

A Preliminary Analysis of the Prophetic Guides and Concealment Narratives of the Northern Treasure Tradition

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Within the pages of the biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (c. 1337–1408) entitled *The Ray of Sunlight*, the author, Nyi ma bzang po (14th–15th c.), presents a succinct “concealment narrative” that explains how Padmasambhava and his disciples concealed the collection of scrolls, ritual artifacts, and relics that would later be extracted by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and come to be known as the Northern Treasures.¹ Nyi ma bzang po's narrative, however, is largely synthetic in that it draws heavily upon the content of various subsidiary treasures, which herein will be referred to in general terms as “prophetic guides,” that were revealed by either bZang po grags pa (14th c.) or Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself.² These documents contain accounts of conversations between Padmasambhava and his disciples in the late-8th or early-9th century wherein they discuss a wide range of subjects, including—but certainly not limited to—the contents, purpose, and location of the concealed treasures as well as the circumstances of their extraction in the distant future, the degenerate age of the 14th century.

While each prophetic guide contains a different set of conversations between Padmasambhava and his disciples, it does not appear that there is an intended reading order to the collection that would result in a unified and coherent narrative. That is to say, the various prophetic guides are not sequential installments of a gradually unfolding chronicle. Despite the similarity to epic literature, the primary purpose of this genre of scripture is not to relate an important series of mythic

¹ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 70-84.

² In this article, “prophetic guides,” or at times simply “guides,” is used to refer to a varied sub-genre of treasure literature that employs titles containing the term *byang*, such as entrance guide (*kha byang*), path guide (*lam byang*), and essential guide (*snying byang*). For a general emic introduction to prophetic guides, see Tulku Thondup 1986, pp. 72-76. For insightful, academic discussions of prophetic guides, which she refers to as “certificates,” as well as related *byang* terminology, see the two articles by Janet Gyatso (1993 & Unpublished) listed in the bibliography.

or legendary events to future readers. As suggested by the name of this genre of literature, prophetic guides are meant to give “prophetic guidance” to a treasure revealer.³ In the case of the tradition of the Northern Treasures, the very first treasure texts to be unearthed were scrolls discovered by bZang po grags pa and Rig ’dzin rGod ldem that contained prophetic guides. In particular, the scrolls were inscribed with a relatively small amount of encoded treasure script (or *dākinī* script), which is still preserved in the published texts today. Then, at a later date, a treasure revealer—not necessarily the treasure revealer who discovered the scroll in question—was able to receive guidance through a visionary process of decoding that allows lengthy prophetic guides to be yielded from these relatively short, encrypted passages.⁴ Then, presumably, one would use these revealed scriptures—discovering and decoding additional scrolls as needed—to help navigate the challenges that arise throughout one’s career as a treasure revealer. A “proper” reading order, if one were to be conceived, might be one that places passages of advice alongside the specific challenges they were meant to address in the order that the events occurred throughout the life of the treasure revealer. Such an order, however, would not yield a coherent, straight-forward concealment narrative, which is why Nyi ma bzang po could not simply copy the information from one or another of the prophetic guides, but had to knit together passages from various sources, making editorial decisions as he went along, to produce a synthesized concealment narrative.

The analytical goal of this article is to draw further attention to the composite nature of the concealment narrative in *The Ray of Sunlight*. Thus, this presentation will begin with a summary of how the Northern Treasures were concealed according to Nyi ma bzang po, before turning to an overview of three prophetic guides that were among Nyi ma bzang po’s sources for that part of the biography.⁵ This exercise will, at the very least, allow the reader to more easily appreciate the compositional efforts that resulted in the easily digestible tale of

³ Of course, authors—secular or visionary—rarely compose their works for such straightforward and single-minded purposes, and so prophetic guides are not unique in their ability to serve multiple purposes.

⁴ Evidently, there are encoded treasure scriptures that are of equal length to their decoded prophecies. The preserved encoded script of the *Byang gter*, however, tends to be relatively short in comparison to their corresponding, decoded scriptures. For examples, see bZang po grags pa 1983a, p. 366.1, 267.4.

⁵ One reason this article is “preliminary” in nature is that it is grounded in an analysis of only the three available prophetic guides that were used as sources for the concealment narrative in Nyi ma bzang po’s biography of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem. There are many other prophetic guides within the tradition of the Northern Treasures. While some of them were consulted in the preparation of this article, still others are yet to be explored.

concealment in *The Ray of Sunlight*. At the same time, however, the following investigation illuminates interesting “problems” or “puzzles” regarding the details of the concealment narrative of the Northern Treasure Tradition and draws attention to the limitations of our knowledge regarding the usage of prophetic guides by treasure revealers while building their institutions.

The Concealment Narrative of The Ray of Sunlight

The concealment narrative in *The Ray of Sunlight* begins with a brief summary of exploits of King Khri srong lde btsan (c. 742–796), who is described as the one responsible for bringing the light of the Dharma to Tibet.⁶ The section ends by declaring that Khri srong lde btsan’s life would have ended by his 56th year if Padmasambhava hadn’t interceded ritually to extend his life for an extra 13 years.⁷ Here, Nyi ma bzang po has succinctly presented the foundation stone—in terms of religious historical precedence—upon which Rig ’dzin rGod ldem has positioned himself as the most important potential religious ally for the royal line of Mang yul Gung thang, which is no small feat considering he is attempting to pull them away from Sa skya pa influence and power.⁸ Just as Padmasambhava himself was able to wield the Dharma to extend the life—and therefore also the reign—of Khri srong lde btsan, Rig ’dzin rGod ldem will be able to—if the proper relationships are established—wield the Northern Treasures to extend the lives and reigns of the Kings of Mang yul Gung thang, who are the only remaining descendants of Khri srong lde btsan.

The concealment narrative next focuses on Khri srong lde btsan’s son, lHa sras Mu khri btsan po (761–815). Herein one learns that it is in response to the petitions of Mu khri btsan po that Padmasambhava traverses the Tibetan landscape planting treasures for future generations of Tibetans. The focus of the narrative then turns towards prophecies regarding the age of degeneration. The discussion begins in general terms, describing four great spirit-hindrances (*bdud kyi bar chad*) that are to be deflected by four great emanations before turning to the predictions that are specifically relevant for Rig ’dzin rGod ldem:

During the final [days of] the teachings in the future, various vices will emerge through the power of [various] demons’ curses. It is said that

⁶ For the specific pages containing the concealment narrative, see Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 70–84.

⁷ This claim is difficult to harmonize with the traditional dates of King Khri srong lde btsan (c. 742–796), which suggest that he died at the age of 54 rather than 69.

⁸ For a lengthy discussion of the relationship between Rig ’dzin rGod ldem and the Kings of Gung thang, see Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 103–108.

regent-emanations⁹ (*rgyal tshab sprul pa'i sku*) will arise to subdue each of those [demons and their curses] and that after those [regent-emanations] meet with their respective treasures, [the longevity of] the precious teachings will be prolonged. In particular, as we approach the time when [the average] lifespan is exhausted at fifty during the 500 [years] of the dark age, a spirit-hindrance (*bdud kyi bar chad*) will manifest for the father—known as bKra shis lde—and his son of the pure royal lineage of Mang yul Gung thang. [Padmasambhava] has stated that if [the royal family] is subjugated by that [spirit-hindrance], then [the people] in Tibet will have to experience intolerable suffering. [However, he] also stated that a bodhisattva who attained the sixth *bhūmi* will appear before Mt. bKra bzang as a counteragent who can vanquish their hindrances.¹⁰

At this point, the narrative begins to focus explicitly on the concealment of the Northern Treasures. While residing together at bSam yas Monastery, Mu khri btsan po asks Padmasambhava a series of questions regarding the remnants of his own family lineage, which are predicted to face extinction during the degenerate times of the 14th century. He wants to know where the treasures that will help them will be concealed and who will extract and wield them. Padmasambhava responds by transporting himself and his three faithful retainers—Mu khri btsan po, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and sNa nam rdo rje bdud 'joms—to the top of Mt. bKra bzang in Western gTsang. He summons a *ḍākinī* who delivers to his hand three whetstones containing a series of prophetic guide scrolls that will act as the keys for three great treasuries that have the potential to preserve the Mang yul Gung thang Dynasty. He then describes the contents and locations of the three treasuries,¹¹ each of which includes a mix of treasure scrolls, ritual artifacts, and relics.

1. The first treasury is concealed in a “mountain that resembles a heap of poisonous snakes,” which is Zang zang lha brag. This is the most well-known treasury, and Nyi ma bzang po spends two pages describing its contents.¹²
2. The second treasury is concealed in Mang yul, where there is a mountain that looks like a heap of precious jewels. This is most likely Ri bo dpal 'bar, the location that later becomes the southern hub of the tradition in Mang yul.

⁹ Here the phrase “*rgyal tshab sprul pa'i sku*” has the sense of an emanated representative of Padmasambhava who will act on his behalf in the future.

¹⁰ For the source of this translated passage, see Nyi ma bZang po 1983, p. 72.

¹¹ As will be discussed below, it appears that the second and third treasures listed here were ultimately left undiscovered.

¹² Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 76-77.

3. The third treasury is concealed in Padmasambhava's meditation cave in Nepal, which is known as Yang le shod.

Padmasambhava then explains that the three whetstone keys are concealed at Mt. bKra bzang and protected by a guardian spirit known as Bu le Nor bu bzang po. He also offers a series of prophecies that make it clear that they are intended for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, who is explicitly named. As his work is now complete, Padmasambhava returns to bSam yas with his entourage. Later, after Padmasambhava has departed, Mu khri btsan po authors and then conceals additional prophetic guides in a temple in rGyang in Western gTsang, where they are protected by the guardian spirits Bu le nor bu bzang po and Dril zhon ma.

The conclusion of the narrative is constituted by prophecies that foretell the historical events beginning with the final good days of the reign of Mu khri btsan po, through the disastrous reign of Glang dar ma (r. 838–842), through the rekindling of the teachings in Tibet, the apparent demise of the royal line and its reemergence in mNga' ris, the fragmentation of Tibet, and finally the rise of the spirit-hindrances and the invasion of foreign armies (13th c.) that set the stage for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem to extract the Northern Treasures.

In summary, Padmasambhava is reported to have concealed three separate treasuries of teachings at three separate sacred mountains as well as a set of three treasure keys at a fourth sacred mountain, all of which are to be revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. Then, Mu khri btsan po conceals another set of subsidiary treasures intended to identify Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as the future treasure revealer and guide him to the treasure keys at Mt. bKra bzang.

Sources of the Concealment Narrative: The Prophetic Guides

1. The Noble One's Advice:

Seven Profound and Noble Statements Regarding Sikkin

('Bras mo gshongs kyi 'phags pa zab mo lung bdun gyi 'phags pa bka'i lung)

Unfortunately, at present there does not appear to be an extant copy of this text. Nevertheless, the preserved passage is worth a brief examination:

In particular, to the northeast of Mt. sKu lha in Mang yul,
There will be an earthen castle that resembles a comb [made] from a
conch shell.
At the periphery [of the castle], a bodhisattva of the royal lineage
Will be conquered by six monstrous emanations and [the king's own]
subjects.

[Then,] the son of that [king], endowed with rosy [skin] and a round head,
 Will appear [and] be endowed with an expansive disposition and a virtuous mind.
 [Then,] six black executioners (*shan pa*) [will arise from] the curses (*byin brlabs*) of those
 Monstrous emanations, who had hawk faces on human bodies.
 [They] will come together because of the power of bad karma, [and] in Gung thang,
 The compassionate king, together with his entourage
 Will expel a cry of woe [as they] are stabbed to death.¹³

It is clear from the subject matter that this is a prophetic account of the fate of the Gung thang Dynasty, not long after Rig 'dzin rGod ldem reveals the Northern Treasures. Although we do not have the rest of this prophetic guide, it is very likely, given its title, that this passage was followed by instructions to depart for the hidden land of Sikkim when these predicted events come to pass. In *The Ray of Sunlight*, however, this passage is employed as part of the more general description of the impending age of decline, the knowledge of which is what leads Padmasambhava to conceal the Northern Treasures.

2. *The Entrance Guide for the Treasury of Treasures* (*Kha byang gter gyi bang mdzod*)

The Entrance Guide for the Treasury of Treasures was extracted by bZang po grags pa (14th c.) at the Drom pa Temple of rGyang and transferred indirectly to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem around 1365.¹⁴ The colophon suggests that the person who performed the task of decoding this treasure scroll, presumably Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, only transcribed the summaries—eight in total—of the treasure caches that are described at the very beginning of the scroll.¹⁵ The concluding narrative reports that after Padmasambhava left Tibet, Mu khri btsan po wrote this index (*dkar chag*) for the treasuries and concealed it in rGyang.

Regarding the text's contents, it begins with four similarly structured indices describing the contents and locations of four separate treasuries that will be revealed by individuals born in the years of the: 1) pig (*phag*), 2) sheep (*lug*), 3) ox (*glang*), and 4) fire (*me*). Then, there are four more vignettes that each describe the relevant end-time circumstances for the treasure revealers born in the years of: 5) fire (*me*), 6) ox (*glang*), 7) sheep (*lug*), and 8) pig (*phag*).¹⁶ It is, however, unclear

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁴ To view the entirety of the short text, see bZang po grags pa 1983a.

¹⁵ bZang po grags pa 1983, p. 272.

¹⁶ Notice the nearly palindromic nature of the sequence: a-b-c-d-d-c-b-a.

if these are eight separate indices or, rather, four pairs of indices offering two sets of prophecies for each of four treasuries.

It is also difficult to determine which—or how many—of these prophecies are meant to refer to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. While it is now common to designate his year of birth as 1337 (Year of the Fire-Ox), this date is far from certain.¹⁷ Regardless, unless he was somehow born in two different years, which is impossible, then at most, four of these indices—most likely the third through the sixth—could be prophecies regarding Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. The only excerpt from *The Entrance Guide for the Treasury of Treasures* to appear in *The Ray of Sunlight* was drawn from the fifth index of the series. One can conclude that in the mind of the biographer, at least this index, which indicates that the decline of the royal lineage of Gung thang will set the stage for the arrival of a person born in a fire-year near Mt. bKra bzang in Tho yor nag po, accurately describes Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. Nyi ma bzang po thereby suggests that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was born in a fire year. While the mystery of the identities of the other personages mentioned in this prophetic guide will be left unresolved herein, it is worth mentioning two possible candidates.¹⁸ First, it would not be entirely unexpected if one or more of these prophecies describes bZang po grags pa since it is quite common for treasure revealers to reveal prophecies about one's own actions.¹⁹ Another likely candidate is Sangs rgyas bstan pa, who was Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's uncle. He is presented as a prophesied master; this hypothesis is supported by the pair of excerpts from other prophetic guides that are recorded in *The Ray of Sunlight*.²⁰

It is abundantly clear, however, that this prophetic guide includes much information that did not make it into the concealment narrative in Nyi ma bzang po's composition. At least half of the indices in this collection refer to unidentified individuals and thus are more or less irrelevant within the context of *The Ray of Sunlight*. While it is beyond the scope of the current investigation to discuss all the excluded information, the following passage is offered as an example of the materials found in this prophetic guide. This is the first index, which discusses a treasury of weapons that is to be revealed by a person born in a year

¹⁷ For a discussion of the various possible dates of birth for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, see Herweg 1994, pp. 161-165.

¹⁸ One untested theory is that the eight indices are meant to describe the treasure activities of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his seven innermost disciples.

¹⁹ bZang po grags pa is generally thought to have been born in a tiger year. So, theoretically, he could have been born in a year of the fire-tiger, which would allow the fourth index to be about him. However, based on the content of that index, it appears to describe the treasure revealing activities of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. If one of these indexes is meant to refer to bZang po grags pa, then perhaps he was born in a different year.

²⁰ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 90-91.

of the pig.

During the [year] of the pig (*phag gi dus*), [which is during] the convergence of the Aśvinī constellation and the planet Jupiter, at the midpoint of a rocky mountain that resembles a heap of serpents [in] the northern land [called] Tho yor nag po, [I] concealed twenty robes, forty shields, and sixty-two knives. That is a treasury of weapons. If that [treasure] is to be extracted, it must be extracted at the hour of the pig, within a month of the pig, within a year of the pig, by a man [born in] a pig year. *De kha th[a]m!*²¹

Even though this text is not heavily quoted in *The Ray of Sunlight*, its impact on Nyi ma bzang po's concealment narrative is evident, particularly regarding the activities of Mu khri btsan po at the end of the sequence of events. Generally speaking, the treasure narrative of the biography mirrors the order of events expressed in this *kha byang*: 1) *great* treasures are concealed throughout the land while Padmasambhava, the *great* master, is in residence in Tibet, but 2) the *kha byang*, *lam byang*, and *snying byang*—arguably *lesser* treasures—are written down and concealed by IHa sras Mu khri btsan po (who is *lesser* with respect to Padmasambhava) after his departure, then 3) the *lesser* treasures are extracted first by bZang po grags pa (arguably the *lesser* treasure revealer), before 4) the *greater* treasures are extracted by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (the *greater* treasure revealer). Despite the similarities, it should be noted that this prophetic guide does not refer to the treasure keys at bKra bzang as would be expected from reading the narrative in the biography.

3. *The Lamp that Illuminates the Way* (*Lam byang gsal ba'i sgron me*)

The Lamp that Illuminates the Way was also revealed by Zang po grags pa in rGyang and then later delivered to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.²² The narrative tunes into the exploits of Padmasambhava as he travels toward Oḍḍiyāna, presumably near the end of his tenure in Tibet. He passes through what will later be Mang yul and recognizes it to be a very unstable region and knows that the future descendants of Mu khri btsan po will face serious obstacles there in the future. He

²¹ bZang po grags pa 1983a, p. 266. This last phrase essentially means, “This [prophecy] is sealed [and secret]!”

²² bZang po grags pa (Unpublished). This text can be found at the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives: D18407. I must express my gratitude to Sonam Topgyal, a librarian at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, who agreed to send me a digital copy of this text that is not included in the 63-volume collection of Byang gter literature that was published in 2015.

therefore conceals the treasury at Zang zang lha brag for their benefit and predicts that the one who will reveal them will come from Mt. bKra bzang, a clear reference to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

At this point, Mu khri btsan po requests additional information regarding the treasures and their future treasure revealer, and this is how we are given important information regarding two specific locations. He describes in detail the mountains of Zang zang lha brag, where the treasures are concealed, and Mt. bKra bzang, which will yield the treasure revealer. Padmasambhava then goes on to describe the calamities that will help one determine that it is time to reveal the treasures at Zang zang lha brag and offers advice regarding how Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his disciples should comport themselves internally and externally as to avoid coming under the control of various obstacles while they attempt to following the instructions in the prophetic guides:

[Mu khri btsan po] beseeched [Padmasambhava] again, saying: "O Honorable and Great Acarya! Will anything hinder that person who is supposed to reveal the treasures? Are there any methods or connections [that he will need]? [...]"

[Padmasambhava] responded saying: "Listen, faithful Tibetan! There will be many hindrances for that fortunate one who will extract these treasures. My compassion will protect him. If he accomplishes what I have explained and is not hindered by laziness or neglect when he meets with the *kha byang*, *lam byang*, and *snying byang* for these treasures, then hindrances will not arise for this diligent person. [Those who claim that they] will practice the holy Dharma after finishing their [mundane] activities [are essentially] admitting that they will not practice it. Abruptly cease all mundane worldly obligations. Pray to me continually [because it is] important [to forge] a connection (*rten 'brel*) [with me]. At that time, the populace (*mi'i rigs*) of ordinary (*tha mal pa*) outcasts (*gdol pa can*) and all those afflicted with wrong views, *māras* (*bdud*), samaya violators (*dam sri*), and *gongpo* spirits ('*gong po*) spirits will hinder the dharma. Therefore, [they] will approach [you] congenially and be respectful, engaging you into conversations that will bring something other than merit and the distracting bustle of worldly affairs. Through their evil deeds, [they] will cause you and [people] around [you] corporeal sickness and mental suffering. All of these will come as hindrances for [your] practice of the secret mantra teachings. Generate enthusiasm and on holy days, during the waxing moon, and auspicious days, do often your ablutions, maintain your vows, and perform your confessions many [times]. Outwardly, in accordance with the Vinaya, you should take on the appearances of [those of] the four-fold retinue²³ and take up precepts (*bslab pa*). Inwardly, you should not

²³ The four-fold retinue is the community of monks, nuns, male lay practitioners, and female lay practitioners.

contradict the words of the texts of the secret mantra. As for the search for the treasures that contain my teachings, act unerringly in accordance with [the instructions] that emerge from the *kha byang*, *lam byang*, and *snying byang*.”²⁴

The above is a wonderfully self-referential passage as it appears within one of the prophetic guides, in this case a *lam byang*, that it is instructing Rig 'dzin rGod ldem to heed. It is also an excellent example of how the advice that appears in the prophetic guides extends well beyond the identification of treasure revealers and treasure caches. The section that follows is very important for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's treasure career, for it is the source of the notion mentioned above that if the king is of faith and joins fast to the wielder of these treasures, his life and reign will be extended for thirteen years. Toward the end of this *lam byang*, Mu khri btsan po expresses concern because the predicted state of affairs seems so awful, and Padmasambhava instructs him to have faith in the power of the treasures and in he who will wield them.

As with the previous prophetic guide discussed above, *The Lamp that Illuminates the Way* is only referenced once—in this case it is a description of the specific calamities that will precede the extraction of the treasures at Zang zang lha brag—and there is also a wealth of information that did not make it into *The Ray of Sunlight*. Nevertheless, here too the influence of this prophetic guide on the concealment narrative of the biography is far more significant than the single acknowledged quotation. Still, there is important information from that concealment narrative, such as the idea that there are supposed to be three treasure keys concealed at Mt. bKra bzang, that is not mentioned in this prophetic guide.

4. *The [Cycle of Prophetic Guide] Scrolls from the White Whetstone Keys*
(*lDe mig 'dzeng rdo dkar po'i nang nas byung ba'i shog dril*)

Finally, there is the collection of six prophetic guide scrolls that were concealed inside of three whetstone keys at Mt. bKra bzang by Padmasambhava and revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem around 1366.²⁵ While Nyi ma bzang po refers to two such scrolls in the biography, everything that finds its way into *The Ray of Sunlight* is now contained

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 5a-6a.

²⁵ bZang po grags pa 1983b. The title of this text varies widely. *The [Cycle of Prophetic Guide] Scrolls from the White Whetstone Keys* (*lDe mig 'dzeng rdo dkar po'i nang nas byung ba'i shog dril*) is a synthetic title constructed from various references to the text. The version cited in the bibliography is entitled: 'Dzeng rdo dkar po nas byon pa.

on the first of the six scrolls.²⁶ It consists of a conversation between Padmasambhava and Mu khri btsan po and would sound very familiar to anyone who has read rGod ldem's biography as Nyi ma bzang po obviously relied most heavily on this prophetic guide—both in the form of acknowledged quotations and unacknowledged borrowings. It is the source for 1) the narrative involving the visionary journey to Mt. bKra bzang by Padmasambhava and his retinue 2) the notion that there are in fact three treasuries that were concealed at Zang zang lha brag, Mang yul gung thang, and Yang le shod, and 3) the idea that there are three corresponding treasure keys that are concealed at Mt. bKra bzang.

The second scroll contains a conversation involving Ye she mtsho rgyal, who would like for some important issues to be clarified regarding Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and the three sets of treasures that he is supposed to extract:

Lady Ye shes mtsho rgyal petitioned Ācārya Padmasambhava, saying: "Kye! O great ācārya! Since these three noble treasuries are [intended] for a single destined person, will they be revealed during the lifetime of a single embodiment? Or will [they] be revealed through a series of rebirths?"

[Ācārya Padmasambhava] uttered the following: "Listen, Noble Lady, [my] secret consort (*gsang ba'i gzungs*). My three innermost secret treasures, at a time when the merit of sentient beings has been exhausted, will be extracted by one secret yogin. Depending in particular on [his] degree of effort. [If it is] superb, [then all three] will be revealed in a single lifetime. [If his efforts are] middling, they will be revealed [over] a series of lives. In the worst [case], [they] will be revealed by my [other] emanations. Regardless, practicing those treasures themselves will bring about karmic connections with happiness and well-being for all sentient, migratory beings."²⁷

Presumably, this passage reflects what must have been a growing concern regarding Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's incomplete treasure career activities, for it appears that he has only revealed the first of the three prophesied treasuries. While it is abundantly clear in his biography and from a multitude of colophons that the treasury at Zang zang lha brag was revealed, there isn't any evidence that he successfully

²⁶ It seems rather unlikely that Nyi ma bzang po had access to the entirety of this prophetic guide as it exists today, for if he had, he would have very likely included a quotation from more than just what is not preserved as the first of the six scrolls. This situation concerning the use and contents of this collection of scrolls further adds to my growing hypothesis that the prophetic guides, at least within the tradition of the Northern Treasures, were decoded on an *ad hoc* basis over an extended period by more than one individual.

²⁷ bZang po grags pa 1983b, pp. 329-330.

revealed the treasures in Mang yul Gung thang or at Yang le shod. This passage above may be one of the only passages preserved by the tradition that implies that the founding patriarch might have been in any way less than perfect. For certainly it suggests that if one or more of these treasures were not extracted during his lifetime, then it is a result of his deficient effort. It may also be one of the only passages within this early layer of literature to imply that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem may be required to return, specifically to complete the process of revelation.

The remaining scrolls all contain additional information not reported in the biography. The third and fourth scrolls are the prophetic guides required to discover the treasures in Mang yul Gung thang and Yang le shod in Nepal. The fifth scroll reiterates the necessity of linking together the three treasures of teachings with the King of Gung thang for the good of Tibet. The sixth scroll is reported as being blank.

General Conclusions

In her discussion of prophetic guides, Janet Gyatso emphasizes their authority-granting nature, further noting that it is important to demonstrate that the fulfillment of the injunctive prophecies necessarily required struggle, which one can often find detailed in the biographies.²⁸ In this regard, the revelation narrative of *The Ray of Sunlight* is rather forthcoming: 1) bZang po grags pa receives the spiritual injunction to reveal the texts at rGyang multiple times before realizing he should take the order seriously, 2) after receiving the scrolls from bZang po grags pa, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem struggles to gain the support of the king, 3) he also struggles to find the keys at Mt. bKra bzang, and 4) he then struggles to find the treasures at Zang zang lha brag. Nevertheless, while understanding the importance of the prophetic guides certainly requires attention to the subject of legitimization, it is also valuable to recognize what one might consider the surface-level of intentionality of these texts: to provide prophetic guidance to a treasure revealer for a large variety of difficulties that are encountered in one's career as a treasure revealer. That being said, the problem of establishing one's legitimacy—both in one's own time and for future readers—is certainly addressed in the prophetic guides.

Reviewing the revelation narrative and the prophetic guides has also revealed that the biography is unclear regarding two specific injunctive prophecies. In particular, it is not clear from the biography if Rig 'dzin rGod ldem did or did not extract the second and third treasures at Mang yul and Yang le shod, despite the fact that the whetstone

²⁸ Janet Gyatso 1993, pp. 119-120.

guides provide the necessary information for their retrieval and suggest that all three will be revealed by the same person, though perhaps not in a single lifetime.²⁹ In an autobiographical text by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem entitled *History of Treasure Revelation*, he appears to confirm that there are treasuries at both Mang yul and Yang le shod, but that they have not yet been extracted.³⁰ In particular, he explains that while the teachings that have already been revealed will cause some benefit for the people of Tibet, greater benefits will result from the arrival of the treasures from Mang yul and Yang le shod.³¹ Unfortunately, while we know this text was written at sNa mo lung, we do not know when it was authored. So, while it is possible that he revealed these other two treasures later in his life, one would expect such important events to have been recorded somewhere, and as of yet, no trace has been found. Similarly, while there are other treasure revealers within the tradition of the Northern Treasures—some of which are understood as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's subsequent incarnations—I have not yet seen any indication within the tradition that they are thought to have discovered the treasures that were left unrevealed in Mang yul gung thang or Yang le shod.

Lastly, as a final, generalized reflection upon these and the other prophetic guides that were revealed by Zang po grags pa and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, it is worth noting that while there are records of how they were revealed and how some of them were transferred between the two treasure revealers, we have very little knowledge about how Rig 'dzin rGod ldem used the scrolls and the prophetic guides they contained. One may be able to gain some insight into these processes by examining their apparent *ad hoc* nature. That is to say, the prophetic guides appear to offer advice that is specifically tailored to address each of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's major challenges as they arise. While the

²⁹ As an aside that provides an interesting reversal of what is expected, Martin Boord reports that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is believed to have concealed treasures at Ri bo dpal 'bar in Mang yul, which were later extracted as *yang gter* by bsTan gnyis gling pa (c. 1480–1535; Boord 2013, p. 74).

³⁰ There are two versions of this text: Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 1983 and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 2015. The first of these is somewhat difficult to find because its title only appears in its colophon and the text is included in the collection as if it were the second half of another text. For a summary of the 2015 edition, see Achard 2023.

³¹ In a later publication of the same text, one of the sentences in question is significantly different. While the earlier publication reads *mang yul skyid grong dang bal yul yang le shod nas gsung dang thugs kyi gter byon nas* (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 1983, p. 262), the latter reads "*mang yul skyid rong du | bal yul yang le shod nas gsung dang thugs kyi sprul pa byon nas*" (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 2015, p. 6). While I cannot know which of these readings is closer to the original, it seems to me that the earlier publication makes much more sense in the context of thinking about the three treasures. Perhaps the version in the newer publication is a result of editing performed by someone unaware of the prophecies regarding the other two treasures.

early prophetic guides help establish his general legitimacy as a treasure revealer, they also offer much needed scriptural support in his mission to acquire the patronage of the king. After a series of murders, however, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem changes his focus away from the Gung thang Dynasty toward opening and escaping to hidden lands, concerns that are clearly reflected in *Outer Passkey to the Hidden Lands*, which is available in translation by Sardar-Afkhami, and a collection of other prophetic guides.³² Perhaps we are to understand the second, third, and fourth whetstone scrolls as reflecting Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's concerns after returning to gTsang and finally receiving the patronage of the King of Gung thang or perhaps as reflecting the concerns of his disciples after his passing. If the prophetic guides do in fact reflect *ad hoc* concerns, then one may be able to read them as commentary on events that occurred during the lives of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his immediate successors and thus gain additional insights into the early history of the tradition.

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³² Sardar-Afkhami 2001, pp. 40-65.

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