

THE *GSAN YIG* OF A MES ZHABS:
OBSERVATIONS REGARDING ITS STYLISTIC AND
FORMAL FEATURES*

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1. Introduction

After having been somewhat neglected within Tibetan studies for several decades, the literary genre of “records of teachings received” (*gsan yig*) was newly introduced as a research topic in its own right in the year 2000,¹ when Jan-Ulrich Sobisch and Dan Martin employed *gsan yigs* as the main sources for their contributions to the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies in Leiden. Sobisch presented a survey of the record of teachings received by the Tibetan scholar and historian A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga’ bsod nams (1597–1659) and described in some detail the biographies of Lam ’bras masters mentioned in this *gsan yig* (Sobisch 2002).² Martin contributed a study on the transmission of the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* in Tibet, in which his main aim was to investigate the ‘grey period’ of this transmission lineage, namely, the years from 842 until the end of the tenth century (Martin 2002). Simultaneously with Sobisch’s and Martin’s work, Sam van Schaik published an English translation of the record of teachings received

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¹ See Sobisch 2002: 161ff. for a historical sketch of *gsan yig* studies, of which van der Kuijp 1995 may be considered the most important one.

² For an investigation of A mes zhabs’s collected works, see Sobisch 2007.

by the *gter ston* Rig 'dzin 'Jigs med gling pa (1730–1798) (van Schaik 2000). Whereas Sobisch and Martin utilised *gsan yigs* mainly as historical and biographical sources, van Schaik also aimed at drawing the reader's attention to the style and conventions of a *gsan yig*. The present paper intends to follow the latter approach and to provide further details regarding the style, structure and technical language of *gsan yigs* on the basis of the records of teachings received by A mes zhabs.³

In his *Tibetan Historical Literature*, Andrei Ivanovich Vostrikov, one of the first scholars to notice the bibliographical and historical importance of *gsan yigs*, distinguishes between *gsan yigs* as bare lists of names on the one hand and as more extensive works, supplemented by literary and historical data, on the other (Vostrikov 1970: 199). The collection of *gsan yigs* under discussion in the present paper clearly belongs to the second type, providing not only the names of teachers and students but also valuable literary and biographical information. These records are part of the collected works of A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, the twenty-seventh throne-holder of Sa skya. A mes zhabs compiled a total of twelve *gsan yigs*: eleven are of his teachers, the last one is his own. Together they form his *thob yig*, consisting of 383 folios.⁴

The structure of a *gsan yig* usually follows a very specific pattern and in order for the Western reader to use a *gsan yig*, it is important to understand its particular features. What I would like to focus on here is not the rough structure of A mes zhabs's *gsan yig* with all the various transmissions of initiations and empowerments. Instead, I would like to examine the structure and style of single lineages. Knowledge of the stylistic and literary characteristics of lists containing lineages is in my eyes a prerequisite to using

³ The following observations result from my participation in a project funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) at the University of Munich between 2004 and 2007.

⁴ For further details, see Sobisch 2002: 164ff.

them as historical sources. Only when one understands the technical language utilised in the *gsan yigs*, will one be able to determine the relations between the individuals listed in a lineage.

2. Single and Parallel Transmissions

A lineage usually begins with the mentioning of the title or topic of the transmission. This entry can either consist of a few words or extend over several folios, for example, when transmissions of collected works or collections of biographies are being introduced and all titles of works included in them are being listed.⁵ Usually a title (or a list of titles) is concluded by the phrase *thob pa'i brgyud pa ni* (“the lineage of the [teaching] received”), which indicates that from here on the listing of names begins. In most cases teachings are documented as transmissions from one teacher to only one disciple, and the names are listed without any additional phrases. In some cases, however, the documentation mentions not only a single transmission from one teacher to one disciple, but a transmission of a single teaching given or received by several individuals. In those cases additional phrases are employed to indicate the specific relationship between these individuals as, for instance, in the transmission lineage of the “Initiation into the *maṇḍala* of the venerable Vajra-Nairātmyā with fifteen goddesses”:⁶

*rje btsun rdo rje bdag med ma lha mo bco lnga'i dkyil 'khor du dbang bskur ba
thob pa'i brgyud pa ni*

(1) *rdo rje 'chang'*

(2) *bdag med ma'*

(3) *birwa pa'*

⁵ Jan-Ulrich Sobisch reports in Sobisch 2002: 179 that he has located eighteen catalogues of collected works in A mes zhabs's *gsan yig*. One of these is the catalogue of the œuvre of Glo bo mkhan chen Bsod nams lhun grub (1456–1532), which is reproduced in Kramer 2008, Appendix D.

⁶ See BD 6a2ff.

- (4) *nag po pa/*
 (5) *ḍa ma ru pa/*
 (6) *a wa dhu* [read: dhū] *ti pa/*
 (7) *ga ya dha ra/*
 (8) *'brog mi shākya ye shes/*
 (9) *bla ma se mkhar chung pa/*
 (10) *zhang dgon pa ba/*
 (11) *bla ma sa skya pa chen po/*
 (12) *bla ma ne tshe sbal ston/*
 (13) *slob dpon bye ma lung pa/*
 (14) *bla ma shes rab grags/*
 (15) *gnam 'phar⁷ ba chos shes/*
 (16) *mngon pa dbang phyug brtson 'grus/ de la*
 (17a) *'phags pa rin po che dang/* (17b) *paṇḍi ta rdo rje shes rab/ de gnyis ka la*
 (18) *zhang dkon mchog dpal/ de la*
 (19) *chos rje brag phug pa/ de la*
 (20a) *bla ma dam pa dang/* (20b) *ri khrod pa gnyis kas gsan/ de gnyis ka la*
 (21) *bla ma dpal ldan tshul khrim/ de la*
 (22a) *chos rje shar pa dang/* (22b) *grub chen buddha ba gnyis kas gsan/ de gnyis ka la*
 (23) *bla ma rdo rje 'chang/ de la*
 (24) *sems dpa' chen po/ de gnyis ka la*
 (25a) *rje btsun dam pa kun dga' dbang phyug pa dang/* (25b) *kun mkhyen bsod nams seng gel/ de gnyis char la*
 (26) *'dren mchog chos kyi rgyal po dkon mchog 'phel/*
 (27) *sa lo chen po/*
 (28) *sngags 'chang chos kyi rgyal po/*
 (29) *grub mchog bsod nams dbang po/ des*
 (30) *bdag la'o/*

⁷ The syllable *'phar* is added by a different hand in the manuscript.

Up to (16) Mngon pa Dbang phyug brtson 'grus⁸ the initiation is documented as a single transmission from one teacher to one disciple. Through the expressions *de la* (“under this [teacher]”) preceding the following person, (17a) 'Phags pa rin po che (1235–1280), and *dang* between (17a) 'Phags pa rin po che and (17b) Paṇḍita Rdo rje shes rab, the author of the *gsan yig* documented a parallel transmission, namely, from (16) Dbang phyug brtson 'grus to both, (17a) 'Phags pa rin po che and (17b) Rdo rje shes rab. A similar pattern is found further below, where it is stated that (19) Chos rje Brag phug pa [Bsod nams dpal] (1277–1350) passed on the initiation to (20a) Bla ma dam pa [Bsod nams rgyal mtshan] (1312–1375) and (20b) Ri khrod pa [Blo gros brtan pa] (1316–1358). Another parallel transmission appears from (21) to (22a) and (22b). After (20b) and (22b) we also find an additional phrase, *gnyis kas gsan* (“both studied [under the teacher]”), although strictly speaking this is redundant information. This is evident from the fact that this information is not given after (17b), where we find the same parallel transmission. After such a branching of the transmission into two parallel lineages, the necessity arose to find a proper expression for the further course of the lineage. The author had to indicate unambiguously if, for instance, (21) Bla ma Dpal ldan tshul khrim (1333–1399) obtained the initiation from both (20a) Bla ma dam pa and (20b) Ri khrod pa, or whether he received it only from one of them. In the present case the expression *de gnyis ka la* (“under these two [teachers]”) shows that both 20a and 20b transmitted the teaching to (21) Dpal ldan tshul khrim. The general structure of two individuals receiving or passing on a teaching may be demonstrated through the following outline (where G stands for ‘generation’):

G1	PERSON A <i>de la</i>
G2	PERSON B <i>dang</i> PERSON C (<i>gnyis kas gsan</i> / <i>kyi gsan</i> / <i>gnyis kyi gsan</i>)
G3	<i>de gnyis la</i> PERSON D

⁸ This person might be identical to the Dbang phyug brtson 'grus mentioned in Roerich 1949/53: 673ff., who lived from 1187 to 1250.

As is evident from the example below, it is also possible that only one person of a group of recipients belonging to the same generation (in this case a group of four persons in total) transmits the teaching to a disciple who then follows him in the lineage:⁹

- (1) *kun mkhyen bsod nams seng ge/ de la*
- (2a) *paṅ chen nyi zla seng ge/*
- (2b) *kong ston dbang phyug grub pa/*
- (2c) *yongs 'dzin dkon mchog 'phel ba/*
- (2d) *'jam dbyangs sangs rgyas rin chen dang bzhi las/ rje sangs rin pa'i drung
du*
- (3) *'jam dbyangs dkon mchog rgya mtshos gsan/*

Among the four [individuals] (2a) Paṅ chen Nyi zla seng ge, (2b) Kong ston Dbang phyug grub pa (fl. late-1400s), (2c) Yongs 'dzin Dkon mchog 'phel ba (1445–1514) and (2d) 'Jam dbyangs Sangs rgyas rin chen (1450–1524),¹⁰ [who received the teaching from] (1) Kun mkhyen Bsod nams seng ge (1429–1489), it was (2d) Sangs [rgyas] rin [chen] under whom (3) 'Jam dbyangs Dkon mchog rgya mtsho (1510–1586)¹¹ studied.

⁹ See the transmission lineage *Rje rdo rje 'chang gyi sgrubs dngos grub rgya mtsho dang sbyar ba shin tu rgyas pa* (MS 34a6f.).

¹⁰ These dates are given in Jackson 1991: 225. In Jackson 1989: 53, 'Jam dbyangs Sangs rgyas rin chen is said to have been born in 1453.

¹¹ In MS 9b6 we are informed that Dkon mchog rgya mtsho “was born in the iron-horse year, [called] *rab myos* (Skt. *pramoda*)” (*rab myos lcags rta lo 'khrungs*) and in MS 9b7 it is stated that he was 13 years younger than his teacher Dkon mchog lhun grub (*de las lo bcu gsum gyi gzhon pa*), who was born in 1497. This means that Dkon mchog rgya mtsho must have been born in 1510. The date of his death is found in NC 54a7: “He lived until [his] 77th [year], [which was] the fire-dog [year] (= 1586)” (*me khyi don bdun bar bzhugs*).

In some cases the phrase *dang* is not used as a conjunction of two names, although the second name is followed by the phrase *de gnyis la*.¹²

- (1) *sa paṅ la*
- (2a) *'phags pa dang*
- (2b) *bo dong brtson 'grus rdo rjes gsan/ de gnyis la*
- (3) *khro phu bsod seng*
- (4) *yang rtse ba rin chen seng ge/ de gnyis la*
- (5) *kun mkhyen bu*

The first part of the transmission closely resembles the above examples. It is obvious that (1) Sa [skya] paṅ[ḍita] (1182–1251) transmitted the teaching to both (2a) 'Phags pa [rin po che] and (2b) Bo dong Brtson 'grus rdo rje (b. 1200). However, the position of the following two individuals, (3) Khro phu [ba] Bsod [nams] seng [ge] and (4) Yang rtse ba Rin chen seng ge, is less evident on first sight. The fact that we find the phrase *de gnyis la* also after Rin chen seng ge, indicates that they both bestowed the initiation on (5) Kun mkhyen Bu [ston] (1290–1364). But as there is neither a *dang* between them nor a *gnyis kas gsan* following them, one has to assume that these two individuals (depicted as PERSON C and PERSON D in the chart below) are to be arranged successively and not in one generation. This alternative structure may be outlined in the following way:

- G1 PERSON A *dang* PERSON B (*gnyis kas gsan / kyi gsan / gnyis kyi gsan*)
- G2 *de gnyis la* PERSON C
- G3 PERSON D
- G4 *de gnyis la* PERSON E (studied under PERSON C and PERSON D)

¹² See the lineage of the *Zab mo lus kyi dkyil 'khor du dbang bskur* (MS 8a7).

3. Transmissions to More than Two Individuals

We find very similar arrangements when we move on to groups of more than two individuals being involved in the process of transmission.¹³ The phrases used correspond to those described above. However, the term *dang* is hardly ever employed between the names and appears only after the last name of the group, as is evident from the following example:¹⁴

- (1) *nyan chen pa/ de la*
- (2a) *brag phug pa/*
- (2b) *bla ma dpal ldan seng ge/*
- (2c) *bla chen kun blo dang gsum gyi gsan/ de gsum la*
- (3) *bla ma dam pa/*

Although no *dang* connects (2a) Brag phug pa, (2b) Bla ma dpal ldan seng ge, and (2c) Bla chen Kun [dga'] blo [gros] (1299–1327), the phrase *dang gsum gyi gsan* (“the three [individuals] studied”) indicates that all three of them have received the initiation from (1) Nyan chen pa [Bsod nams brtan pa] (b. 1230).¹⁵ To emphasise the fact that all of Nyan chen pa’s students transmitted the teaching to the following person, (3) Bla ma dam pa, the expression *de gsum la* is employed. It is noteworthy that the phrases *gnyis kyi gsan*, *gsum gyi gsan*, and so forth are used regularly with the genitive particle *kyi / gyi* instead of the expected ergative marker *kyis / gyis* in A mes zhabs’s *gsan yig*.

¹³ The following examples describe structures including three individuals. A few groups of four masters are also to be found, for example, in GB 4a5f., 4b6f., and NC 56b6f. Groups of five individuals usually appear only in connection with the term *rjes su bzung ba*, which is discussed further below.

¹⁴ See MS 8a6.

¹⁵ For Nyan chen pa’s date of birth, see MS 10b6: “born in the iron-tiger year, [called] *rnam ’gyur* (Skt. *vikṛta*)” (*rnam ’gyur lcags stag lo ’khrungs*), and MS 10b7: “Twenty years younger than [Tshogs bsgom rin po che] (1210–1307)” (*de las nyi shu’i gzhon pa*).

Moreover, the variant with the genitive usually appears only in connection with the particle *kyi / gyi*. When the Tibetan morphology demands the ergative marker *-s* as in *gnyis ka, gsum ka*, and so forth, the expected *-s* is added (i.e. *gsum kas gsan*).¹⁶ As an alternative to the phrase *gsum gyi gsan* the expression *gsum la gnang* (“[he] bestowed [the teaching] on those three [individuals]”) is used on several occasions, as illustrated in the following example:¹⁷

- (1) *bla ma sa skya pa chen pos/*
 (2a) *slob dpon rin po che bsod nams rtse mo/*
 (2b) *tshul khrims grags/*
 (2c) *gtsug tor rgyal po gsum la gnang/ de gsum kas*
 (3) *rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan/*

Since *dang* is missing after the first and second disciple of (1) Bla ma Sa skya pa chen po [Kun dga’ snying po] (1092–1158), the phrase *gsum la gnang* is indispensable for the understanding of the relation between the four individuals. The phrase *de gsum kas* (just as *de gsum la* in the previous example) makes it obvious that all three disciples of (1) Kun dga’ snying po passed the teaching on to the next person, (3) Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147–1216). I have found two constructions for cases where three individuals are involved in the transmission of a teaching in the *gsan yig* of A mes zhabs. They may be outlined as follows:

G1	PERSON A
G2 <i>de la</i>	PERSON B PERSON C PERSON D (<i>dang</i>) <i>gsum gyi / gsum kas gsan</i>
G3 <i>de gsum (ka) la / de gsum kas</i>	PERSON E

¹⁶ Names ending in a vowel seem to be treated inconsistently. On the one hand, *-s* is employed, for example, in MS 8a7: *bo dong brtson ’grus rdo rjes gsan*. On the other hand, we also find the genitive, like in *brog mi’i gsan* (BD 12b6) and in *lce ston mdo sde seng ge’i gsan* (MS 34a5).

¹⁷ See SG 4a5f.

or:

G1	PERSON A- <i>s</i>
G2	PERSON B PERSON C PERSON D (<i>dang</i>) <i>gsum la gnang</i>
G3	<i>de gsum (ka) la / de gsum kas</i> PERSON E

In some cases the phrase *de gsum la* (or one of its equivalents) precedes a person's name, but the three names preceding *de gsum la* are not concluded by the expression *gsum gyi gsan* (or one of its equivalents):¹⁸

- (1) *rje sems dpa' chen po*
- (2) *kun mkhyen bsod nams seng ge*
- (3) *grub chen dkon mchog blo gros*
- (4) *'dren mchog dkon mchog 'phel de gsum ka la*
- (5) *rje sangs rgyas rin chen*

There is no doubt that (5) Rje Sangs rgyas rin chen (1450–1524) obtained the initiation from three teachers: (2) Kun mkhyen [Go bo rab 'byams pa] Bsod nams seng ge (1429–1489), (3) Grub chen Dkon mchog blo gros (b. 1428) and (4) 'Dren mchog Dkon mchog 'phel (1445–1514). However, as there is no indication that not only (2) Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge but also (3) Dkon mchog blo gros and (4) Dkon mchog 'phel have received the teaching from (1) Rje Sems dpa' chen po (i.e. Mus chen Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, 1388–1469), they most probably have to be understood as belonging to three different generations:

G1	PERSON A
G2	PERSON B
G3	PERSON C
G4	PERSON D
G3	<i>de gsum ka la</i> PERSON E (studied under PERSON B, C, and D)

¹⁸ See MS 11a2f.

There is another problematic phrase frequently used in the *gsan yig*, namely, *rjes su bzung ba*, literary meaning “having taken care of” or “having accepted.” It seems to be a technical term similar to *gnang* and it occurs in contexts where more than one teacher passes on a teaching. In such cases the individuals forming the group of transmitting teachers may or may not be connected with *dang*.¹⁹

- (1) *rgyal ba brag phug pa*
- (2) *bla ma dam pa*
- (3) *blo gros brtan pa gnyis kas rjes su bzung ba*
- (4) *bla ma dpal ldan tshul khrim*

or:²⁰

- (1*) *dpal tshul*
- (2*) *shar chen dang*
- (3*) *grub chen buddha shrī gnyis kas rjes su bzung ba*
- (4*) *ngor chen kun bzang*

The phrase *gnyis kas rjes su bzung ba* indicates, in the first example, that (4) Dpal ldan tshul khrim received the initiation from (2) Bla ma dam pa and (3) Blo gros brtan pa and, in the second, that (4*) Ngor chen Kun [dga’] bzang [po] (1382–1456) obtained it from (2*) Shar chen [Ye shes rgyal mtshan] (d. 1406) and (3*) Grub chen Buddha shrī (1339–1419). However, the relationship of (3) Blo gros brtan pa to (1) Rgyal ba Brag phug pa and that of (3*) Buddha shrī to (1*) Dpal [ldan] tshul [khrim] is less obvious. Since the expression *de la* is not employed after (1) Brag phug pa or (1*) Dpal ldan tshul khrim and the phrase *gnyis kas gsan* does not follow after (3) Blo gros brtan pa or (3*) Buddha shrī, we may assume that in both examples the four individuals are to be lined up successively. The understanding of the structure of the lineage depicted in the second example is complicated further by the usage of the

¹⁹ See BD 11b4.

²⁰ See GB 9b6.

particle *dang* between the names of (2*) Shar chen and (3*) Buddha shrī. The particle obviously refers to the phrase *rjes su bzung ba* (“Shar chen *and* Buddha shrī taught Ngor chen”), but it remains uncertain why it is only used in the second example. Is the relation between (3*) Buddha shrī and (1*) Dpal ldan tshul khriṃs different from that between (3) Blo gros brtan pa and (1) Brag phug pa?²¹ One could assume that with a *dang* the second and third person in our examples are to be regarded as fellow students, while they may have belonged to two different generations of students when the *dang* is missing. In other lineages in the *gsan yig*, however, we find phrases like *gnyis* (*gsum*, etc.) *kas gsan* connected to the expression *rjes su bzung ba*, where these explicitly indicate a group of students receiving a teaching from the same teacher:²²

(1) *rje dkon mchog lhun grub de la*²³

(2a) *sngags ’chang chos kyi rgyal po*

(2b) *rje dkon mchog rgya mtsho*

(2c) *rje dkon mchog dpal ldan gsum gyi gsan/ de gsum char gyi*²⁴

²¹ When trying to establish the correct relationship between the individuals in our two examples, it does not help checking the other transmission lineages of the *gsan yig* for references to (1) Brag phug pa and (2) Bla ma dam pa as teachers of (3) Blo gros brtan pa, because it is evident from other lineages that (3) Blo gros brtan pa has been a student of both (see e.g. MS 5a1 and 9b4). The same applies to (3*) Buddha shrī, who received other teachings from (1*) Dpal ldan tshul khriṃs as well as from (2*) Shar chen (see BD 10a1f. and GB 23b7).

²² See BD 11a3f. See also MS 17a4.

²³ The phrase *rje dkon mchog lhun grub de la* is added by a different hand in the manuscript.

²⁴ The use of the genitive *gyi* instead of the ergative marker *gyis* in the present context corresponds to the employment of these particles in connection with the phrases *gnyis kyi gsan* and the like (see above). As is the case with the latter phrase, also in relation

rjes su bzung ba

(3) *rdo rje 'chang bsod nams dbang po!*

(2a) Sngags 'chang Chos kyi rgyal po (= Sngags 'chang chen po Kun dga' rin chen, 1517–1584), (2b) Rje Dkon mchog rgya mtsho (1510–1586), and (2c) Rje Dkon mchog dpal ldan (1526–1590) studied under (1) Rje Dkon mchog lhun grub (1497–1557). These three taught (3) Rdo rje 'chang Bsod nams dbang po (1559–1621).

It is noteworthy that the phrase *rjes su bzung ba* refers to as many as five individuals in A mes zhabs's *gsan yig*, for example, in the transmission lineage of “Consecrations and cycles of teachings pertaining to Guruyoga, the profound path” (*Lam zab mo bla ma'i rnal 'byor gyi byin rlabs dang chos skor rnam*s):²⁵

(1) *mus chen!*

(2) *'jam dbyangs shes rab rgya mtsho!*

(3) *rgyal tshab kun dbang!*

(4) *mkhas grub dpal rdor ba!*

(5) *kun mkhyen lnga kas rjes su bzung ba*

(6) *'dren mchog!*

In view of the fact that the five names preceding the phrase *rjes su bzung ba* are never connected by a *dang* in A mes zhabs's *gsan yig*, we may assume that the individuals involved in these constructions are to be regarded as occurring in succession, as is depicted in the following outline:

G1	PERSON A
G2	PERSON B
G3	PERSON C

to *rjes su bzung ba* after the expressions *gnyis ka* and the like, the ergative marker *-s* is added (e.g. *de gnyis kas rjes su bzung ba*).

²⁵ See BD 10b7ff.

G4	PERSON D
G5	PERSON E <i>Inga kas rjes su bzung ba</i>
G6	PERSON F (studied under PERSON A-E)

4. Alternative Lineages

A mes zhabs usually concludes a transmission lineage by the phrase *des bdag la'o* (“through him to me”). Very often alternative transmission lineages for the same teaching are provided subsequent to the main lineage. Some of the lineages split into more than twenty alternatives.²⁶ Again there are particular phrases to introduce such an alternative lineage, like *yang*, *yang na*, or *gzhan yang* (all meaning “further” or “alternatively”). Usually not the whole alternative lineage is documented in the *gsan yig*, but only those parts that differ from the main lineage. Specific terms are being employed to indicate where the lineage splits and where it continues. This is how the phrases are being employed:

... (1) *kun mkhyen/* (2) *grub chen dkon mchog blo gros/* (3) *rje 'jam dbyangs/*
 (4a) *rje dpal ldan rgyal po/* (5a) *rje bzang po dpal/* (6a) *pañ chen nam dbang/*
 (7a) *rje chos dbang/* (8) *'khor lo sdom pa sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan/ des* (9)
bdag la'o/ yang na (3) *rje 'jam dbyangs/* (4b) *rje dkon mchog lhun grub/* (5b) *rje*
dkon mchog rgya mtshol (6 [= 8]) *mus chen buddha'i*²⁷ *mtshan can la* (7 [= 9])
*bdag gi thos so!*²⁸

... (1) *bla ma dam pa dpal ldan rgyal po/* (2) *'jam dbyangs sangs rgyas rin*
chen/ (3a) *spyān tshab pa tshul khriṃs bzang po/* (4a) *'phags chen dpal ldan*
bkra shis/ (5) *sngags 'chang chos kyi rgyal po/* (6) *rgyal tshab dkon mchog dpal*
ldan/ [...] ***yang na*** (2) *'jam dbyangs sangs rgyas rin chen yan gong dang 'dra*

²⁶ See, for example, MS 10a6ff.

²⁷ Mus chen Buddha is a variant of the name Mus chen 'Khor lo sdom pa Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan.

²⁸ See MS 6a1ff.

ba las/ de nas (3b) *sa lo 'jam dbyangs chen po/* (4 [= 5]) *sngags 'chang chen po man 'dra*²⁹

The phrase *yang na*, which indicates the beginning of the alternative lineage, is followed either by the bare name of the teacher from whom on the lineage splits (as in the first example) or, alternatively, by the name in combination with an expression like ... *yan gong dang 'dra ba las/ de nas...*, meaning “up to ... like above; then...” (see the second example). In the first example we are informed that (2) Grub chen Dkon mchog blo gros (b. 1428) transmitted the teaching to (3) Rje 'Jam dbyangs [Sangs rgyas rin chen] (1450–1524), who passed it on to (4a) Rje Dpal ldan rgyal po and also to (4b) Rje Dkon mchog lhun grub (1497–1557). From these last two masters on the teaching was transmitted through two alternative branches, which were united again when (8/6) Mus chen Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan (1542–1618) received the initiation from two different masters: once from (7a) Rje Chos [kyi] dbang [phyug] and once from (5b) Rje Dkon mchog rgya mtsho. Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan finally passed the teaching on to (9/7) A mes zhabs.

Since it is usually obvious which lineage the reference ‘above’ (*gong*) is relating to, the author does not specify the title of that lineage again. However, there are a few instances, where the title of the transmission referred to is given:³⁰ *dam pa kun dga' grags yan lha brgyad dang 'dra* (“Up to Dam pa Kun dga' grags (1230–1303) [the lineage is] equal to [the lineage of the *Gur gyi mgon po*] *lha brgyad [kyi rjes gnang]*”). The following list includes the most common phrases used in A mes zhabs's *gsan yig* to introduce an alternative lineage:

yang < PERSON A > < PERSON B > ...

yang < PERSON A > *nas* < PERSON B > ...

yang < PERSON A > *gyi rjes su* < PERSON B > ...

²⁹ See GB 9a4ff.

³⁰ See GB 58a5.

yang < PERSON A > *yan chad gong dang 'dra ba las/ de nas* < PERSON B > ...
yang < PERSON A > *yan sngar dang 'dra ba las/ de nas* < PERSON B > ...
yang < PERSON A > *yan gong bzhin las/* < PERSON B > ...
yang < PERSON A > *yan chad* < title of a transmission lineage mentioned above > *dang 'dra ba las/* < PERSON B > ...

The reader is usually referred back to the main (or sometimes to another alternative) lineage after several alternative names by phrases like, for example, “down from ... like above” (... *man gong dang 'dra*; see the second example above).³¹ The following phrases are employed in A mes zhabs’s *gsan yig* for this purpose:

... < PERSON C > *man gong dang 'dra*
 ... < PERSON C > *man sngar bzhin*
 ... < PERSON C > *man 'dra*
 ... < PERSON C > *sogs sngar dang 'dra*

³¹ In some cases the ‘main’ lineage (i.e. the first of a set of alternative lineages) is neither completed by the phrase *des bdag la'o* nor by a reference to a previous lineage, but it is interrupted without any comment. The further course of the lineage is then documented in the alternative lineages that follow. This leads to the peculiarity that the complete lineage can only be established by resorting to following alternatives, not to a preceding one. See, for example, NC 21a4ff.: (1) *rdo rje 'chang/* (2) *bdag med ma/* [...] (10) *dpa' bo rdo rje/ des* (11) *lo tsa ba chen po shākyā ye shes la gnang/ de la slob ma'i mchog* (12a) *'khon dkon mchog rgyal po/* (12b) *mnga' ris pa gsal ba'i snying po/* (12c) *se mkhar chung pa/* (12d) *khyin lo tsa ba 'od kyi snang ba dang bzhi las/* (12a) *'khon dkon mchog rgyal po/ yang na/* (12b) *bla mnga' ris pa/* (13b) *sgyi chu ba dgra lha 'bar/* (14) *sa chen/ yang na/* (12c) *se mkhar chung pa/* (13c [= 12a]) *'khon dkon mchog rgyal po/* (14) *sa chen/ yang na* (12d) *khyin lo tsa ba/* (13d [= 12a]) *'khon dkon mchog rgyal po/* (14) [...] *rje sa skya pa chen pos/* (15a) *slob dpon rin po che bsod nams rtse mol/* (15b) *tshul khriṃs grags/* (15c) *gtsug tor rgyal po dang gsum la gnang/* [...] (30) *mang thos klu grub rgya mtsho/* (31) *mkhan chen thams cad mkhyen pa ngag dbang chos grags/ des* (32) *bdag la'o/*.

In some cases the references *man/sngar 'dra* are also used to abbreviate a main lineage. When appearing in the context of an alternative lineage, the phrase usually refers to the main or one of the other preceding alternative lineages. However, being part of a main lineage, the reference may be rather ambiguous. Generally it relates to the last mentioning of the name of the teacher (in a lineage documented before) from whom on the lineage splits. There are a few lineages, where it is uncertain if the author refers to the last occurrence of the name of the person (in an alternative lineage documented before) or to the last main lineage containing the name. In the transmission lineage of the *Tshar gsum khug pa yan lag drug dang bcas pa*, for example, we are informed that “down from Bla ma Dpal ldan tshul khrim pa [the lineage] is identical to [a lineage given] above.”³² Looking at the preceding transmissions, we find Dpal ldan tshul khrim last mentioned in the transmission lineage of the *Rnam 'joms bir lugs*, which is listed three lineages before.³³ However, as is evident from the alternative lineages given for the *Rnam 'joms bir lugs*, this teaching has been transmitted to Dpal ldan tshul khrim by two different teachers, Bla ma dam pa and Bla ma Tshul khrim rgyal mtshan. It remains uncertain, whether they both have also transmitted the *Tshar gsum khug pa* to Dpal ldan tshul khrim or if the reference relates only to one of the alternatives.³⁴ Given the fact that the documentation of

³² See NC 18a2f.: *bla ma dpal ldan tshul khrim pa man gong dang 'dra*.

³³ See NC 17b3ff.

³⁴ Similar difficulties occasionally also exist at the beginning of abbreviated lineages. In the transmission lineage of the *Bir bsrung thun mong ma yin pa'i byin rlabs man ngag dang bcas pa*, for example, we find Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po as the first person of the lineage (see MS 18b2f.). The last mentioning of the names preceding Ngor chen appears in the transmission lineage of the *Lam zab mo bla ma'i rnal 'byor gyi byin rlabs dang chos skor rnams*, listed three lineages before (MS 18a1ff.). There, two alternative teachers are given from whom Ngor chen received the *Rnal 'byor gyi*

lineages together with their sometimes numerous alternatives can become very complex, we also have to take into account the possibility of mistakes, especially when the reader is referred back to previously documented lineages.

5. Stylistic Features

Finally, I would like to mention some stylistic peculiarities in the way names are listed in the transmission lineages. The names of most individuals, who are mentioned in A mes zhabs's *gsan yig*, are given in many varying forms. For example, Sa chen Kun dga' snying po is often listed as Bla ma Sa skya pa chen po. In some cases, however, either the abbreviated form of his name, Sa chen, or a more extended version of it, namely, Bla ma Sa skya pa chen po Kun dga' snying po, is given. The well known Bla ma dam pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan is referred to by almost thirty alternative names and titles, ranging from the designation 'Gro ba'i mgon po Bsod nams rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po to the rather ambiguous title Bla ma rje. The decision for a short or a long name or title variant seems to be made rather arbitrarily. The abbreviations occur most commonly in alternative lineages and in connection with well-known teachers, like, for example, Sa skya paṇḍita. On the other hand, names of the same masters are given in extended forms in other lineages, where Sa paṇ is referred to as, for example, Chos rje Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan. Most probably the author's main intent in this context was not primarily to support the correct identification of the individual, as every reader would be able to associate the right person with the short title 'Sa paṇ.' The reason for the elaboration of the names of certain individuals in some lineages might be explained by the author's intention to pay homage to these important figures. Some teachers' names found in the *gsan yig* are not modified at all, like, for example, in the case of Dam pa Kun dga' grags (1230–1303) or Mkhas pa Yon tan khri (b. 13th cent.?). One may assume that

byin rlabs, and in this case, too, we cannot be sure if they both also transmitted the *Bir bsrung* to Ngor chen.

they were not well known enough to be easily recognised when given under another name variant.

Besides the variation of the length of single names in a transmission lineage there are several ways of ‘ornamenting’ a lineage as a whole. One such possibility is to give all names in Sanskrit. These Sanskrit names are then provided in Tibetan in interlinear glosses (given here within parentheses):³⁵

*ba dzra dha ra (rdo rje 'chang) [...] bhu [read: bhū] mi paṇḍu [read: pāṇḍu]
paṇḍi ta [read: tā] nanda dhwa dza shrī bha dra (sa skya pa lnga rig kun dga'
rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po)/ arya [read: ārya] ma ti dhwa dza shrī bha dra
('phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po)/ ratna shrī (dkon mchog dpal/
pu nya shrī (bsod nams dpal)/ sha wa ra ma ti sthi ra (ri khrod pa blo gros brtan
pa)/ sadgu ru pu nya dhwa dza shrī bha dra (bla ma dam pa bsod nams rgyal
mtshan dpal bzang po)/ shrī wan [read: wān?] shī la (dpal ldan tshul khrims)/
dharma swā mi dznyā na dhwa dza shrī bhadra (chos rje ye shes rgyal mtshan
dpal bzang po)/ ba dzra dha rā nanda bha dra (rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang
po)/*

Another technique of ornamentation is employed through integrating additional information into the main text of a lineage. This information can either be the date and place of birth, or the place where the individual received the teaching. A third way is to render the lineage in verse. Both techniques may be illustrated together by the following example taken from a transmission lineage that includes the date of birth of each individual and is written in verse:³⁶

*ang gir chu spre'i lo khrungs sa skya pa//
rnga chen chu khyi lo 'khrungs rje btsun rje//
rab byung me yos 'khrungs pa grags pa'i zhabs//
dge byed chu stag lo 'khrungs paṇḍi ta//
myos byed shing lug lo 'khrungs 'phags pa'i zhabs//*

³⁵ See, for example, MS 4b5ff.

³⁶ See MS 9b1.

*kun ldan lcags byi lo 'khrungs zhang ston rje//
dbang phyug me glang lo 'khrungs brag phug pa//
yongs 'dzin chu byi lo 'khrungs 'gro mgon rje//
agni me 'brug la 'khrungs ri khrod pa//*

Sa skya pa [chen po Kun dga' snying po], born in the water-monkey year;
Rje btsun [Bsod nams rtse mo], born in the water-dog year;
[Rje btsun] Grags pa [rgyal mtshan], born in the fire-hare year;
[Sa skya] paṇḍita, born in the water-tiger year;
'Phags pa [Blo gros rgyal mtshan], born in the wood-sheep year;
Zhang ston Rje [Dkon mchog dpal], born in the iron-mouse year;³⁷
Brag phug pa [Bsod nams dpal], born in the fire-ox year;
'Gro mgon [Bsod nams rgyal mtshan], born in the water-mouse year;
Ri khrod pa [Blo gros brtan pa], born in the fire-dragon year.

The main purpose of ornamenting a lineage does not seem to be the addition of further information on the listed individuals. The names were most probably elaborated in order to honour the masters mentioned, to highlight the teaching by this special treatment of its transmission lineage, and possibly also for aesthetic reasons. On the other hand we may assume that the author also aimed at demonstrating his own abilities and knowledge by translating the names into Sanskrit or by supplying biographical details and possibly even putting these into verse. Being composed by a learned and competent person, the *gsan yig* would certainly be regarded as more authoritative and reliable.

³⁷ In another lineage Zhang ston is said to have lived until 1307 (fire-sheep year). See NC 54a3: *me lug re bgyad bar bzhugs*.

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- BD Bsod nams dbang po. *Chos kyi rje dpal ldan bla ma dam pa rnams las dam pa'i chos ji ltar thos pa'i tshul legs par bshad pa zab rgyas chos kun gsal ba'i nyin byed las rje btsun grub pa'i 'khor lo bsgyur ba dpal sa skya pa chen po 'jam mgon bsod nams dbang po'i zhal snga nas kyi rjes su bzung ba'i sarka*. In AZ, fols. 1a–32a.
- GB Grags pa blo gros. *Chos kyi rje dpal ldan bla ma dam pa rnams las dam pa'i chos ji ltar thos pa'i tshul legs par bshad pa zab rgyas chos kun gsal ba'i nyin byed las yab rje sbas pa'i sangs rgyas sngags 'chang mtshungs med grags pa blo gros kyi rjes su bzung ba'i tshul gyi sarka*. In AZ, fols. 33a–57a.
- MS Mus chen Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan. *Chos kyi rje dpal ldan bla ma dam pa rnams las dam pa'i chos ji ltar thos pa'i tshul legs par bshad pa zab rgyas chos kun gsal ba'i nyin byed ces bya ba las khyab bdag 'khor lo'i mgon po rgyal ba mus pa chen po rdo rje 'chang sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan gyi rjes su bzung ba'i tshul gyi sarka*. In: AZ, fols. 58a–127a.
- NC Ngag dbang chos kyi grags pa. *Chos kyi rje dpal ldan bla ma dam pa rnams las dam pa'i chos ji ltar thos pa'i tshul legs par bshad pa zab rgyas chos kun gsal ba'i nyin byed ces bya ba las mkhan chen 'jam pa'i dbyangs ngag dbang chos kyi grags pa'i rjes su bzung ba'i sarka*. In AZ, fols. 194a–275a.
- SG Nags dgon Sdom brtson dam pa Sbyin pa grags pa. *Chos kyi rje dpal ldan bla ma dam pa rnams las dam pa'i chos ji ltar thos pa'i tshul legs par bshad pa zab rgyas chos kun gsal ba'i nyin byed ces bya ba las chos kyi rje sdom brtson dam pa sbyin pa grags pa'i rjes su bzung ba'i tshul gyi sarka*. In AZ, fols. 149a–161b.

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