

A Treasure Text on the Age of Decline: Authorship and Authenticity in Tibetan Prophetic Literature

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According to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the origin of *terma* or treasure literature is closely tied to Padmasambhava, an Indian Tantric master, who was invited to Tibet in the eighth century by King Trisong Detsen¹ to support the dissemination of Buddhism. Early sources give little evidence of his visit to Tibet.² Nonetheless, by the thirteenth century Padmasambhava—often called affectionately Guru Rinpoche, or “Precious Teacher”—is seen not only as a Tantric master who defeated the indigenous gods and demons and then incorporated them into the Buddhist practice, but also as a fully enlightened buddha,³ who as a teacher of numberless esoteric practices is the founder of Tantric Buddhism in Tibet. Treasure teachings maintain that they were initially preached by the Buddha in India and later taught by Guru Rinpoche in Tibet. Tradition holds that in order to secure these spiritual treasures for future generations, especially for times when the Dharma is in decline, Guru Rinpoche concealed them in various parts of Tibet and prophesized that future reincarnations of his twenty-five disciples⁴ would discover them at various times in history. These future reincarnations who revealed Guru Rinpoche’s hidden teachings are known as *tertöns* (treasure

¹ Khri srong lDe btsan (742-c. 800/755-797).

² *dBa’ bzhed*, see Diemberger and Pasang Wangdu 2000: 52-55; PT44: Padmasambhava’s bringing the Vajrakīlaya tradition to Tibet, see Cantwell and Mayer 2013: 20, Kapstein 2000: 159; and PT307: Dalton 2004: 764.

³ Especially treasure texts revealed by Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer (1124-1192) and Guru Chos dbang (1212-1270). See Cantwell and Mayer 2013: 20.

⁴ *rJe ’bangs nyer lnga*. There are several lists of the twenty-five disciples who all attained supreme accomplishment. Some lists include Khri srong lDe btsan, while others add him as the twenty-sixth disciple. Dudjom Rinpoche includes him in his list of twenty-five; see Dudjom 1991: 535-536.

revealers or treasure masters) and, due to their activities especially from the thirteenth century onward,⁵ treasure revealing became one of the three modes of transmission practiced by followers of the Nyingma school.⁶ These treasures were (and still are being) revealed sometimes in the form of texts, ritual objects and relics. They can be concealed in lakes, trees, rocks, caves or even in space, but the true place of concealment is the *tertön*, the treasure revealer's mindstream. Spiritual treasures found in a material form or experienced in a dream or vision work as a trigger in the *tertön*'s mind and help him to recall Guru Rinpoche's teachings. Then the treasure-master composes and writes down the teaching. The words "author" and "writer" are natural parts of our modern lexicon, but it is worth considering the meaning of these words in a Tibetan cultural context: what does it really mean when we say that *tertön* so-and-so revealed a scripture?

The revealer of a treasure text is the person who breaks the code and codifies the scripture and may be considered its author in the sense of a "composer." However, authorship of the teaching transmitted through the text is attributed to the Buddha. In spite of the fact that historical evidence is lacking to prove that these texts come from the historical Buddha or even that they existed during the time of Guru Rinpoche, they often contain authentically ancient material.⁷ Robert Mayer quite recently has even found an early treasure text that was simply a reproduction of a much older manuscript.⁸ Still, as with most products of Tibetan literature, treasure texts are also usually compilations and produced from blocks of teachings quoted from earlier works, and their aim is to pass on an existing spiritual truth. It is acceptable to add changes to the texts over the centuries and keep the original attribution, which makes the question of authorship even more complex.

⁵ Tibetan sources mostly agree that the first *tertön* was Sangs rgyas bLa ma, who lived in the eleventh century. According to Dudjom, he was a contemporary of Rin chen bZang po and may have lived between 990 and 1070 (Dudjom 1991: 751 and Index 432). O rgyan gLing pa (1323–c.1360) also mentions Sangs rgyas bLa ma as the first *gter ston* in his *Padma bka' thang shel brag ma* f. 197a. Secondary sources also follow this tradition; see Doctor 2005: 198. fn. 5; Dudjom 1991: 751–752; Tulku Thondup 1990: 154; Gyatso 1993: 99, fn. 5. However, treasure revelation became widespread and popular only in the thirteenth century.

⁶ The three modes of transmission: *bka'ma* (master-disciple), *gter ma* (treasure), *dag snang* (pure vision).

⁷ Gyatso 1993: 103, fn. 14.

⁸ In 2010 he found that one of Nyang ral Nyi ma'i 'od zer's (twelfth century) treasure works is a republication of an old physical manuscript that has a copy in the Dunhuang collection, IOL TibJ 331 III (c. tenth century). Mayer 2015: 229.

1. The Author and his Work

The text that will be our point of departure is attributed to Rigzin Gödem (1337-1408)⁹ a famous treasure revealer who lived in the fourteenth century and was affiliated with the Nyingma School. He was the spiritual teacher of the Gungthang royal family, and at the age of 52 he was appointed as personal preceptor to King Chogdrubde (mChog sgrub lde, 1370-1396).¹⁰ Rigzin Gödem established the lineage of Northern Treasure (*byang gter*) in Tibet. He is credited not only with the discovery of several *terma* cycles but also with a list of seven Hidden Lands or *beyüls* (*sbas yul*). It is known from one of his biographies that he spent eleven years (1373-84) in Sikkim (*'Bras mo gzhong*), in one of the Hidden Lands. According to Tibetan sources, he held the key to other lists of hidden places (*kha byang*, *them byang*), and even the Fifth Dalai Lama in the seventeenth century refers to the seven Hidden Lands as a list attributed to Rigzin Gödem.

From the fourteenth century onward, several Tibetan Buddhist works—especially ones written by lamas associated with the Nyingma tradition—are concerned with Hidden Lands, where Tibetans can migrate when attacks by foreign armies and violence endanger human life and the preservation of the Buddhist teaching. Several different genres of literature developed to describe the Hidden Land, the ways to get there, and the external and internal signs showing the time to leave Tibet. One of these texts is the *sBas yul spyi'i them byang* or *The General Description of Hidden Lands*,¹¹ which gives a very detailed account of the age of decline and places Hidden Lands in Tibet and on its borderlands, where the Dharma can be preserved during the Age of Decline. Although several scholars have mentioned this text as an important source for learning about Hidden Lands,¹² it has not yet been published in English. The Tibetan original is part of a collection of biographies and prophecies called *Byang gter lugs kyi rnam thar dang ma 'ongs lung bstan*, one of the major collections of the Northern Treasure tradition. I first came across this remarkable collection of texts in Dharamsala at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in 2010 while searching for material on Yolmo history.¹³ Later, I acquired a copy of the same collection from the

⁹ He was born dNgos grub rgyal mtshan (1337-1408) and later called rGod kyi ldem 'phru can, “the one with vulture feathers,” because a feathery growth appeared on the top of his head. His most commonly used name is Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

¹⁰ The rulers of Gungthang during Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's time: bKra shis lde (1352-1365), his son Phun tshogs lde (1365-1370) and mChog sgrub lde (1370-1396).

¹¹ I will refer to it in footnotes as KNYD.

¹² Orofino 1991: 240; Ehrhard 1997: 361, fn. 22; Childs 1999: 137.

¹³ LTWA Acc. no. Ka. 3:77-2221.

Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre.¹⁴ The importance of this text is shown also by the fact that it was published in two smaller collections, one containing prophetic texts related to Yolmo, and the other presenting textual sources concerning the hidden land of Demoshong.¹⁵

2. The Main Topics in *The General Description of Hidden Lands*

2.1. The Age of Decline

The General Description of Hidden Lands is written in the form of a dialogue between King Trisong Detsen and Guru Rinpoche, and the king's main concern is the Age of Decline, the last five-hundred-year period when the Dharma is about to disappear, human lifespan decreases, and people are poisoned by desire and deceit. Guru Rinpoche's prophecy in the text perfectly reflects the teachings of Buddhist temporal cosmology and the view that cosmogenic processes are shaped by karmic forces and the actions of sentient beings shape society through the ordered law of causation:

That time when [the chief] Māra, the Lord of Pleasure,¹⁶ looks in the four directions from the top of Mount Meru [and sees] the dark side conquered, he will rejoice. Seeing that the teaching of Śākya degenerates in Southern Jambudvīpa, Māra will be cheerful. At that time, when Vajrāsana¹⁷ in India is captured by the Turks,¹⁸ Māra will shoot his flower-weapons.¹⁹ In Tibet, the Land of Snow, the time will not be ripe to spread the teaching further. The king of Māras will fire seven arrows to Tibet from the top of Mount Meru. As a result, there will be no Sun and Moon, resulting in no year and month in Jambudvīpa. As an external sign, dazzling fire will blaze in the sky. As an internal sign, district chiefs, army commanders, local lords, the ones with greater karmic power, will be shot by Māra's poison of killing.²⁰ Instantaneously, burning hatred and wild jealousy will arise. As a result, they will kill

¹⁴ TBRC LC Classification: BQ7920.C64.

¹⁵ See bibliography.

¹⁶ dGa' rab dbang phyug. The chief Māra, the Love God, Kāma.

¹⁷ rDo rje gdan. The place where Gautama Siddhārtha attained enlightenment. It is identified with Bodh Gayā today.

¹⁸ *Du ru kha*. This event, when Du ru kha rgyal po destroyed the shrine of rDo rje gdan is part of the mythic history of the black flying *bse* mask of the *Sa skya pa*. See Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 284 and Vitali 2001: 26-27.

¹⁹ *mTshon cha'i me tog*.

²⁰ *gSod byed kyi dug*.

each other. Completely annihilate each other . . . Then the poison of craving for food will be shot at men. Tibetan religious men, and those not at all religious, and the ones in between, will all barely be able to handle the pain. Suddenly, steaming hot food would appear [in their minds], and the lust for eating will arise in everyone. They will hunt for deer²¹ in high remote places. They will catch fish with arrows. They will slaughter their own cattle. They will eat red meat. They will drink red blood. They will spread animal skins on the ground. And in the final times,²² they will eat the flesh of [their own] fathers . . . This is how the seven poisonous arrows of Māra will be shot to Tibet. Similar to a small bird carried away by a hawk, Tibetans will not be able to focus their thoughts on one thing but constantly argue with each other.²³

The main catalysts of the age of decline are the *kleśas*, afflictive emotions, often personified in scriptures by Māra, the Buddhist Evil. The Buddha said at the end of the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-sutta*, “Monks, I do not consider any power so hard to conquer as the power of Māra.”²⁴

The Māra we encounter in our text is Devaputramāra, a god of the Desire Realm, the lord of the Heaven of Controlling Others’ Emanations (Sk. *paranirmitavaśavartina*). He sees with his clairvoyance the disciples who are seeking liberation and shoots them with his arrows: the arrows of attachment, aversion, ignorance, jealousy and pride. Māra is often mentioned as

²¹ *Ri dvags*. Herbivores such as deer for instance.

²² *Dus tha ma*. The “final period,” referring to the final five hundred years.

²³ KNYD: 3-4. *de’i tshe bdud dga’ rab dbang phyug gis/ ri rab kyi rtse nas phyogs bzhir bltas pas/ phyir nag po’i phyogs kha rgyal²³ nas bdud brod pa skyed lho phyogs ’dzam bu gling pa shākya’i bstan pa nyams pa mthong pas/ bdud snying dga’/ de’i dus na rgya gar rdo rje gdan du ru khas ’dzin pas bdud mtshon cha’i me tog ’thor/ bod kha ba can gyi yul du bstan pa’i lhag ma dar la ma smin ba’i dus ’ongs te/ bdud kyi rgyal po des ri rab kyi steng nas dug mda’ bdun bod la ’phen te/ de la lo zad zla zad nyi zla’i mdangs ’dzam bu’i gling la med pa’i tshe ’phangs pas/ phyi rtags su ni nam mkha’ la me ’od lam lam pa ’ong/ nang rtags su sde dpon dang/ dmag dpon dang/ gtso bo dang/ ’jig rten gyi las stobs che ba rnams la gsod byed kyi dug ’phangs pas/ glo bur du zhe sdang tsha lam lam pa dang phrag dog ’khrug ram ram pa skye/ de’i rje su gcig gis gcig gsod/ gcig gis gcig brlag par ’joms so/. . . / rngam char lto ba’i dug shar po la phog ste/ bod kyi chos pa dang mi chos pa ’bring po thams cad la kha ngal khyog khyog pa/ lto ba tsha chil chil ba glo bur du ’byung/ de’i dus su thams cad la zas skom gyi ’du shes ’dod sred langs ste phu’i ri dwags rngon/ mda’ⁱ²³ nya ’dzin/ rang gi phyugs ’og tu bcug ste gsod nus/ sha dmar po za/ khrag dmar po ’thung/ pags pa dmar po ’ding/ dus tha mar pha sha za ba ’byung ngo/. . . / de liar bdud kyi dug mda’ bdun bod la phog pa dang/ bya phran khras khyer ba ltar/ bod kyi bsam pa phyogs gcig tu mi ’dril bar gcig la gcig rtsod/ gcig la gcig rgol zhing ’khrugs pas/*

²⁴ *Dīghanikāya*, Sutta 26, Section 28 (Walshe 1987: 405).

the flower-armed god, because his bow and arrows are made of sugarcane with the buds of the Amra tree. When his flower arrows strike, they feel delightful, but they are deeply piercing. The *kleśas* symbolized by Māra²⁵ and their result, the karma created by them, are the causes for the repeated creation, endurance and destruction of the universe. As a result of negative actions, the lifespan of humans is decreasing.

Guru Rinpoche's prophetic teachings also mention Tibetan historical events as signs of the advent of the final period of decline. At different points in the text, he suggests that the final period starts in Tibet when the empire falls into small principalities (ninth century) and worship stops in the royal temples, or when the Mongolian Black Dorta invades Tibet (1240, Iron Male Mouse year),²⁶ or when the royal lineage of Gungthang "is cut by a knife."²⁷

2.2. Protection from Negative Effects

Another question asked by King Trisong Detsen is how to stay protected from the poisonous arrows of Māra during the last five hundred years. Guru Rinpoche predicts that three external things, three internal substances, three secret *samādhis*, three wrathful mantras and three protecting postures can protect practitioners from the negative effects of the Declining Age:

First, the three external things are three temples founded by the ones with an awakened mind²⁸ in places blessed earlier by realization . . . If you never part from the *samādhi* of your own tutelary deity,²⁹ the *bodhicitta* and the *samādhi* without concepts, any of these three, you won't be hit by the poisonous arrows of the demon. If you get the inner substances—the medicine of realization, the Tathāgatha's pearl-like relics and substance from a *maṇḍala* made by someone who had earlier

²⁵ *Kleśa* refers here to the aforementioned five negative mental states.

²⁶ It was the time when the Mongolians defeated China and established the Yuan dynasty with its new seat in Beijing. The main political center of Tibet became Sa skya, the seat of the Sa skya School, who were spiritual advisors to the Yuan emperors. According to Rig 'dzin rGod lde m's *terma* teachings, it was the time to leave Tibet, but very few people had the courage to do so. Tibet was under Mongolian rule until 1368, the year that marks the end of the Yuan dynasty.

²⁷ The same event is mentioned in a text concerning the Hidden Land of Khembalung; see Reinhard 1978: 17. As there were twenty-one generations of kings in the Gungthang Kingdom in Southern Tibet, it is uncertain what events the text refers to. The final demise of the royal house occurred in 1620, when Gungthang was defeated by Tsang.

²⁸ The three bodhisattva kings: Srong btsan sGam po, Krhi srong lDe btsan and Ral pa can.

²⁹ *Yi dam*. Sk. *iṣṭadevatā*.

attained perfection³⁰—the poisonous arrows won't hit you. The three wrathful mantras: the mantra of Vajra Claw³¹; the transforming mantra of Uṣṇīṣa's cycle; and the mantra of Vajra Armor.³² If you recite any of them from the evening when shadows turn into darkness until the light of the stars and planets fades,³³ you will not be hit by poisonous arrows. The three protecting postures are the Vajra posture³⁴ wrathful dancing posture³⁵ and circumambulation with prostrations. When you do these, the essential points of the body cannot be hit by poisonous arrows.³⁶

2.3. Hidden Lands

A Hidden Land (*sbas yul*) is a place of refuge, a destination to settle during the last phase of the Declining Age for meritorious individuals from all strata of Tibetan society, lamas and laymen alike. It is a place where an idealized version of Tibetan society can be sustained far from all the political trouble in Tibet. It is also a safe haven for those who want to spend extended time in retreat. It is a sacred land, a multi-layered *maṇḍala*, where practitioners can achieve a higher realization. It is a stepping stone for being reborn in Sukhāvātī.³⁷ As many spiritual treasures are hidden in a Hidden Land, it is a place for yogis and treasure revealers as well, because the teachings concealed there provide further chances for spiritual development. The outer aspect of the Hidden Land is a geographical place, where a

³⁰ *Grub thob*. Sk. *siddha*. Tantric adept who attained a certain level of realization or perfection.

³¹ *rDo rje sder mo*. Sk. Vajranakhā. Wrathful female deity.

³² *rDo rje go khrab*.

³³ From dusk until dawn.

³⁴ *rDo rje dkyil krung*. Crossed-legged position.

³⁵ *Khro bo'i stang stabs*. The one like Vajrapāni's.

³⁶ KNYD: 7. *phyi'i yul gsum ni/ byang chub kyi sems dang ldan pas bzhengs pa'i lha khang gsum dang/ sngon byin gyis brlabs pa'i sgrub gnas su/. . . / ting nge 'dzin rang gi yi dam gyi lha dang/ byang chub kyi sems dang/ mi dmigs pa'i ting nge 'dzin gsum gang rung re dang ma bral na bdud kyi dug mda' mi 'phog/ nang gi rdzas ni/ sgrub pa'i sman/ de bzhin gshegs pa'i ring bsrel/ sngon grub pa thob pa'i dkyil 'khor gyi rdzas bcangs pas dug mda' mi 'phog/ drag po'i sngags gsum ni/ rdo rje rder mo'i sngags/ gtsug gtor 'khor los bsgyur ba'i sngags/ rdo rje go khrab kyi sngags/ dgongs kha grib so nag song nas gza' skar gyi bkrag ma thon gyi bar bzlas pas dug mda' mi 'phog/ bca' ba'i 'khor lo gsum ni/ rdo rje dkyil krung/ khro bo'i stang stabs/ phyag dang bskor ba byed pa'i lus gnad la dug mda' mi 'phog go/*

³⁷ *bDe ba can*. The Pure Land of Amitābha. The Khembalung text says if you stay in a Hidden Land for at least three years you will be reborn in Sukhāvātī. Reinhard 1978: 20.

sizeable population can engage in agro-pastoral work. The inhabitants are often unaware of the special qualities of the place, but practitioners can feel its sanctity, and they are deeply affected by it. Only those who can access the inner level of the Hidden Land attain higher realizations. The inner level can lie in the same place as the outer, or it can be deeper in the mountains. The practitioner can feel a greater space and freedom and obtain food and shelter without effort and find spiritual treasures. A truly accomplished yogi can even go deeper and experience the secret level of the Hidden Land. On the secret level, there are even more profound *termas* and enlightenment can be achieved at higher speed. This level of a Hidden Land no longer exists in the outside, but within the yogi's mind. On this level, distinction between self and the world blends.³⁸

The main aim of *The General Description* is to urge its readers to leave their place and go to Hidden Lands. The prophecy lists many power-places and hidden valleys that can provide a safe refuge, describes how to get there, how to overcome obstacles on the way, which Hidden Land is easy to find, etc. Many scholars consider the Hidden Land to be a unique Tibetan concept, but I see it as being deeply rooted in the earliest Buddhist tradition. A part of the Pali Canon,³⁹ the twenty-sixth *sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, a teaching attributed to Buddha Śākyamuni himself, the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-sutta* (*Lion's Roar on the Turning of the Wheel*)⁴⁰ gives an elaborate description of the reasons why the human lifespan is decreasing and what happens at the end of the Age of Decline. Richard Gombrich suggests that the main narrative inserted as the teaching of the Buddha was present even before the Buddha's time in India.⁴¹ In the text, the historical Buddha gives a long teaching to his Magadhan monks in Mātulā⁴² concerning karmic events that resulted in the decrease in lifespan until his own lifetime, when people lived only for one hundred years, and continues his teaching with a prophecy. He says that a time will come when the lifespan will be only ten years. Girls will get married when they are five. There will be no word for morals, no respect for anyone; promiscuity and fierce hatred will characterize that final

³⁸ Bernbaum 1980: 62.

³⁹ Based on oral tradition and an earlier version composed in north India, the Pali Canon was first put into writing around 29 BCE, at the fourth Buddhist council in Sri Lanka.

⁴⁰ *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-sutta*. It is slightly mentioned by Nattier 1991: 13-15. She mentions it to prove that cosmic evolution and devolution were assumed by Buddhists from early on. The English translation of the title is by Walshe 1987: 395. Another interpretation of the title: "Die stolze Rede über einen Weltherrscher der Vorzeit" (Franke 1913: 260).

⁴¹ Gombrich 1997.

⁴² A village in Magadha.

age. Then there will be a seven-day “sword-interval”⁴³ when swords appear in peoples’ hands and they hunt and kill each other. The Burmese edition of the same text is a bit more interpretative, saying: “. . . world-wide armed conflicts will rage only for seven days, during which they will look upon one another as prey.”⁴⁴ And during this time of war and violence, some of them will think: “Let us not kill or be killed by anyone! Let us make for some grassy thickets or jungle-recesses or clumps of trees. For rivers hard to ford or inaccessible mountains, and live on roots and fruits of the forest.”⁴⁵ The Burmese edition is again a bit more to the point, saying that some would hide in thickets of tall grass, dense jungles, forested woodlands, inaccessible mid-river islands and mountain valleys.⁴⁶

These teachings were incorporated into the Abhidharma cosmology, and centuries later they found their way to Tibet. The teachings on the Age of Decline found fertile ground in Tibet, where especially from the thirteenth century on not only was the Dharma degenerating but the country was also being torn apart by internal conflicts, foreign attacks and chaos. As a result, many lamas thought that the final battle mentioned in the sutra was drawing close and that it was urgent to look for a hiding place.

A Hidden Land is seen as a place where an ideal society can be established, as in the Golden Age of Tibet, and people can live again in a socially and politically stable environment in complete harmony. Beyond the fertility of the place and the abundance of food supply, another reason to consider could have been the fact that, according to the treasure teachings, Guru Rinpoche blessed these lands, and people could live there under his protection. He also subjugated the local mountain gods and turned them into protectors of the Dharma, so migrants didn’t have to be afraid of hostile

⁴³ The meaning of this expression (*satthantarakappa*) is not clear for the translators of the text (Walshe, Rhys Davids), but it seems to mark a turning point between two *antarakalpas*. Walshe 1987: 602, fn. 798.

⁴⁴ *Ten Suttas* 1984: 363. This Burmese edition was also published in Sarnath and used by the Tibetan Institute of Higher Studies. It is a popular text among Tibetans. Most monks and lay practitioners I talked to were aware of this teaching. At the same time, I discovered from *khenpos* I met from schools other than Nyingma and who were not from Nepal that, even though they did have some knowledge of this teaching, they were not aware of the concept of Hidden Land.

⁴⁵ *Dīghanikāya* 26.21; Walshe 1987: 402.

⁴⁶ *Ten Suttas* 1984: 363. See also Franke 1913: 268, “. . . wird es das beste sein, wir ziehen uns in das Gras-Jungle oder in das Wald-Jungle oder unter das Luftwurzel(und Lianen-) Geflecht großer Waldbäume oder auf eine schwer zugängliche Flußinsel oder in die Unebenheiten des Gebirges zurück . . .” See the original Pali text in *Dīghanikāya* 26.21. PTS 2006: 73.

elemental forces turning against them. And because these local gods were bound under oath to protect Buddhist practitioners who keep their vows, they would also save them from wild animals. Guru Rinpoche's blessing ensures health, long life and prosperity in this life, and it is also the precondition for attaining liberation, the freedom from migratory existence.

2.4. Creating Networks

Our Tibetan text also advises its reader to build good relationships with locals on the way, build resting places on the routes to the Hidden Lands, set up small monastic or yogi communities and temples, and in case the traveller has a poor livelihood it even offers ideas about where material treasures (gold, turquoise, *gzi* stones) are hidden. These treasures can be used partly to support him and partly to erect buildings for people following behind:

Those going to Lapchi and Snowy Yolmo! On the east of Sangsang Lhadrak,⁴⁷ there is a trench filled with gold and *gzi* stones, each piece is the size of a goat's liver. Take them, and erect a resthouse in the Gyalthang⁴⁸ valley. On the pass of Nanam,⁴⁹ create a monastic community.⁵⁰

The text recounts a long list of material treasures hidden en route to the seven Hidden Lands, which makes it look as if it were a conscious scheme to set up infrastructures and “weak ties” networks in order to facilitate migration. The treasure revealer yogis wandering in the Himalayas in search of Hidden Lands created “weak ties” networks not only with locals but also with other high lamas, political luminaries and Nepali rulers. As they had good resources to facilitate their movements, they could travel a lot and had access to a greater volume of information, not only by communicating with others but also by getting access to texts or even circulating them or their messages.

⁴⁷ Zang zang lha brag. THL Place ID: F8193. According to the Northern Treasure tradition, Padmasambhava concealed various texts and sacred objects in a maroon casket here, which were revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem in 1366. These were the Northern Treasures.

⁴⁸ rGyal thang.

⁴⁹ sNa nam. Name of a great mountain range in Tibet.

⁵⁰ KNYD: 12. *la phyi dang yol mo gangs la 'gro ba rnams/ zang zang lha brag gi shar na gser gzi'i dong pa gang dang thig po ra'i mchin pa tsam zhig yod pa thon/ rgyal thang gi rong la lam khang tshugs/ sna nam gyi la la dge 'dun gyi sde thob/*

2.5. Preserving the Royal Line

Another important reason to leave Tibet was to preserve Tibetan culture outside Tibet. It is quite obvious from our treasure texts that the idea of living in a Hidden Land was driven by sentiments about the Golden Age of the imperial era of Tibet (seventh to tenth century), the ideal society. As Childs tried to prove, the reason to reach a Hidden Land could have been to preserve the imperial lineage.⁵¹ Nevertheless, I think it was not (only) the bloodline they wished to preserve but maybe more what the institution of kingship meant to them. Let me again refer to the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda-sutta*, which shows that there is a human need to institute kingship to regulate human affairs according to the Dharma because of changing environmental and human conditions. As a result of kingship, a stratified society develops, and the presence of the Cakravartin or Universal Monarch guarantees righteous rule and morality in accord with the Dharma. Kingship is the basis of order in society; royal power and the power of the Buddha's Dharma together consolidate socio-political stability. Since the Buddha has transcended this world through achieving nirvana, the king becomes the sovereign, the "sovereign-regulator" as Tambiah calls him,⁵² a link between the cosmic Dharma and the dharma of human affairs. The ideals of social order and righteous kingship are intertwined. The moment a newly installed king does not follow the Dharma, human conditions degenerate, morals decline, and social order disintegrates. As a karmic result, the human lifespan decreases rapidly.

After the Tibetan empire fell apart, an era of foreign invasions and internal conflicts followed, and by the thirteenth or fourteenth century the memory of the Imperial Era of Tibet turned into a massive narrative of the Golden Age, with Trisong Detsen being the Cakravartin and Guru Rinpoche the second Buddha. The power of the king supported by the Buddhist order is manifested in the system of royal temples built in concentric circles from Lhasa to the borderland in order to control negative energies and maintain order. And the fate of these royal temples symbolizes the fate of Tibet. Our text mentions that the sign of the last five-hundred-year period is when worship stops in these temples. But by protecting and renovating these sacred places, especially Samye, the first monastery in Tibet, which was founded by Trisong Detsen and Guru Rinpoche, the effects of the Declining Age can be reduced:

⁵¹ Childs 1999.

⁵² Tambiah 1976: 52.

At the time when all Tibetans go to the southern valleys, put an amulet box with poisonous gas under the gate of Samye! If Samye falls completely in ruins, there will be civil war in Tibet. If the three-storied central temple⁵³ is torn down, foreign armies will invade Tibet. If the three-storied Samye and the Magical Apparition [temple] of Lhasa⁵⁴ are not in ruins and the enemy doesn't cause [much] damage, Tibet will not be completely destroyed. Therefore, put sandalwood ointment in the nostril of a man who was born in the year of the monkey, smear his head and body completely with goat fat, and [he] should put the tanned leather amulet box⁵⁵ covered with butter under the threshold of Samye, then open it and run away. As a result, army troops won't be able to come close to Samye.⁵⁶

2.6. Quoting the Buddha

Guru Rinpoche quotes two texts, the *Seven Sutras of the Victorious Śākyamuni's Prophecy*⁵⁷ and the *Sutra of the King of Prophecies*,⁵⁸ to prove that the historical Buddha had already predicted the time when Jambudvīpa would be surrounded by foreign armies and his followers had to flee. By the blessing of the Great Compassionate One, now Guru Rinpoche received the task of predicting the time of escape:

In the last five hundred years of the Degenerate Times, it will be ten times worse than now. There will be no king, which is like having limbs without a head. Each land will be a [separate] principality. Each principality will have its ox-hearted butcher. Servants will quarrel and prattle. In each holy place and monastery, there will be a preceptor and master.

⁵³ dBu rtse rigs gsum. Another name for Samye monastery.

⁵⁴ Lha sa 'phrul snang. Another name for Jokhang temple, the main temple of Lhasa.

⁵⁵ bSe'i ga'u. It can mean an amulet box made of tanned leather or of rhinoceros hide or an amulet of Se, the guardian demon of the Kīlaya teaching.

⁵⁶ KNYD: 13. *bod thams cad lho rong la 'gro ba'i dus na/ rdzi dug gi ga'u bsam yas kyi sgo la zhog cig/ de'ang bsam yas kyi mtha' gogs pa dang bod la nang 'khrug yong/ dbu rtse ri gsum zhig ral 'byung ba dang bod mtha' dmag gis khyab yong/ bsam yas dbu rtse ri gsum dang lha sa 'phrul snang la zhig ral dang dgra'i gnod pa ma byung na bod gting nasbrlag par mi 'gyur/ de'i phyir mi sprel lo pa gcig gi sna bug tu tsan dan gyi lde gu blugs/ ra tshil gyis mgo lus med par byugs/ bsam yas kyi them pa'i 'og na mar brkos bse'i ga'u de'i nang du zhog la kha phye ste rang bros shig/ des bsam yas kyi phyogs su dmag ra 'cha' mi nus so/*

⁵⁷ rGyal ba Shākya thub pa'i lung bstan gyi mdo bdun.

⁵⁸ Lung bstan rgyal po'i mdo.

Preceptor, master and ordinary people will [all] wear yellow robes.
 Disciples will quarrel and [dissent will] spread.
 People will control their neighbors like thugs.
 Practitioners will abuse their friends.
 Kind and gentle people will have perverted views.
 They will abandon practicing the holy Dharma.⁵⁹

And finally Guru Rinpoche ends his prophecies with an oral instruction:

When the last five hundred years of the teaching come to an end
 All sentient beings of Jambudvīpa
 If there is no peace and happiness, flee to a safe place!
 Without listening to the teaching of sinners,
 Virtuous ones, concentrate your thoughts one-pointedly.
 Although in the revelations on Hidden Lands,
 Safe forests and valleys are described,
 Abandon your desire for vast plains of bliss.
 On the narrow borderlands of Mon
 Imbalance of elements causes illness.
 There is need for medical expertise in certain circumstances.

.....

Maintain good conduct for three years,
 Then the body will be fit for the land.⁶⁰
 Even if you fear the forests and valleys, they are safe lands,
 Because I, the king of Urgyen,
 Made the lands and valleys safe, tamed and
 Blessed the smaller lands, and concealed Dharma treasures there.
 The gatekeepers and guardians
 Obey the teaching and are entrusted [with treasures]
 For that reason, all the Hidden Lands
 Each place of realization and each sacred place
 Has the seal of [my] command, so settle there!
 The place of realization blessed by me
 Is like a father's land inherited by his son.

⁵⁹ KNYD: 16. *da lta bas lnga brgya snyigs ma'i dus na bcu 'gyur bas ngan du 'gro/ rgyal po med pas mgo med kyi yan lag 'dra/ yul re na rgyal phran re/ rgyal phran shan pa glang snying re/ gros 'go kha 'chal g.yog pos byed/ gnas dgon re na mkhan slob re/ mkhan slob skye bo gos ser gyon/ gros 'go nye gnas skyes 'gos byed/ jag pas nye bas khyim mtshes 'joms/ bshe skur chos byed grogs la gtong/ log lta byams sems can la byed/ spang bya dam pa'i chos la byed/*

⁶⁰ The physical body will adjust to the environment.

Go there and seize it without hesitation.
 In the life after this
 No doubt, [you] will meet me.⁶¹

Both of these quotations are in verse and seem to have been inserted from other texts, but I have not yet been able to identify their origin.

3. Conclusion

Despite their long cultural legacy and popularity, *terma* teachings have not been immune to strong criticism, and a number of famous Tibetan scholars, such as Sakya Pandita (1182-1251) and Jigten Gönpo (1143-1217), expressed their disapproval of the practice of *terma* revelation. Pawo Tsuglag Thenga (1504-1566), a great historian of the sixteenth century, refutes the idea that only Nyingma practitioners had the privilege to discover *termas*, since other schools also have a few treasure teachings. He explains that the reason why mainly Nyingma masters discovered these treasure teachings was that treasure inventories (*kha byang*) were inserted in the kings' treasuries (*dkor mdzod*) hidden with the condition to benefit future royal dynasties and restore temples.⁶² The fact that all treasure teachings and their narratives are associated with Guru Rinpoche⁶³ and his activities in Tibet also gives a certain amount of legitimacy to the *terma* tradition. It is interesting to see the shift in criticism: in the distant past *sarma* scholars⁶⁴ questioned the authenticity of the *terma* tradition itself, and *terma* teachings were not included in the Tibetan Buddhist canon, but during the course of history they accepted the phenomenon of treasure revelation, and instead of the authen-

⁶¹ KNYD: 17-18. *bstan pa'i snyigs ma lnga brgya'i mthar/ 'dzam gling sems can thams cad la/ bde skyid med pas bstan sar bros/ sdig can bka' las mi nyan pas/ dge byed bsam pa phyogs gcig dril/ lung bstan sbas pa'i yul rnams kyang/ nags rong bstan sa'i yul yin pas/ bde zhing yangs pa'i 'dod pa skyungs/ rmu 'thom mon gyi yul mtshams na/ 'byung ba mi snyoms nad gzhi'i (18) rgyu/ thabs mkhas rten 'brel sman dpyad dgos/ nags rong 'dzin pa'i g.yang sa la/ drod dngangs ma byed sgo ba chos/ char rmugs thib dang sa dug la/ 'jigs par mi bya pho nya bcos/ lo gsum spyod pa legs par bsdams/ de nas yul dang lus 'phrod 'gyur/ nags rong dogs kyang sa bstan pas/ U rgyan rgyal po padma ngas/ sa rong bstan pas yul phran rnams/ sa 'dul byin rlabs gter chos sbas/ sgo ba sgo srung bka' nyan bskos/ de phyir sbas pa'i yul kun nang/ sgrub gnas re dang gnas chen re/ bka' rtags yin pas bzhag par bya/ nga yi byin brlabs sgrub gnas su/ pha yul bu yis 'dzin pa ltar/ the tshom med par 'dzin du bzhud/ skye ba 'di yi phyi ma la/ nga dang 'phrad par the tshom med/*

⁶² Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston 1959: 255.

⁶³ He is considered to be the second Buddha by Tibetans, because he brought the Tantric teachings to Tibet in the eighth century.

⁶⁴ New schools of Tibet: Kagyüpa, Sakyapa, Gelukpa.

ticity of the tradition they questioned the authenticity of certain treasure revealers (*gter ston*). Two of the most significant discussions on the authenticity of *tertöns* appear during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the Nyingma polymath Ju Mipham (1846-1912) and Dondrupchen Jigme Tenpe Nyima (1865-1926). They conclude that false treasure revealers inflicted great damage with their misleading activities on the treasure tradition, and only powerful, authoritative leaders could validate treasure revealers. The latter scholar suggests that, by analyzing the treasure scriptures, an experienced master can evaluate their content and validity.⁶⁵



⁶⁵ Terrone 2010: 60-61.

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