

The Literary Works of gTsang smyon Heruka (1452–1507)

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1. Introduction

The mad yogin gTsang smyon Heruka is famous for having compiled and printed the biography (*rnam thar*) and song collection (*mgur 'bum*) of Milarepa (Mi la ras pa, 1040–1123), who served as gTsang smyon's role model.¹ Among his other important deeds, the renovation of the Svayambhū Stūpa in Nepal and the compilation of an extensive collection of the aural transmissions (*snyan brgyud*) of the bKa' brgyud tradition are particularly noteworthy.² Moreover, he initiated a tradition of printing that was to continue for almost a century after his death. Given his importance and influence it is somewhat surprising how relatively little attention gTsang smyon has received in the last century, not least among the Tibetans. The existence of several biographies of him, a song collection with songs attributed to him, statues of him, and references to him in Tibetan texts indicates that he was quite well known in the 16th century, but then was gradually forgotten.

According to his biographies, gTsang smyon's literary production began with some short liturgical texts which he composed when he was in his late 20s. In between his wanderings, the restoration of the Svayambhū Stūpa, and his meditation retreats he composed, compiled, and printed several important works of literature. His final literary efforts were carried out in his early 50s, just a few years before he passed away. During that period he completed a biography of Marpa (1012–1097), and some texts that he included in his large Aural Transmission compilation.

This paper will delineate and describe gTsang smyon's literary works and also briefly outline when, where, and how these texts were produced. The main sources on which the paper is based are the colophons of his texts and the three extant biographies of gTsang smyon. The latter were written by gTsang smyon's direct disciples: rGod tshang ras pa sna tshogs rang grol (short: rGod tshang ras pa, 1482–1559),³ lHa btsun rin chen rnam rgyal (short: lHa btsun,

¹ Since the name Milarepa is widely known in its pronounced form I have chosen to write it as pronounced.

² For studies of his renovation of the Svayambhū Stūpa, see Larsson 2011 b; Rospatt 2001: 203–207; Schaeffer 2009: 64–67. For a PhD dissertation about the aural transmissions of the bKa' brgyud tradition, see Sernesi 2007.

³ For a short autobiography of rGod tshang ras pa, see rGod tsang ras pa 16th cent. a; for a study of this text, see Ehrhard 2010.

1473–1557),⁴ and dNgos grub dpal 'bar (1456–1527).⁵ Furthermore, gTsang smyon's song collection will be taken into consideration since it contains material that, although printed after his death, likely stems from his spontaneous songs of realization (*mgur*).

gTsang smyon and his disciples were very productive and influential. The tradition of printing that gTsang smyon established is sometimes referred to as “the School of gTsang smyon”. Among the many works this “school” printed, we find several titles that were compiled and printed under the direction of gTsang smyon, and a large number of works composed and printed by his disciples and other affiliated people after his passing. In this paper I will focus upon the former category. Thanks to Kurtis R. Schaeffer and E. Gene Smith, we have a good overview of the activities of the “School of gTsang smyon” (Smith 1969; 2001; Schaeffer 2009: 53–71; Schaeffer 2011). There are, however, many individual texts printed by the “school” that have not yet been studied.⁶

My doctoral thesis, *The Birth of a Heruka* (Larsson 2009), was an investigation of how gTsang smyon was transformed into a mad yogin – a heruka.⁷ The main sources for the dissertation were the three above-mentioned biographies. In these texts it is stated that gTsang smyon wrote, compiled, and printed texts. Although these activities were not the focus of the thesis, I made some references to them. Moreover, I devoted a chapter of the thesis to presenting materials that in various ways are connected with gTsang smyon, his disciples, and other affiliated people. This paper is based upon the first part of that chapter, a section which was devoted to gTsang smyon's literary works (Larsson 2009: 207–225). However, the present paper is not only a reformulation of previous research, but also a preliminary step in an upcoming postdoctoral project which will focus upon the form of Buddhism propagated and practised by gTsang smyon and his disciples. The point of departure of this postdoctoral project will be gTsang smyon's songs of realization.⁸

⁴ There are several biographies of lHa btsun in existence. For a recent PhD dissertation on lHa btsun, see Clemente 2009.

⁵ For bibliographic information of these three biographies, see the Bibliography.

⁶ Marta Sernesi is currently carrying out a postdoctoral project at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, which aims at the study of the lives, writings, and blockprinting activities of gTsang smyon Heruka and his disciples, especially rGod tshang ras pa (some of her discoveries are published in Sernesi 2011 b). Michela Clemente is also continuing her studies of another central disciple of gTsang smyon, lHa btsun rin chen mam rgyal. Both of them presented papers at the 12th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS) in Vancouver 2010. So we can anticipate an increasing knowledge of the School of gTsang smyon in the years to come.

⁷ A revised version of the dissertation was published by Brill in 2012.

⁸ The project was called “The Life, Songs, and Impact of a Mad Yogin”, financed by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), and carried out at University of California Berkeley.

2. An Overview of gTsang smyon's Literary Works

2.1 The First Literary Works and the Songs of Realization

The biographer dNgos grub dpal 'bar states that gTsang smyon had the following visionary encounter of his *yidam* Hevajra, at about age 26,⁹ while he was meditating in the Cave of the 'Bri's tongue ('Bri Ice phug) in Chu bar. At dawn, while [gTsang smyon] was in a state where Clear Light and sleep mixed, he saw the complete maṇḍala of Hevajra in the sky before him. The main figure had nine heads and 18 hands, and in each hand he held different symbolic objects and weapons (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508: 11a).

[Hevajra] said, “Son of a noble family, now since the time for helping others has arrived, you must also compose texts about Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara, and so forth!” Hearing this [gTsang smyon] woke up, and following the prophecy, which he received that morning, he wrote stanzas that contained a daily practice text of Hevajra.¹⁰

This was the starting point of gTsang smyon's increasingly successful career as a writer of religious texts.

It was also during this period that gTsang smyon's spiritual songs – *mgur* – are presented for the first time in the biographies. According to another of the biographers, rGod tshang ras pa, he sang his first song shortly after the vision of Hevajra. While staying in the La phyi area, he expressed his realization in a song called “The Grand Song of the Essential Meaning of the Great Vehicle” (rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 52):¹¹

How wonderful!
The Victorious One, Hevajra, is one's own mind,
primordially pure.
It is neither empty nor non-empty,
but abides in a state without elaborations.

Previously, when on the path of meditation,
I did not recognize this self-originated wisdom,

⁹ Information about gTsang smyon's age is seldom given in dNgos grub dpal 'bar's biography, but lHa btsun states his age from time to time. By combining the different biographies it is often possible to assume gTsang smyon's age.

¹⁰ dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508: 11a–11b: [...] *zhal nas / rigs kyi bu da ni 'gro don dus la bab pas / dges pa rdo rje dang / 'khor lo* (11 b) *bde mchog sogs kyi yig cha yang rtsoms shig / gsung ba'i ngang la mngal sad cing / de'i nang par lung bstan ltar / dges pa rdo rje'i mngon rtogs tshigs bcad ma zin bris su mdzad do /*. Similar passages are found in rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 51 and lHa btsun 1971: 50. See also Larsson 2009: 146–147.

¹¹ *Theg chen snying po don gyi mgur chen.*

which is free from elaboration.
 Because of confusion I took confusion for meditation.
 Now I am a meditator beyond conceptual mind.

When one wants to meditate,
 meditation is obscured by meditation.
 But when one understands non-meditation,
 everything arises as meditation.
 Ordinary persons are fettered by wisdom itself,
 but for a yogin the five poisons arise as ornaments.

The nature of Dharma
 has no origination and no cessation.
 Since it is not known by the learned,
 I asked the dumb.
 They did not know it either,
 so I asked the corpses at the cemeteries.
 Their explanations are the nature of the Dharma.

This is the meditation experience of a madman
 in the Snow Mountains of Lapchi.
 E vaṃ.
 Arranged in letters, how wondrous!
 E vaṃ.¹²

¹² gTsang smyon Heruka [1508]: 1b: *E ma ho // bcom ldan dges pa rdo rje ni // gdod nas dag pa'i rang sems yin // de ni stong dang stong min te // spros pa med pa'i ngang la gnas // spros bral rang byung ye shes de // sngon chad ma shes lam bsgoms pas // 'khrul pas 'khrul pa sgom par go // da ni sgom mkhan blo dang bral // sgom par 'dod tshe sgom gyi sgom de sgribs // sgom med rtogs tshe thams cad sgom du shar // so so skye bo ye shes rang gis bcings // rnal 'byor pa la dug lnga rgyan du shar // skye 'gag med pa chos kyi gnas lugs de // mkhas pas mi shes skugs pa dag la dris // des kyang mi shes dur khrod ro la dris // de yis bshad pa chos kyi gnas lugs yin // smyon pa la phyi gangs la bsgoms pa'i nyams / e baṃ // yi ger bkod pa e ma mtshar // e baṃ //*. The same song is also rendered in rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 52; lHa btsun 1971: 82. For an alternative translation of this song, see Stearns 1985: 12.

gTsang smyon's songs constitute an interesting subcategory of texts that, although printed by gTsang smyon's disciples after he passed away, probably contain his own words.¹³ The songs were issued as a collection (*mgur 'bum*) after gTsang smyon's passing, and the name of the collection is *A Precious Collection of the Master, the Heruka of gTsang's Songs, Showing the Path of the Omniscient and Powerful King*.¹⁴ These songs provide us with a unique insight into the form of Buddhism that gTsang smyon and his disciples advocated and practised. By looking at the narrative context of the songs it is sometimes possible to discern why, when, where, and to whom a particular song was sung.

The colophon of the collection states that it was compiled (*sbyar*) by rGod tshang ras pa. It also states that gTsang smyon's female companion, Kun tu bzang mo, was responsible for the arrangement (*bkod*) of the collection and sponsored its printing (*spar du bzhangs*) (gTsang smyon Heruka 1508 (?): 27b). rGod tshang ras pa also composed a short catalogue of gTsang smyon's songs with the title *Illuminating Sunbeams Catalogue* (rGod tshang ras pa 16th cent. b).¹⁵ This catalogue was eventually issued together with a text that gTsang smyon composed in 1503 called *Opening the Eyes of Faith: A [Text that] Dispels the Darkness of Ignorance [Regarding] the Outline of Songs*.¹⁶ The songs of gTsang smyon were later incorporated into two of his three extant biographies.¹⁷ The settings, in which the songs occur in the biographies and in the song collection, make it possible to determine that the songs originated during the last 28 years of his life. On a few occasions such songs are also referred to in sections of the biographies describing his earlier years, however before his late 20s gTsang smyon had not yet obtained the fame and support of later days, and without followers, disciples, and benefactors, any songs he may have sung were unlikely to have been remembered or written down. It should also be kept in mind that these songs are "songs of realization", and before a master has attained accomplishment he has no realization to express. Since

¹³ Well aware of the difficulties of determining the authorship of the songs, I find it quite reasonable to assume that they originated from gTsang smyon. Subsequently, those who wrote them down may have modified them. But, since they are rendered almost identically in the song collection and in both of the biographies, his disciples obviously did not want to alter their contents, and this indicates that they perceived the songs as their master's actual words.

¹⁴ *rJe btsun gTsang pa he ru ka'i mgur 'bum rin po che dbang gi rgyal po thams cad mkhyen pa'i lam ston*. Listed under gTsang smyon Heruka [1508] in the Bibliography. For a study of the colophon of the text, see Ehrhard 2010: 155–157.

¹⁵ *dKar chags nyi 'od snang ba*.

¹⁶ *mGur kyi dkar chags ma rig mun sel dad pa'i mig 'byed*. Both these texts are described in Ehrhard 2010: 157–158; and in Schuh 1981: 126–127.

¹⁷ rGod tshang ras pa's and lHa btsun's biographies of gTsang smyon. No songs are included in dNgos grub dpal 'bar's biography.

gTsang smyon's awakening is rendered in the part of the biographies that describes his early 20s, it is logical that no songs are reproduced in the sections of the biographies dealing with his earlier life.

gTsang smyon continued to compose texts and sing songs of realization for the rest of his life. rGod tshang ras pa lists twenty-seven songs, of which six are called "grand songs" (*mgur chen*), in his catalogue (rGod tshang ras pa 16th century b: 10a–10b). Many of the liturgical and instructional texts that gTsang smyon composed were included in his magnum opus, the Aural Transmission Compilation (*sNyan brgyud*), to which we will return.

2.2 Compiling and Printing the Biography and Song Collection of Milarepa

The compilations of Milarepa's biography and song collection were gTsang smyon's most important literary works, at least in terms of popularity and influence. These works will therefore be described and analysed in some detail. The biography was given the title the *Life of the Great Powerful Lord of Yogins rJe btsun Milarepa, which Teaches the Path of Liberation and Omniscience*¹⁸ and the song collection was titled the *Collected Songs which Expand on the Life of rJe btsun Milarepa*.¹⁹ Andrew Quintman notes that no copy of gTsang smyon's original block-print has yet appeared. But two manuscripts that are preserved in the archives of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project in Kathmandu seem to have been copied from this first printing (Quintman 2006: 205, n. 38).²⁰

The Milarepa texts mark the beginning of a very important endeavour that was to contribute more to gTsang smyon's lasting influence upon Tibetan culture than any other of his activities, namely his undertaking to print texts. Still today, new editions, translations, and re-prints of works stemming from the School of gTsang smyon appear even in the most remote corners of the globe, and the biography of Milarepa is the most prominent example by far.²¹

Printing books was a very costly, and in the late 15th century rare, enterprise. Substantial funding was necessary in order to amass the materials and to support the scribes and carvers who were needed to produce a block-print. According to one of gTsang smyon's biographers, lHa btsun, it was a

¹⁸ *rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug chen po rje btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam thar thar pa dang thams cad mkhyen pa'i lam ston*. The biography has been translated to many languages. For English translations, see Evans-Wentz 2000 [1928]; Lhalungpa 1979; Quintman 2010.

¹⁹ *rJe btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam thar rgyas par phye ba mgur 'bum*. For an English translation of the song collection, see Chang 1989.

²⁰ gTsang smyon's own printer colophon in these manuscripts is presented in Quintman 2006: 408–411.

²¹ It is far beyond the scope of this paper to list the many translations and editions of Milarepa's biography. In Swedish alone there are two different translations (Lagerkvist 1986; Andræ 1954).

visionary encounter with Nāropa that encouraged gTsang smyon to compile and print the biography and collection of songs of Milarepa (lHa btsun 1971: 96–97).²²

After the vision, at 37 (1489),²³ he decided to go to La phyi in southern Tibet, one of Milarepa’s favourite places of meditation. At La phyi he began the compilation and printing of the biography and song collection of his prototype. All three biographies of gTsang smyon describe, in a rather detailed way, why and how the biography and the collection of songs of Milarepa were made.²⁴ According to these accounts, gTsang smyon wanted to popularize and spread Milarepa’s biography and thereby benefit all beings. The biographer dNgos grub dpal ’bar describes it as follows:

Then he arrived at La phyi and there, the father siddha pondered in the following manner, “What profound and extensive dharma and oral instructions should we teach the worthy vessels so that they become liberated, and [what shall we] do? Everyone, from the king, to the ministers, to the leaders who take pride in their high position, to the common people, and all in between, have vowed to accumulate merit, but they have no leisure to act according to the way of the holy Dharma. Even if we were to inspire them to practise Dharma and make time for them, since they do not know how to practise the profound essence, they would just follow the bubble[-like] meaning of the words. [How should we teach] the superior method – the jewel that fulfils all wishes – that leads to the level of Buddha in one life, [in order to] awaken the virtuous potential of the [ones mentioned above and] those who take pride in being *dge bshes* externally? If the biography of the Venerable gZhad pa rdo rje (Laughing Vajra=Milarepa) could be made available, it would serve as an example of austerity and forbearance of sufferings for those who crave for sense pleasures and this life. And for those who doubt that Buddhahood can be obtained in one life, and who do not have time for profound meditation, it would be a perfect example that it can be done. And they would develop trust in the holy Dharma of the definitive meaning. Those who have the highest capacities would be liberated in one life. The average ones, even though they are lacking in experience, would have faith and devotion for the beings that practise. They would set the beneficial conditions and by their perfectly pure aspirations their minds would be settled for practice in the next life, and based on that, liberation would come. Even the inferior ones would give up wrong views, and an uncommon faith would arise, and then they would come to be ones for whom saṃsāra has an end.”

“How wonderful it would be”, [gTsang smyon] thought. Since most of the songs [of Milarepa] were very widespread it seemed to be easy to search them out. But some dispersed ones were very difficult to trace, and for each and every one [of the dispersed] songs [gTsang smyon] had to search through mNga’ ris,

²² A translation of this section is rendered in Quintman 2006: 198–199.

²³ lHa btsun 1971: 93.

²⁴ rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 130, 137–153, lHa btsun 1971: 97–98. dNgos grub dpal ’bar’s account is rendered below.

dBus, gTsang, Dags,²⁵ and sKong²⁶ with limitless difficulties. This he did without sparing material things. His [generosity] also gladdened the artisans [who were involved in the project] and in two years the undertaking was accomplished and completed.²⁷

Having successfully completed the printing of the Milarepa texts, gTsang smyon distributed many copies of the texts all over Tibet (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508: 16b). gTsang smyon thereby contributed a great deal to making Milarepa famous in Tibet and elsewhere. It should be noted that Milarepa's biography

²⁵ Dags po.

²⁶ sKong po.

²⁷ dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508: 16a–16b: *De nas la phyi ru phebs nas / pha grub thob chen po'i thugs la 'di ltar du dgongs te / ga re kho bo cag gis snod dang skal bar ldan pa'i gdul bya rnams la / zab rgyas kyi chos dang gdams ngag bstan nas grol bar byas shing byed pas / bsod nams bsags par khas 'cha' la / dam pa'i chos tshul bzhin du bya ba'i long med pa'i rgyal po dang / blon po dang / mi che bar rlom pa'i dpon po so so nas / dmangs phal pa'i bar rnams dang / chos byed par rlom zhing byed pa'i long yod la byas na yod kyang / zab mo'i gnad nyams su len mi shes par / tha snyad tshig gi sbu pa'i rjes su snyog pa las / tshe gcig gis sangs rgyas kyi sar 'khrid pa'i thabs khyad par can yid bzhin gyi nor bu las / phyi rol du gyur pa'i dge bshes su rlom pa rnams la nmam dkar gyi rigs sad par bya ba la / rje btsun gzhad pa rdo rje'i nmam thar 'di nyid mig lam du gyur nas / 'dod yon dang tshe 'di la zhen pa rnams la / dka' thub sdug khur gyi mig rkyen / tshe gcig gis sangs rgyas thob pa la the tshom za zhing / zab mo sgom pa'i dus min par 'dod pa rnams la / de dag yin pa'i mthun dpe nmam dag du gyur nas / nges don dam pa'i chos la (16b) yid ches shing / rab kyis tshe 'di la grol ba dang / 'bring gis rang gis nyams su ma myong kyang / nyams su len pa'i skyes bu rnams la / dad ching mos te 'thun rkyen bsgrubs / smon lam nmam par dag pas 'tshams sbyar / tshe phyi mar nyams su blangs nas rten de la grol bar bya ba dang / tha ma rnams kyis kyang log lta spangs te / dad pa thun mong ma yin pa skyes nas / 'khor ba mtha' can du gyur na ci ma rung snyam par dgongs te / mgur 'bum gyi dpe rnams phal cher shin tu dar pas btsal sla bar snang mod / kha 'thor ba 'ga' zhig ni shin du btsal bar dka' na yang / mgur re re'i phyir yang mnga' ris dbus gtsang / dags rkong tshun nas dka' ba dpag med kyis btsal te / zang zing gi dngos po la phangs pa ma byas par / gzo gnas pa rnams kyang yid mgu bar mdzad te / lo gnyi la 'jug rdzogs pa grub par mdzad do /. Andrew Quintman made a thorough examination of these sections of the biographies of gTsang smyon in his doctoral thesis, and he also translated major sections of them (Quintman 2006: 195–209). Also Kurtis Schaeffer and Ilze Maruta Stearns have investigated how gTsang smyon composed the biography and song collection of Milarepa. They too have translated sections of the biographies that deal with how gTsang smyon made the biography and song collection of Milarepa (Schaeffer 2009: 56–57; Stearns 1985: 66–96). However, none of these three authors have used dNgos grub dpal 'bar's biography of gTsang smyon and the translated section above may therefore be seen as a complement to previous studies. Nevertheless, since the accounts are similar in the three biographies, I have benefited from previous studies when translating this section.*

was completed in 1488, according to the colophon of the text itself (gTsang smyon 1979: 199; 1991: 874).²⁸ This information contradicts lHa btsun's account, which states that gTsang smyon started the work in 1489 and completed it after two years (lHa btsun 1971: 93). This would mean that Milarepa's biography was completed in 1491. rGod tshang ras pa mentions that Kun tu bzang mo, who later sponsored the printing of gTsang smyon's songs, became gTsang smyon's disciple during this period (rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 141–142). This extraordinary woman also became his consort and remained with him for the rest of his life.²⁹

Let us now leave the biographical accounts for a while and examine gTsang smyon's Milarepa texts. gTsang smyon based his works upon an already existing literary and oral tradition, but as Andrew Quintman (Quintman 2006: 209–241), Peter Alan Roberts (Roberts 2007: 57–60), and others have shown, he made several important innovations in his version of the biography.³⁰ For example, he decided to compose two different texts: one containing the biography – *rnam thar* – and one containing the songs – *mgur 'bum* (Quintman 2006: 215). This made the biography accessible also to people without much prior knowledge of Buddhism. Another important innovation was that he changed the third-person account of earlier versions into a first-person account, and thereby gave the biography an autobiographical narrative form (Quintman 2006: 216; Roberts 2007: 57). gTsang smyon also changed Milarepa's status from an emanation to an ordinary being and thereby making him easier to identify with (Quintman 2006: 221; Roberts 2007: 78–80). This narrative move also turned Milarepa into a perfect example for showing the efficacy of the tantric methods of his lineage. Moreover, gTsang smyon downplayed the more controversial aspects of the story. For example he emphasized sGam po pa's (1079–1153) primacy over Ras chung pa (1085–1161) as Milarepa's foremost disciple (Roberts 2007: 3), and he also removed sections from older versions that contained polemics against the gradual approach to enlightenment (Blancke, unpublished).

These innovations contributed to making his version accepted and popular, not only among some peripatetic bKa' brgyud yogins, but among all the different Tibetan schools of Buddhism. Thanks to his large network of disciples and benefactors, gTsang smyon then amassed the needed material and labour to print and disseminate his two Milarepa texts. Another important factor

²⁸ Lhalungpa asserts that it was written 1484 (Lhalungpa 1979: 203), but this must be a mistake since Earth Monkey Year corresponds to 1488.

²⁹ Kun tu bzang mo's biography is given in rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 140–142. She was one of the key-figures in promoting gTsang smyon's lineage and teachings after he had passed away.

³⁰ I have written about this in my doctoral thesis, see Larsson 2009: 207–217, and there is an unpublished article by Kristin Blancke that addresses this issue.

contributing to the popularity of his version of the biography and song collection was gTsang smyon's decision to distribute the texts to important religious and political leaders. He also promoted it to those who could not read by means of scroll paintings (*thang kha*) that were based upon his version (rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 147).

It is noteworthy that gTsang smyon so thoroughly identified with Milarepa that it is hard to say whether it is Milarepa or gTsang smyon who speaks to us in the biography. Despite denying Milarepa's status as an emanation in his biography, gTsang smyon paradoxically became so intimately associated with Milarepa that he came to be regarded as Milarepa's emanation. gTsang smyon was generally evasive about his previous lives, but he sometimes made allusions and said enigmatic things that showed that he saw himself as Milarepa incarnate.³¹ Quintman notes that gTsang smyon's biography of Milarepa "can be read, in part, as his own autobiography, an autobiographical biography, a life within a life" (Quintman 2006: 249). This was perhaps part of the reason for the great success of his work. Because gTsang smyon so thoroughly identified with Milarepa his version stood out from other versions and was full of life. gTsang smyon meditated in the same caves as Milarepa, ate the same food, walked the same paths, smelled the same smells, and so forth. So when he transformed Milarepa's biography into an autobiography by making it a first-person account it was more than just a narrative technique; he expressed his heartfelt closeness to Milarepa, and often "spoke" from his own experience.

2.3 The Life of Marpa

Around 1505, just two years before his death, gTsang smyon stayed in Chu bar, the place where Milarepa passed away, or as it is expressed in the colophon, "the nirmānakāya palace, the supreme place where Lord Milarepa attained perfect, complete buddhahood" (The Nālandā Translation Committee 1986: 204).³² There he printed a biography and collection of songs (*mgur 'bum*) of Marpa, Milarepa's teacher, that he had composed (rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 235). The biography was given the name the *Life of Marpa the Translator which is Meaningful to Behold*.³³ Gene Smith's list of the different editions of this text shows that the biography of Marpa also became popular and widely

³¹ The statements and allusions of this kind that gTsang smyon made have been translated and analysed at length by both Stearns 1985: 75–83 and Quintman 2006: 253–261.

³² gTsang smyon 1990: 189: *dbang phyug mi la ras pa mngon par rdzogs par sangs rgyas pa'i gnas mchog / chu bar sprul sku'i pho brang*.

³³ *sGra bsgyur mar pa lo tsha'i rnam thar mthong ba don yod*. The text is mentioned in Schaeffer 2011: 470. The copy that Schaeffer refers to is preserved in the archives of NGMPP, reel no. L9/11-L10/1.

disseminated in Tibet (Smith 2001: 74). Vostrikov notes that this biography “is extremely popular in Tibet and abroad” (Vostrikov 1979: 189, n. 555).³⁴

The song collection has remained obscure and no translation of it has appeared. The Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project has a microfilm copy titled the *Collected Songs of Marpa the Translator*.³⁵ The collection is 40 folios long in the later edition printed by IHa btsun 1552 (?) at Brag dkar rta so.³⁶

Given the importance of Marpa’s biography, it is peculiar that neither IHa btsun nor dNgos grub dpal ’bar care to mention it in their biographies about gTsang smyon. Only rGod tshang ras pa mentions it, and he does so in one sentence only (rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 235). This indicates that the disciples of gTsang smyon did not consider this work to be especially important, but history has proven them wrong. The biography of Marpa became an important text that, although not as popular and disseminated as Milarepa’s, was widely read and accepted as authoritative far beyond bKa’ brgyud circles.

In the colophon gTsang smyon mentions his sources:

Originally it was given orally and in full detail by Jetsün Mila and Marpa Golek to the teacher of Ngen Dzong. Jetsün Mila also gave it to Rechungpa. Then, Rechungpa and Changchup Gyalpo, the teacher of Ngen Dzong, discussed it and compiled a biography, which remains here as the main text. To this was added many biographical anecdotes recounted by guru Ngokpa, Tsurton, and Metön (The Nālandā Translation Committee 1986: 204).³⁷

2.4 The Aural Transmission Compilation

The popularity of the life stories and song collections of Marpa and Milarepa might overshadow gTsang smyon’s largest literary production: an extensive collection of the Aural Transmissions (*snyan brgyud*) of the bKa’ brgyud tradition. gTsang smyon worked on this project for the greater part of his life and completed it just before he died. The compilation contains many original works by gTsang smyon, and also works by other masters of the tradition.

³⁴ Jacques Bacot translated parts of it into French, and a complete English translation was made by Chögyam Trungpa and the Nālandā Translation Committee (Bacot 1937, Nālandā Translation Committee 1986). For a review of the latter, see Martin 1984.

³⁵ *sGra bsgyur mar pa lo tsa’i mgur ’bum* (NGMPP reel no. L194/7, E2518/2). The work is listed in Schaeffer 2011: 470.

³⁶ Listed in Schaeffer 2011: 470.

³⁷ gTsang smyon 1990: 189: *rje btsun mi la dang / mar pa mgo legs gnyis kyis / ngan rdzong ston pa la zhib rgyas zhal nas snyan du brgyud pa dang / rje btsun mi las ras chung pa la yang gnang bas / ras chung pa dang / ngan rdzong ston pa byang chub rgyal po gnyis bka’ bgros nas / bsgrigs pa’i nam thar phyi mo’i gtso bor bzhugs pa las / bla ma mgog pa / tshur ston / mes ston rnam kyis zhal nas byung ba’i yig cha la sogs / nam thar mang dag ’dzom pa’i nang nas /.*

According to IHa btsun, gTsang smyon wrote a text called *An Outline of the Adamantine Verses that Dispel the Darkness of Ignorance* associated with the Aural Transmission during his first stay in Tsāri when he was in his early 20s (IHa btsun 1971: 31).³⁸ About ten years later, when gTsang smyon was spending three years at the La phyi hermitage, he composed most of the texts that later were included in his collection. The reason behind this massive work was a fear that the profound instructions would disappear in the future. The instructions contained the innermost essence of the most profound practices of the bKa' brgyud tradition and apparently they had been considered too profound and secret to be passed down in letters. Only a few notes had been written down by Milarepa and some other masters, instead, for hundreds of years, most of the instructions had been transmitted orally. gTsang smyon decided that the time was ripe to make a written collection of these important instructions and thereby save them for future generations of practitioners (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508: 17a). Among the texts gTsang smyon composed at La phyi we find: *The Sādhana of the Revered Innate Goddess*,³⁹ *The Root-verses of Oral Instructions*,⁴⁰ *The Oral Instructions of the Body-maṇḍala*,⁴¹ *The Universal Panacea of the Vīra*,⁴² *The Six Ornaments*,⁴³ and also a fire-ritual,⁴⁴ and a consecration ritual (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508: 17a).⁴⁵ According to dNgos grub dpal 'bar the compilation that gTsang smyon made “became similar to a guide (*lam mkhan*) or eyes (*mig*) of the oral precepts for those in the degenerate time [who aspire for] the accomplishment of enlightenment in one life. And it also made the teachings of the bKa' brgyud shine like the sun” (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508: 17a).⁴⁶

gTsang smyon's disciple rGod tshang ras pa later wrote an index (*dkar chag*) listing and describing the texts included in gTsang smyon's compilation (rGod tshang ras pa 1974).⁴⁷ In it we find many of the texts that are mentioned in the

³⁸ *rDo rje tshig rkang gi sa bcad ma rig mun sel*. This title is preserved as a seven-folio manuscript in NGMPP's archives, reel no. L138/15.

³⁹ *rJe btsun lhan cig skyes ma'i sgrub thabs*.

⁴⁰ *Zhal gdams rtsa tshig*.

⁴¹ *Lus dkyil zhal shes*.

⁴² *dPa' bo chig thub*.

⁴³ *rGyan drug*.

⁴⁴ *sByin sreg*. An eighteen-folio manuscript of a *bDe mchog mkha' 'gro snyan brgyud sbyin bsreg* ritual, which is ascribed to gTsang smyon, is contained in NGMPP's archives, reel no. L324/2.

⁴⁵ *Rab gnas*.

⁴⁶ *lNga brgya'i dus su tshe gcig gis sangs rgyas sgrub pa'i gdams ngag rnam kyī mig gam / lam mkhan lta bur gyur pa 'dis kyang / bka' rgyud kyī bstan pa nyin mor mdzad pa lags so /*.

⁴⁷ Marta Sernesi has translated this index in her dissertation, and she has also transliterated the Tibetan text (Sernesi 2007: 259–268).

biographies of gTsang smyon, as well as other texts. Several of the texts that rGod tshang ras pa lists in the index have appeared in manuscript format in two collections of manuscripts published as *bDe mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud (Ras chung snyan rgyud): Two manuscript collections of texts from the yig cha of gTsang smyon He ru ka* (gTsang smyon 1971). These two collections contain several of the original works that gTsang smyon composed. The first collection is the most complete, but some texts that are missing from it are extant in the second collection. Not all the texts in the collection are authored by gTsang smyon, but several of them are. The most interesting extant text is perhaps the *Authoritative Commentary of the Aural Transmission of the Saṃvara/Dākinī in Conjunction with its Outline*⁴⁸ (short: *Authoritative Commentary*).⁴⁹ In its manuscript form it is more than 350 pages long⁵⁰ and, according to the biographies, it was completed at the end of gTsang smyon's life. This is an extensive commentary to the so-called *Adamantine Verses (rDo rje'i tshig rkang)* and explains the tradition's root text word by word (Sernesi 2011 a: 195).⁵¹ The *Authoritative Commentary* includes a so-called “golden rosary” (*gser 'phreng*) section with short life stories of each lama in the aural transmission lineage, from Vajradhara up to gTsang smyon's main teacher Sha ra rab 'byams pa (1427–1470). Biographies of the following masters are included in the *Authoritative Commentary* (gTsang smyon 1971, vol. 1: 21–115):

1. rJe btsun rDo rje rnal 'byor ma
2. Ti lo Shes rab bzang po
3. Nā ro pa
4. Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros
5. Milarepa
6. Ras chung rDo rje grags
7. Khyung tshang pa Ye shes bla ma
8. a) Mar ston Tshul khriims 'byung gnas
b) sLob dpon sTar bsgom
c) Ma gcig Ong bhyo ras ma
9. Zhang lo tsa ba Byang chub 'od zer
10. 'Gro mgon lha rje Dha ra shri
11. Sras Byang sems bSod nams rgyal mtshan

⁴⁸ *bDe mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud kyi gzhung 'brel ['grel] sa gcad [bcad] dang sbrags pa.*

⁴⁹ *gZhung 'brel.* Both volumes contains this text, but in the second volume it is called *bDe mchog kha' 'gro snyan rgyud kyi gdams pa yid bzhin nor bu skor gsum.* The text is also contained in NGMPP's archives, reel-no. L686/2–L686/1.

⁵⁰ The *dbu med* manuscript is issued in Tibetan pages but paginated in the Western way, i.e., front side: one, back side: two, etc.

⁵¹ See the contents in gTsang smyon 1971, vol. 1: 1–6.

12. Ma gcig 'Khrul zhig kun ldan ras ma
13. mKha btsun gZi brjid rgyal mtshan
14. mKhan po dBang phyug shes rab
15. Ri khrod ras pa gZhon nu rgyal mtshan
16. Ras chen pa gdan cig pa gZhon nu dpal ldan
17. La phyi pa mdong ston Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan
18. 'Dul 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po
19. Sha ra rab byams pa Sangs rgyas seng ge⁵²

There are nine more texts by gTsang smyon in the first volume of this pair of manuscript collections.⁵³ Among them we find a vase empowerment,⁵⁴ a eulogy, a consecration ritual, a fire ceremony, instructions for transference (*'pho ba*), instructions of the secret conduct of Nāropa,⁵⁵ and also a permission blessing (*rjes gnang*) for the Four Armed Protector.⁵⁶ Several of these texts are mentioned in the biographies of gTsang smyon, and they are also listed in the index by rGod tshang ras pa. This means that many of the central Aural Transmission texts which gTsang smyon composed are still extant, some in the two collections of manuscripts, and some in the archives of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project.

It is noteworthy that no block-print version of gTsang smyon's Aural Transmission Compilation has appeared. The two manuscript collections are minor in scope and length, and rGod tshang ras pa's index does not reflect such a collection. It thus remains to be clarified how the surviving manuscript collections, the index, and the twelve-volume collection referred to in the biographies relate to one another (Sernesi 2007: 29). Since no part of any block-print version of the work has appeared, it is unclear if the text ever existed in block-print form.

2.5 Miscellaneous Works

Most of the ritual texts and liturgies that gTsang smyon composed were included in his Aural Transmission Compilation, but some did not fit in there.⁵⁷

⁵² There are also sections of the *Authoritative Commentary* which describe the alternative lineages of the Aural Transmission that gTsang smyon received from Sha ra ba. These are outlined in Sernesi 2007: 113–116.

⁵³ See the contents in gTsang smyon 1971, vol. 1: 1–6.

⁵⁴ According to the colophon this text was written in 1492.

⁵⁵ *Nāro gsang spyod kyi 'khrid*. Two manuscripts with this name are also found in NGMPP's archives, reel-no. L108/16 and L109/8.

⁵⁶ *Phyag bzhi pa'i rjes gnang*. According to the colophon this text was written at the behest of Kun tu bzang mo. This might be *mGon po grub thabs 'dus pa* (*An Abbreviated Protector Sādhana*) that is mentioned in rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 198.

⁵⁷ An example of such a text could be a dedication prayer named *rJe btsun gtsang smyon gyis mdzad pa'i b[s]ngo ba shin tu zab cig* (*Venerable gTsang smyon's Very*

We saw above, for example, that one of his first texts was a daily practice text of Hevajra. rGod tshang ras pa also mentions that gTsang smyon composed a couple of Hevajra texts while staying in Chu bar in 1503 (rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 207). The names of the latter texts are *The Great Praise of Hevajra* and *A Discourse of Hevajra*.⁵⁸ None of these Hevajra texts have appeared, but it is possible that they will show up some day.

gTsang smyon also composed a prayer for blessing directed to Milarepa. This prayer is called *The Treasury of Blessings: A Prayer to the Venerable Laughing Vajra*⁵⁹ and it is included in a compilation of prayers called *Accompanying Prayers of the Lineage [of the] Three Dohā cycles*.⁶⁰ The supplication to Milarepa was printed at Ras chung phug under the direction of rGod tshang ras pa.

There is also a travel document (*lam yig*) attributed to gTsang smyon, titled *An Authorized Permit for Travel*.⁶¹ This document, with requests for food, provisions, lodging, and other kinds of assistance that his disciples brought along with them on their pilgrimages to Ti se, La phyi, and Tsāri, is included in the biography by rGod tshang ras pa (rGod tshang ras pa 1969: 191–192). It is worth mentioning that the mad yogin 'Brug pa kun legs (1455–1529) reproduced gTsang smyon's travel document in his autobiography and decided to write a similar one.⁶²

3. Conclusion

gTsang smyon's literary works show that he wanted to promote the ancient bKa' brgyud masters' teachings and lineage.⁶³ He devoted a large part of his life to disseminating the life stories, songs, and, not least, the aural transmissions of Marpa, Milarepa, and other bKa' brgyud forefathers. Concerned that the aural instructions, the life stories, and the songs of the bKa' brgyud masters would disappear or be misunderstood by future generations; he collected them, compiled them, printed them, and finally disseminated them to his disciples and sponsors.

Profound Dedication Prayer), NGMPP reel-no. L234/11. But I am uncertain whether this six-folio manuscript text is a miscellaneous work or if it was a part of the Aural Transmission collection.

⁵⁸ *dGe rdor stod chen* and *dGes rdor gleng bzhi*.

⁵⁹ *rJe btsun bzhad pa'i rdo rje la gsol ba 'debs byin rlabs kyi gter*.

⁶⁰ *mDo ha bskor gsum rgyud pa'i gsol 'debs dang bcas pa*. The collection of supplications is available in NGMPP's archives, reel no. L803/5 and its length is 33 folios in total for the seven titles that are included (listed in Schaeffer 2011: 468).

⁶¹ *bKa' shog lam yig*.

⁶² The travel document is rendered in 'Brug pa kun legs 2005: 79–81 and 1974: 65–66. A French translation of the *lam yig* is found in Stein 1972: 143–145.

⁶³ For a discussion of gTsang smyon's affiliation with the bKa' brgyud school, see Larsson 2011 a.

The innovations he made when compiling the texts reflect the period when gTsang smyon lived and his remarkable literary genius. He skilfully adapted his texts to the demands and needs of his audience. gTsang smyon thus managed to bring life, authority, and current relevance to the ancient texts. By downplaying controversial aspects, he also contributed to making them accepted by a much larger audience than previously. The most prominent example of this is his version of the biography of Milarepa.

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