show signs of sharing much of the same stemmatic relationships as found in the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, while the third, the *Myang 'das*, shares the most salient features of the overall pattern, while also having a single important difference. Taking the data as a whole, the following overall general pattern seems to be emerging:

- D stands on its own
- MG form a distinct family
- TRNK form a distinct family
- In all texts other than the *Myang 'das*, moreover, TRNK and MG have significant shared errors and are thus significantly closer to one another than to D.
- In the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, NK are further differentiated from TR by significant shared errors; although such internal relationships within TRNK are simply unclear in the other texts.

However, we should be aware that all four collations so far have been of similar types of Mahāyoga texts within the NGB, which might prove a major factor in their similarities; and in addition it is important to

¹⁸ It is counted as one of the Eighteen Tantras of Mahāyoga, a particularly significant grouping.

¹⁹ At the time of writing, our AHRC Research Project's photography of the sGang steng-b ms is complete, while the Aris Trust and Endangered Archives Programme photography of the sGang steng-a is still in progress.

²⁰ The gTing skyes edition was comprehensively catalogued (including all chapter titles and colophons etc) in Kaneko 1982; his work is now being reformatted for internet publication by David Germano's team at the University of Virginia. The breakthrough work for the mTshams brag NGB came with Anthony Barber's text index included with the Taipei Edition of the Tibetan Tripitaka; that has now been much expanded into a full internet version including all chapter titles and colophons etc. by David Germano's team. The sDe dge was partially catalogued in full detail, including all chapter titles and colophons etc, in an unpublished work by Giacomella Orofino; similar unpublished work was done by Jean-Luc Achard; while shorter catalogues omitting chapter titles were produced by Thub bstan chos dar, Jean-Luc Achard, Giacomella Orofino, Cathy Cantwell, Adelheid Pfandt and others. Of these, the Thub bstan chos dar version was published in a useful book (2000), while Achard's appeared in a convenient electronic journal (2003). Much of this previous work is now also being transformed into an internet version by David Germano's team. The Rig 'dzin NGB was comprehensively catalogued by Cathy Cantwell and Rob Mayer in an internet version (see Cantwell, Mayer and Fischer 2002), although a paper version is also in process. F-K. Ehrhard has made available xeroxes of a traditional dkar-chag for the Nubri edition, and also clarified its doxographical relation to the Kathmandu edition (see Ehrhard 1997).

²¹ Achard (2002) discusses 'Jigs med gling pa's NGB edition.

recall that it is methodologically absolutely crucial to analyze every text independently rather than looking at whole collections – individual texts can always show quite individual patterns. Nevertheless, some of the shared stemmatic patterns between all four texts so far analysed do seem consistent enough to be indicative of something fundamental within the available NGB transmission.

Our newly acquired descriptive bibliographical knowledge also illuminates the relations between our editions, and perhaps also defends the validity of the original *Phur pa bcu gnyis* stemma's bifidity at each of its three branches. The catalogue of the Rig 'dzin edition was made by the present authors some years after editing the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*: when compared with Kaneko's exhaustive catalogue of gTing skyes (Kaneko 1982), it shows the collections of gTing skyes and Rig 'dzin to be doxographical near-identical twins. These two are different from Kathmandu and Nubri, which Ehrhard has now shown to form another pair of doxographical near-identical twins (Ehrhard 1997). More recent data still shows that mTshams brag and sGang steng-b form yet another pair of doxographical identical twins. However, the sDe dge is doxographically unique, as is the lost 'Jigs med gling pa edition, whose surviving dkar chag has been analysed by Achard (2002).

Thus an interesting fact that already began to emerge from our initial collation of the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, was that internal stemmatic affiliations seemed to coincide to some noticeable degree with the external doxographical structural affiliations of the larger collections to which they belonged: as within, so it seemed to be without. In other words, with the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, our earlier findings of largely unaided textual criticism seem to have marched in step with our later findings so far of descriptive bibliography.²² However, with the *rDo rje khros pa*, the *Sho na dkar nag gi rgyud*, and the *Myang 'das*, we are less clear if this is always the case. Here we can see that the doxographical twins mTshams brag and sGang steng-b are also consistently stemmatic twins; and we can see that the doxographically unique sDe dge edition is also consistently stemmatically unique; but we have not been able clearly to specify if Kathmandu and Nubri also form a stemmatic pairing against Rig 'dzin and gTing skyes, since the data is too unclear – all we can say with certainty is that the latter four are consistently stemmatically closely related against the former three.

Theoretically, none of this need be the case at all: the choice or availability of exemplars that governs spelling and other textual matters, and the choice of doxographical arrangements for a collection as a whole, absolutely need not coincide, and there are very definitely cases in the NGB transmission where they do not. For example, we found that in a very few instances, the Rig 'dzin collection seems to contain the same versions of some texts as the mTshams brag collection, rather than the text versions contained in gTing skyes (Cantwell, Mayer and Fischer: Rig 'dzin Vol Zha text 4, Vol. Tha text 1 and Vol Pa text 6). In addition, the Rig 'dzin collection contains several texts found in the mTshams brag collection but omitted in gTing skyes.²³

The fact that the findings of textual criticism and descriptive bibliography do coincide to a considerable extent in the cases we have collated so far seemingly points to a further important factor: geography. The importance of geography for most pre-modern manuscript transmissions is widely remarked and is already established as a major factor in Kanjur transmission. As with the Kanjur, the vast size and great sanctity of the NGB collections probably intensified the geographical effect: since it must have been exceptionally difficult to borrow and then transport the highly revered and extremely massive NGB editions over long distances, it must surely have been more feasible to take *ma dpe* from comparatively nearby. Our research has found evidence for what looks like a distinctive regional grouping of extant NGB editions (we would be on much surer ground, however, if more editions had survived). To illustrate: the coincidence of close doxographical structure and generally close stemmatic relatedness we have found so far between the Nubri edition and the Kathmandu edition which came originally from sKyid grong, strongly suggests a connection to their origins in such closely neighbouring geographical locations (in this case, they also come from a

²² The *Phur pa bcu gnyis* is an exceptionally long text, and we have not yet fully completed our collation of all of its more recently available editions, although most is done.

²³ These are listed in, 'Distinctive Features of the edition' on the Rig 'dzin website: go to <http://ngb.csac.anthropology.ac.uk/csac/NGB/Doc/Contents.xml> and follow the links.

similar sectarian background, and were produced by two closely connected lamas). Similarly, we know that Waddell procured the Rig 'dzin edition while accompanying the Younghusband invasion of Tibet, and we also know that the Rig 'dzin's doxographical twin (and in the case of the four texts analysed so far, also its stemmatic close relation) gTing skyes comes from the region directly adjoining Younghusband's route into Tibet.²⁴ The specific pattern of a Nubri/Kathmandu stemmatic association against gTing skyes and Rig 'dzin is not so clear in the two texts we examine here as it was in the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, but what is beyond doubt is the affiliation between the group of four, all of which are from the Southern Central Tibetan region. The mTshams brag and sGang steng-b from Bhutan, according to all analyses made so far, are both doxographically and stemmatically absolutely identical, and we already have some reason to believe (from Lopon Pemala's description of it), that the Bhutanese sGra med rtse edition might also be a close relative. The sDe dge from Khams might so far appear doxographically, and (for our four texts) stemmatically unique – but we have not yet gained access to any other editions from its region.

To support this geographical hypothesis from historical sources, we read that the *ma dpe* of even the grandest editions of the past were often reasonably local: Ratna gling pa's, sMin gling gter chen's, the 5th Dalai Lama's, and 'Jigs med gling pa's *ma dpe* were all from dBus and gTsang, plus a single edition from Kong po; none were from far-off east Tibet or Bhutan; and even the single edition from Kong po was a famous 17th century copy exported there from gTsang by Gong ra lo chen gzhan phan rdo rje, so it should really count as a gTsang edition. Likewise, five out of seven of the exemplars used by dGe rtse Paṇḍita for his sDe dge xylograph were from Khams or nearby; although for this extraordinary enterprise the 5th Dalai Lama's edition was also imported from Kokonor in Amdo, and 'Jigs med gling pa's from Central Tibet (but in this case, as Achard deduces, it might well have been only the dkar chag of the 'Jigs med gling pa edition, rather than the whole edition itself).

It is premature, after only four collations, to come to any broad conclusions about the NGB as a whole; nevertheless, it makes sense to use the pattern that has emerged so far as a hypothesis to test when making future collations. What we see so far suggests (as an hypothesis to test) that sDe dge's huge textual variance from all the other versions quite possibly represents a largely Eastern (if conflated) inheritance, as well as its editors' well-known recensional intervention. mTshams brag's and sGang steng-b's numerous shared textual particularities quite possibly represents a distinctive Bhutanese tradition, of which sGra med rtse might also turn out to be a member. The two other sets of doxographical near-twins, gTing skyes and Rig 'dzin and Nubri and Kathmandu, are also all four textually related to one another and form a stemmatic group of their own. To some degree, they probably represent the gTing skyes and sKyid grong regions respectively, although we might better describe all four taken together as representing a single Southern Central tradition that occasionally subdivides into two branches; this might be preferable because the textual variance between the gTing skyes and sKyid grong branches, while occasionally apparent, is sometimes not present at all, or not very pronounced.

However, as Helmut Eimer has reminded us,²⁵ what we cannot yet say is whether or not the NGB tradition as a whole will turn out to resemble the Kanjur in having two main lines of transmission plus many regional editions: our extant witnesses might nearly all be seen as regional, and apart from sDe dge, we have no other certain representatives from the great centres of Central Tibet and Khams.

With the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, the *Sho na dkar nag gi rgyud*, the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, and the *Phur bu mya ngan las 'das pa'i rgyud*, external factors of geography and doxography, and internal factors of the patterns of variant readings, all seem so far to be chiming in reasonable harmony. But we should expect life might become less tidy in other texts: our cataloguing activities have already turned up examples where Rig 'dzin has a few texts that are closer to mTshams brag's version than to gTing skyes'. Moreover, as learning increases, more complexities will no doubt have to be encountered: for example, we can expect sDe dge's affiliations to sometimes have moved closer to the Central and Southern tradition through horizontal

²⁴ gTing skyes is only a few miles to the west of Younghusband's route, but over 150 miles east of sKyid grong and Nubri.

²⁵ Personal communication, 14 March 2004.

transmission via the 5th Dalai Lama's edition, which dGe rtse Paṇḍita praised as so useful in establishing doubtful readings for his xylograph; but at the moment we have no way to identify such passages.

The picture so far

Before approaching our new data from critically editing the *Myang 'das* and the *rDo rje khros pa*, many readers might find it helpful to get a more detailed picture of the previous findings from NGB editing. That means reviewing our 1996 edition of the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, since it is the only previously published critical edition of an NGB text. Readers who wish to do so, please now turn to the Appendix, 'The Stemma of the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*'.

The present and the future

Our present study provides a more nuanced view of the relations between the editions which the examination of the *Phur pa bcu gnyis* opened up. The overall picture of the three main groupings is confirmed in our analysis of the two texts here, although the exact relations between the three groups is not entirely uniform in each case, as we shall see. Moreover, the internal relationships between TRNK do not always conform to the pattern of a mirroring of the doxographical similarities between TR and between NK respectively. We also have a clearer insight into the Bhutanese edition represented by MG, thanks to the inclusion of the sGang steng-b manuscript in this study.

Finally, what can we hope for from future NGB stemmatic analysis? With any luck, we might succeed in restoring portions of some of the famous editions of the past now lost to us. Even at this extremely early stage, we can envisage recreating lost hyparchetypes for some texts—for example, common ancestors of TR and NK, or of the Bhutanese edition; and where the transmission has not become bifid, we are seriously experimenting with the identification of a large number of valuable older readings.

In addition to stemmatics, standard eclectic or rational methods, and a highly adapted form of 'deep editing,' are probably our best avenues in further developing the editing of NGB texts. Both of these need to be applied with the mixture of radical scepticism and patient conservatism typical of all good editing: while one must question every reading, one must also avoid changing transmitted readings without sound cause. In theory, it should be possible to do such eclectic editing with the NGB texts which have bifid stemmata: in practice, it cannot be undertaken until we have a significantly sounder understanding of the archaic religious and linguistic forms that are sometimes concealed within these texts.

Above all, we must remain aware that our goals are plural rather than singular: as well as the restoration of a single original version of the text, which might often have existed, we are also interested just as much (or even more) in processes, contexts, and layers. We recognize that in *rNying ma pa* culture, many of the major NGB editors through history were, as *gter ston*, endowed with the religious authority to reveal scripture in their own right. Hence any editorial changes they made to NGB texts should carry as much weight as original readings, and be presented in parallel as legitimate alternatives. One task is to try to identify such changes, which were traditionally made silently. We are also interested in locating the previous materials from which the NGB texts were often constructed. At the same time, we recognize that *rNying ma pa* culture unambiguously rejects incoherencies arising from scribal errors and other transmissional problems; hence our tasks as editors is also to identify and eliminate such error, which is, of course, the more traditional task of textual criticism. A further major priority must be to gather as much external historical understanding of the NGB editions as possible, and this should include anthropological and cultural perspectives as well as historiography. At this stage we still have remarkably little understanding of how, why, and by whom these revered yet anonymous texts were composed, and how and by whom they were used. Even if the NGB's hermeneutics might transcend history, its textual criticism as we envisage it is also an historical and sociological exercise.