

## Genealogy into the Future: Glimpses from Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653–1705) Exposition of the Extended Dalai Lama Lineage<sup>1</sup>

*Birgit Kellner*

In the course of the 17th century, Tibet became an ecclesiastical or “bodhisattvatic” state under the leadership of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–82). As the Fifth was not only regarded as the latest link in a chain of reborn religious hierarchs, but also as an emanational embodiment of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Tib. *Spyan ras gzigs*), Tibet became envisioned as a society under the tutelage of a supreme bodhisattva. Spiritual genealogy, which had been a pervasive element of Tibetan religious culture for several centuries and had more recently become a preferred method for regulating succession among religious hierarchs, now acquired unprecedented political significance.

This new constellation also motivated a refashioning of the past. Aiming to establish the supremacy of the Fifth Dalai Lama as a person, as well as that of the Dalai Lama lineage as an institution, Blo bzang rgya mtsho and his advisers, the regents, propagated an expansive version of his lineage, constructed as a potentially unlimited succession of emanations of Avalokiteśvara reaching back into a distant Indian past, 991 aeons ago (one aeon alone is already an inconceivably long time). The ambitious regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705) was particularly invested in the construction of Blo bzang rgya mtsho's persona, especially after the Fifth's death in 1682, which he famously managed to conceal for altogether 13 years by mummifying the corpse (and reportedly hiring a look-alike for official appearances) while orchestrating and preparing

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1 I would like to gratefully acknowledge the help of Nancy Lin (Vanderbilt University), who generously shared a draft version of her paper “Recounting the Fifth Dalai Lama's Lineage”, forthcoming in the volume *Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism: Birth-Narratives, Institutional Innovation, and Embodiment of Divine Power* (eds. Derek F. Maher and Tsering Wangchuk), Boston: Wisdom Publications. Nancy Lin also kindly referred me to the Tibetan text of the Fifth Dalai Lama's “Sarasvatī prayer” (see below), which is the main textual source used in her paper. Lin's paper complements my own, as she addresses the lineage production in a broader cultural context and also discusses the visual projects of the Fifth's court through which the lineage was promoted.

the Fifth's succession. Having acted as the de facto ruler of Tibet after the Fifth's official resignation in 1679, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho composed a large amount of biographical literature on his master, which also contains an extensive exposition of the extended lineage. Combining motives from Tibetan historiographic tradition with themes and narrative devices from popular religious biography, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's exposition can be read as making an ideological as well as teleological argument for the continuity of a religious institution with newly gained political significance into the indefinite future. This argument is ideological in that it effaces the historicity of the Dalai Lama's claim to supremacy, and teleological because it presents Tibetan history as the fulfilment of a salvific plan, in particular through predictions attributed to Avalokiteśvara, his various manifestations and their helpers in the past.

Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's exposition of the extended Dalai Lama lineage sheds interesting light on mechanisms and strategies involved in the construction and negotiation of lineage in Tibet. As we shall see, he operates with the standard that the lineage should be a single line of successive incarnations, yet the extension of the lineage into the past, and the Fifth's own choices in that extension, make it impossible to apply this standard rigidly. This did not prevent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and later authors from referring to the resulting array of Avalokiteśvara incarnations as a "lineage", but the tensions revealed by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's arguments suggest that genealogy here serves less as a method for anchoring a community in a past and much more as a means of regulating its future.

## Historical and Conceptual Background

### *Rebirth Lineage and Incarnation*

Tibetan culture is, if anything, pervaded by lineages. Esoteric or tantric traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism such as came to flourish in Tibet emphasize the transmission of teachings and practices from teacher to disciple in a close personal bond. Being part of an unbroken lineage is what authorizes a tantric master. The significance of lineage is itself inscribed in, and continually confirmed by, tantric religious practice, right from the preparatory steps where the lineage *gurus* are invoked in ritual. The importance of lineage as a personalized transmission vehicle in tantric Buddhism may well have contributed to the very concrete reality of lineage in Tibetan religious life, but lineage as a phenomenon extends far beyond the confines of esoteric practice. Lineages were kept alive in liturgy through "lineage supplication prayers" (*gsol 'debs*), depicted in painting, enacted through ritual practice, and carefully recorded

and transmitted in “records of teachings received” (*gsan yig, thos/thob yig*).<sup>2</sup> Besides being nearly ubiquitous in religious life and literature, lineage serves both as an organizing structure and as a source of authority and reputation in virtually all contexts where theoretical or practical knowledge is passed on, whether it is in monastic learning, in medical practice, or in arts and crafts.

Lineage is subject to various forms of differentiation; in the context of Buddhist religious transmission and practice, one may for instance distinguish rebirth lineages (*skye brgyud*) from teaching lineages (*chos brgyud*), with the latter acting as a framework for the former. Lineages of rebirths (*yang srid, skye ba*) have been attested in Tibetan Buddhism since the 12th century. Examples of what may be recognitions of reborn masters from late Indian Buddhism are rare and dubious.<sup>3</sup> In Tibet, the earliest documented cases took place in the Bka’ gdams teaching lineage. The tantric master Chos kyi rgyal po (1069–1144) considered himself a rebirth of Nag tsho (1011–ca. 1068), a master-translator whom a western Tibetan king had dispatched to bring the famous Bengal scholar-monk Atiśa (982–1054) to Tibet, who was to become the founding figure of the Bka’ gdams as self-conscious tradition. Other Bka’ gdams teachers around that time are identified as embodiments of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and also as rebirths of an earlier teacher. Tibetan tradition itself claims that the tradition of recognised “emanational embodiments” (*sprul sku*) began with Karma pakṣi (1206–83), counted as the second hierarch of the Karma branch of the Bka’ brgyud school, who recognized himself as a rebirth of Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–93) and later also as a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara; this recognition was accepted by his disciples.

Two concepts are at work here. Rebirth expresses that consciousness perpetuates itself after the death of a living being and takes on a new body. Although every living being is regarded as a rebirth in this general sense, the Tibetan practice of rebirth recognitions is limited to important religious masters, and in their case is typically guided by intention.<sup>4</sup> The second concept,

2 For the Fifth Dalai Lama’s own *gsan yig* see Ehrhard, “Flow”.

3 See van der Kuijp, “Die Dalai Lamas”, for a more detailed account of the historical events summarized in the following.

4 The possibility of controlling one’s rebirth is already suggested in (albeit sporadic) canonical passages where someone’s wish, thought, meditation or resolve—especially at the moment of death—is said to determine where and how one is reborn (Schmithausen, “Critical Response”, 206). One should note that the continuity of consciousness across existences on which rebirth is premised is only an apparent one; Buddhist philosophers are quick to point out that there are at best only short-lived mental episodes that cause others and constitute a series; there is no lasting substrate that would endure from one life to the next.

that of an “emanational embodiment” or incarnation (*sprul pa, sprul sku*), is derived from a complex metaphysics of buddhahood, according to which, in simplified terms, buddhahood can appear to ordinary living beings in a particular form, usually as an animal or a human, chosen in accordance with the faculties and characteristics of the people who are to be instructed or converted.<sup>5</sup> A *sprul sku* manifests one or another aspect of buddhahood, typically in the form of a bodhisattva like Mañjuśrī (the bodhisattva of wisdom) or Avalokiteśvara (the bodhisattva of compassion).

### *The Avalokiteśvara Cult and Bka’ gdams Incarnation Narratives*

It is perhaps not a coincidence that the first known cases of reborn incarnations of Avalokiteśvara are documented among the Bka’ gdams school, which centuries later would become an important point of reference for Blo bzang rgya mtsho and Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho in their expansion of the Dalai Lama lineage. The early Bka’ gdams pa were engaged in missionary activities, aiming to bring Tibetans to support the Buddhist Dharma—and their lineage—during a period of Buddhist revivalism that followed decades of political disorder and religious disintegration in the aftermath of the collapse of the Tibetan empire from 842 onward. Across Tibet, Atiśa and his disciples taught various meditative techniques centred around Avalokiteśvara, making use of simplified sets of practices geared towards the conversion of the laity. An identification of a Tibetan master with the bodhisattva of compassion would in this context certainly have raised his prestige—especially in an environment where mythical narratives reshaped the history of the old Tibetan empire into an unfolding of Avalokiteśvara’s benevolent agency. In such narratives, king Srong btsan sgam po (605?–649), who is credited with having laid the foundations for Buddhism in Tibet, is identified with Avalokiteśvara. One finds these in several works of “discovered” or “revealed” literature, so-called “treasure” (*gter ma*) texts, attested to by the 11th and 12th centuries, but possibly reaching back into the early post-imperial period. Some of these treasure texts present themselves as personal manifestos, or testaments, by Srong btsan sgam po himself. In a telling passage from the *Mañi bka’ ’bum*, a treasure text that was probably compiled around 1175,<sup>6</sup> the buddha Śākyamuni himself predicts the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara’s future births in Tibet, and assigns Tibet to him as his special

5 Tibetan *sprul sku* translates Sanskrit *nirmāṇakāya*. The terms “emanation”, “emanational embodiment”, and “incarnation” are here used interchangeably, for the process whereby a bodhisattva manifests as a living being, or for that living being that constitutes such a manifestation.

6 See Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilisation*, Appendix 1.

domain, invoking the idea of the snow-land as an immoral wilderness in need of civilizing, which was to become such an important element in Tibetan cultural awareness:

The snowy domain to the north [Tibet] is presently a domain of animals, so even the word “human being” does not exist there—it is a vast darkness. And all who die there turn not upwards but, like snowflakes falling on a lake, drop into the world of evil destinies. At some future time, when that doctrine declines, you, O bodhisattva, will train them. First, the incarnation of a bodhisattva will generate human beings who will require training. Then, they will be brought together [as disciples] by material goods. After that, bring them together through the doctrine! It will be for the welfare of living beings!<sup>7</sup>

The *Maṇi bka' 'bum* goes even further and grounds the predicted embodiment of Avalokiteśvara in Srong btsan sgam po in the very nature of the universe.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, like the “testaments”, the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* supports Avalokiteśvara’s embodiment in Srong btsan sgam po through a number of the bodhisattva’s rebirth stories,<sup>9</sup> in which Avalokiteśvara typically appears in the guise of Indian kings and princes. Stories of the same type are encountered in the “Book of Bka’ gdams” (*Bka’ gdams glegs bam*, henceforth KLB), a popular collection set down in writing in 1302 after a period of oral transmission.<sup>10</sup> They are modelled on popular narratives of buddha Śākyamuni’s own previous births (Skt. *jātaka*),<sup>11</sup> in which the buddha as the all-knowing narrator identifies a character from a story in a distant past as a buddha-to-be, while other characters have been reborn as members of his audience (and entourage) in the present. In the stories of the KLB Atiśa replaces the buddha as the authoritative narrator, and

7 MKB I.87 (quoted in DGS 78a6-b1). The translation is borrowed from Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation*, 149.

8 Kapstein, “Remarks”, 526 (originally published in 1992). For further details on the Avalokiteśvara cult in 11th-century testamentary literature see Appendix I in Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilisation*.

9 See Appendix I in Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, Sørensen, *Civilisation*, for a comparative table, comparing two recensions of the MKB with the *Bka’ chems mtho[n] mthing ma*.

10 Ehrhard, “Transmission”, 44. For brief summaries of the individual stories see Schuh, *Tibetische Handschriften*.

11 The title pages attached to individual sections of the KLB identify these stories as *skyes rabs*, which is the customary Tibetan translation of *jātaka* (Schuh, *Tibetische Handschriften*, 1, 16 and 22). See Roesler, “Operas”, for a closer analysis of parallels between the KLB and *jātaka* tales as far as narrative devices are concerned.

he places his chief Tibetan disciple 'Brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1004/5-64) at the centre of the narratives, identifying him with Avalokiteśvara in his numerous manifestations. Set in a timeless Indian universe populated by good and evil kings, saintly monks and forest renunciates and Brahmins as well as demons hostile to the Dharma, many of these lively stories narrate how princes and kings come to devote themselves to the Dharma, often only after overcoming a number of obstacles placed in their path.

While Atiśa himself might have transmitted such Indian tales to his Tibetan disciples, more specific links to the Bka' gdams tradition in its Tibetan environment were inserted in some of them at some unidentifiable point in their transmission prior to 1302. Two stories especially stand out in this respect, and will be of particular significance for the Fifth Dalai Lama and Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. In the story of prince Dkon mchog 'bangs,<sup>12</sup> the prince resists his father's command to marry in order to continue the royal line. A Buddhist saint appears in the sky and advises the prince to travel to the land of U rgyan, where he is to find the Wisdom "sky-goer" (*mkha' 'gro ma*, Skt. *ḍākinī*) Gsang ba ye shes and take her home as his bride. After a complicated and dangerous journey, during which the prince is also called upon to do battle with fierce demons, he at long last finds Gsang ba ye shes in the company of the spiritual teacher and Vajra-holder Dri ma med pa and other *ḍākinīs*, numbering in the thousands. He receives numerous predictions about future rebirths, and the future identity, of all present. The prince himself will be reborn as Srong btsan sgam po and 'Brom ston, and Gsang ba ye shes promises to be reborn as his companion (during his existence as Srong btsan sgam po, as the king's Chinese wife). The foundation of the monastery of Rwa sgreng in Central Tibet, as the palace of Avalokiteśvara, is also predicted; the monastery, the first monastic seat of the Bka' gdams, was founded by 'Brom ston in 1056/7. Of the altogether 21,000 junipers that would be found in Rwa sgreng, the prophecy continues, two central ones stand for Atiśa and 'Brom ston; the trees have seven layers of bark that symbolically represent the seven Victorious Ones (*rgyal ba*) who will instruct human beings in an age of decline. The long story of king Lha'i rgyal po continues along the same lines.<sup>13</sup> Here the story of a childless king, whose wish for offspring is fulfilled when upon Atiśa's request he builds *stūpas* and takes a *yoginī* for his bride, serves as a frame for detailed prophecies and extensive explanations on incarnational connections between the main saints of the Bka' gdams school and Tibetan kings. Tibetan history is seen as the fulfilment

12 No. 5 in the *bu chos*-section of the KLB (Schuh, *Tibetische Handschriften*, 5–8). See Roesler, "A Palace", 134–35 for a summary focusing on the content of the predictions.

13 No. 19 in the *bu chos* section of the KLB (Schuh, *Tibetische Handschriften*, 16).

of predictions made in a mythical Indian past, and in particular, of predictions of future rebirths.

*Rebirth Lineages as a System for Regulating Succession*

Approximately at the time when the narratives in the KLB were written down—1302—rebirth lineages began to turn into a system of passing on authority, power and property; it seems that “the interest in previous incarnations mirrored in the stories and the institutional promotion of the *sprul sku* system went hand in hand”.<sup>14</sup> In the 16th century, the recognition of a child rebirth gradually became the preferred method for regulating the succession of religious hierarchs. As Buddhism had been reintroduced into a politically fragmented situation after the collapse of the empire, networks of religious centres had sprung up that were closely related to the noble families, or clans, that ruled over their territory. Exponents of noble families not only sponsored and supported these, but became religious masters themselves. Religious and temporal authority were first transmitted within family lines, from father to son or, in male monastic groups that were bound to celibacy, from uncle to nephew. The shift of the transmission of authority from family lines to lineages of rebirths is nicely illustrated in the history of the 'Brug pa branch of the Bka' brgyud school, founded by Gtsang pa rgya ras (1161–1211). Authority over this school was kept within the Rgya clan for two centuries. Rgyal dbang kung dga' dpal 'byor (1428–76), in the tenth generation descended from the lineage founder, claimed to be not only his rebirth, but also a rebirth of the Indian yogin Nāropa, as well as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara. Other rebirths had occurred in the intervening generations, but they had not been recognized. Rgyal dbang kung dga' dpal 'byor was still a member of the Rgya clan, and his proclamation of a spiritual genealogy can be seen as serving to increase the prestige of the family. When no male heir appeared for a number of years after his death, a child outside the family was chosen as his rebirth and given the name 'Jam dbyangs chos kyi grags pa. The next in the line was the famed historian Padma dkar po (1527–92), also recognized as a child, and also not a member of the Rgya family. Despite attempts of the Rgya to reappropriate the lineage, it remained outside the family and became based exclusively on spiritual genealogy.<sup>15</sup> The recognition of Padma dkar po's own rebirth was heavily disputed. The unsuccessful of the two candidates eventually fled to Bhutan, where the 'Brug pa remain dominant until today.

14 Roesler, “Operas”, 116, n. 6.

15 Smith, “Padma dkar po”, 81–83.

Transferring authority within rebirth lineages rather than family lines offered certain advantages. As was the case in the Rgya clan, male heirs were not always available; in other cases familial succession brought out rivalries between different parts of a family competing for the privilege of their offspring to advance to prestigious offices. Devising a path to religious offices through the neutral model of rebirth might have seemed an attractive work-around to avoid problems and delays caused by familial strife.<sup>16</sup> The determination of succession through the family-independent notion of rebirth supported the independence of monasteries and monastic networks from the prerogatives of noble families; it significantly contributed to the rise of monastic institutions to positions of political power. In historiographical literature, one notes the shift of succession from family descent to spiritual genealogies insofar as family genealogies become redescribed as involving incarnation lines. Gradually, the genealogical representation of incarnate lineages replaces that of noble families. On this level, notions of social belonging adapted from Indian Buddhism displaced the self-identification via patrilinear and matrilinear kinship groups that are pervasive throughout Tibetan culture.

### **The Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682) and the Extended Dalai Lama Lineage**

These shifts in genealogical representation illustrate how changes in the social and political framework of religion impact on Tibetan visions of the past, a process that can be observed over and over in Tibetan historiography. The early history of the lineage of the Dalai Lamas, high-ranking religious hierarchs within the Dge lugs or “yellow hat” school<sup>17</sup> is another case in point. The title “Dalai Lama” was conferred on Bsod nams rgya mtsho (1543–88) by the Altan Khan<sup>18</sup> of the south-east Mongolian Tümed Mongols as part of a longer sequence of titles. The event recalled the relationship between the Sa skya hierarch 'Phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–80) and Qubilai Khan (r. 1260–94), the founder of the Yuan dynasty that had enabled the Sa skya school of Buddhism to dominate Central Tibet politically for some time. Conceived as

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16 Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”, 242.

17 The self-referential term “Dge lugs pa”, “The Virtuous Ones”, came into use some time after the foundation of the school. The term “Dga’ ldan pa” (“Those from Ganden”) is also in use, referring to one of their main monastic seats.

18 The transliteration of Mongolian names and titles follows Atwood, *Encyclopedia*.

relationships between patron and priest (*yon mchod/mchod yon*),<sup>19</sup> and therefore framed from the perspective of religion, these relations were reciprocal in that the “priest” offered instructions and tantric initiations to the ruler, while the ruler in turn extended his patronage to the master and his community, which included political and military protection.

The title “Dalai Lama” was then retrospectively awarded to the two predecessors in Bsod nam rgya mtsho’s rebirth lineage, Dge ’dun rgya mtsho (1475–1542), as well as Dge ’dun grub (1391–1475), a disciple of the Dge lugs’ founding father Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa (1357–1419). Bsod nam rgya mtsho therefore came to be counted as the third in the Dalai Lama lineage. A posthumously composed biography of Dge ’dun grub dating to 1494 already presents him as a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, and mentions as his previous existences king Srong btsan sgam po, as well as ’Brom ston. The identification with ’Brom ston is anchored in familial connections, since Dge ’dun grub himself belonged to the ’Brom family, but it also reflects the fact that the Dge lugs pa understood themselves as reviving and continuing the Bka’ gdams lineage, as Tsong kha pa had initiated his tradition as the “new Bka’ gdams” (*bka’ gdams gsar ma*). The biography highlights the beneficial activities of numerous and manifold manifestations of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in Tibet, for Avalokiteśvara may assume various forms, as kings, as lay or monastic bodhisattvas—forms chosen in accordance with the people to be converted. Just like the one moon is reflected in various water surfaces on the earth, so Avalokiteśvara shows his numerous manifestations.<sup>20</sup>

The identification of a Dalai Lama as a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara became politically significant with Blo bzang rgya mtsho who came to rule over Central Tibet. A text dating to 1698, 16 years after his death, noted tellingly that the Dalai Lama’s government served Tibet just as a bodhisattva serves all humanity.<sup>21</sup> This political shift was, once more, facilitated by the close relationship between Dge lugs hierarchs and their Mongol patrons. In 1642, Gūūshi Khan of the Khoshud Mongols offered the 13 myriarchies of Tibet as a gift to Blo bzang rgya mtsho; the Mongol ruler was in turn awarded the title “Upholder

19 See Seyfort Ruegg “*mChod yon*”, *Ordre Spirituel* and “The Preceptor-Donor (*yon mchod*) Relation” for detailed studies of the relationship between spiritual and temporal order in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist thought, and further Cüppers, ed. *The Relationship*.

20 See the passage translated in Ishihama, “On the dissemination”, 543–44. In a biography of the Third Dalai Lama composed in 1596, Maitri Don grub rgyal mtshan also once refers to the Third Dalai Lama Bsod nam rgya mtsho as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara and a rebirth of ’Brom ston (van der Kuijp, “Die Dalai Lamas”, 16).

21 Quoted after Schaeffer, “Der Fünfte Dalai Lama”, 65.

of Doctrine, King of the Dharma". A "patron-priest" relationship between the two had already been established in a series of earlier meetings, and the event was understood to re-enact the alliance of 'Phags pa with Qubilai Khan. The act marked the end of a long period of civil war between the forces of Dbus (Central Tibet) and Gtsang (Western Tibet), which, given that the ruling houses were aligned with the Dge lugs and the Karma Bka' brgyud schools respectively, had been ideologically projected as a sectarian conflict.

The activities of the Dalai Lama and his regents after 1642 include key ingredients of what a modern political analyst would refer to as "nation-building": the establishment of a new form of government—the Dga' ldan pho brang government—uniting religious and secular branches, new administrative structures, accompanied by large-scale public projects expressed in a symbolic language that reinforced the identification of the Dalai Lama with Avalokiteśvara. The most visible of these was the construction of the Potala palace in Lhasa, which was named after Avalokiteśvara's residence on the summit of mount Potala[ka] in South India (although, given that Avalokiteśvara was already known to reside in his palace at Rwa sgren, the bodhisattva was effectively only relocated within Central Tibet).<sup>22</sup> As scholars, the Fifth and Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho engaged in wide-ranging projects to gather, organize and systematize Tibetan scholarship and sciences, whether medical sciences, historiography or astronomy. The project to establish the Dalai Lama's supremacy, while having broader cultural, social and diplomatic reach, was at the same time also aimed to secure Dge lugs supremacy over other schools in an atmosphere of sectarian hostility and competition. This included the conversion of Karma Bka' brgyud monasteries to Dge lugs centres, and the appropriation of their assets.

Blo bzang rgya mtsho undertook a variety of activities that stressed his identification with Avalokiteśvara and with king Srong btsan sgam po. After 1642, he performed an increasing number of rituals relating to Avalokiteśvara in front of occasionally large numbers of people, where he presented himself as Avalokiteśvara and Srong btsan sgam po.<sup>23</sup> During a journey to China in 1652–53, his autobiography mentions approximately 50 Avalokiteśvara-related rituals of various sizes and types, in front of audiences of different ethnicities and from various social strata. The Fifth further commissioned a series of paintings of parts of his lineage in monastic assembly halls, that is, in publicly visible locations. A lineage of Dge 'dun grub's previous incarnations was

22 Van der Kuijp, "Die Dalai Lamas", 31.

23 For documentation of the activities referred to here and in the following see Ishihama, "On the dissemination".

painted in the monastery at Rdzing phyi, which had been restored in 1644 after suffering damage in a fire caused by upheavals in 1642. The same lineage was also painted on the walls of the great assembly hall in the Potala in 1648, and in 1651 in the inner sanctuary of the assembly hall of the Dga' ldan don gnyis gling monastery at Lho brag. Whole series of succession paintings were produced, as murals or in the form of *thang ka* scrolls, although few complete sets appear to survive.<sup>24</sup>

The lineage, however, was no longer limited to the five successive rebirths with the title “Dalai Lama”. Blo bzang rgya mtsho authored a short undated treatise on the pictorial depiction of the succession of Indian and Tibetan incarnations of Avalokiteśvara, entitled “The Clear Mirror” (*gsal ba'i me long*).<sup>25</sup> The treatise lists 16 incarnations, plus the Fifth Dalai Lama himself. In addition to the first four Dalai Lamas, these comprise, among others, Avalokiteśvara himself, the Indian prince Dkon mchog 'bangs from the “Book of Bka' gdams”, king Srong btsan sgam po and the two other kings who had become enshrined as “Dharma kings” owing to their importance in establishing Buddhism—Khri srong lde btsan (742–797) and Khri ral pa can (805–836). The list also includes 'Brom ston, as well as five Tibetan religious masters from different schools and traditions, active between the 11th and 13th centuries. We shall return to this list and the motives behind its constitution below, in our discussion of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's exposition.

The literary corpus expounding the Dalai Lama genealogy further includes biographies of the Fifth's two predecessors, composed in 1646 and 1652<sup>26</sup>—as well as three autobiographies, and, last but not least, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's biographical literature on him. Finally, the Fifth also composed several supplication prayers to his own lineage, one of which lists altogether 78 Avalokiteśvara incarnations. In general, this list expands each of the groups that were already represented in the shorter list of 16: Indian pre-existences from the “Book of Bka' gdams”, Tibetan kings, and Tibetan religious masters. The list also includes figures whose inclusion is more difficult to explain, such as Padmavajra, a 14th-century Nepalese scholar, reportedly a pre-birth of the First Dalai Lama, but, as we shall see, even Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho knew very little about him.

No doubt due to the enormous prestige of the Fifth, the extended Dalai Lama lineage became authoritative, although later authors do not always

24 See Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”, for a reproduction and discussion of a set of seven *thang ka* of the Dalai Lama lineage, associated with the Ninth Dalai Lama Lung rtogs rgya mtsho (1805–15).

25 Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”.

26 Van der Kuijp, “Die Dalai Lamas”, 15.

exactly reproduce the list given by Blo bzang rgya mtsho himself. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's list contains—as we argue below—66 incarnations up to and including the Fifth himself, while Klong rdol bla ma (1719–95), a leading historian in the Dge lugs school, counts 58 incarnations from Avalokiteśvara to the Eighth Dalai Lama.<sup>27</sup>

### The Extended Lineage of the Fifth Dalai Lama in Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's "Silken Dress Supplement"

Blo bzang rgya mtsho resigned from office in 1679, leaving Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho to rule; three years after his resignation he passed away. During much of the 1690s, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho was chiefly concerned with shaping the public perception and legacy of the Fifth Dalai Lama, authoring a large quantity of literature—Kurtis Schaeffer counts 7000 pages—in praise of the Fifth, which included a substantial number of biographical works.<sup>28</sup> Although no Tibetan author quite matched Blo bzang rgya mtsho and Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho as far as the volume of their (auto)biographical output was concerned, their works nevertheless have to be seen against the background of a general increase in religious (auto)biography in Tibet in the 17th century.<sup>29</sup> Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho produces his lengthy exposition of the extended lineage as part of a biographical supplement, appended to the first three volumes of Blo bzang rgya mtsho's autobiography, "The Silken Dress" (*du kū la'i gos bzang*), covering the period from 1617 to 1681. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho classifies this as the "ordinary, outer" autobiography of the Dalai Lama. Conceived as a biography, the "Silken Dress Supplement" (henceforth DGS), which was completed in 1696,<sup>30</sup> has the figure of the Fifth as its vanishing point. The very structure of the work shows this clearly. The opening verses contain a summary of Blo bzang rgya mtsho's life in 12 acts (1–13b), following a well-established structure of the life of buddha Śākyamuni. An extended version of his life in 12 acts is given as the final part of

27 See Sørensen, "Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie", 248, and 284, n. 23, for a detailed comparison of Klong rdol bla ma's list with Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (but see below n. 37 on Sørensen's counting of the latter list).

28 See Schaeffer, "Der Fünfte Dalai Lama", 83, and Schaeffer, "Ritual", for a more extensive discussion of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's writings and activities in this period.

29 This is impressively demonstrated by Schaeffer, "Tibetan Biography", whose data analysis helped by the digital resources of the *Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre* (TBRC) shows the enormous potential of computational methods in Tibetological research.

30 Schaeffer, "Ritual", 197. The "Supplement" as a matter of fact consists of three volumes, covering altogether 1081 folios.

the lineage (133a–162b), so that the lineage is structurally framed by the figure of the Fifth likened to buddha Śākyamuni himself.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to appearing as the culmination point of the lineage, the Fifth is also present in the DGS as an authority on its actual form. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho refers to three supplication prayers to the lineage that Blo bzang rgya mtsho composed: “Blo bzang the Victor” (*blo bzang rgyal ba ma*), the outer version, “Compassion for the World” (*’gro la rjes rtse ma*), the inner version, and “Sarasvatī’s Lute” (*dbyangs can rgyud mang ma*), the secret version.<sup>32</sup> Like the “Clear Mirror”, the first two present a list of 16 incarnations, while the Sarasvatī prayer presents the long list of 78 rebirths. The Sarasvatī prayer was composed in connection with a set of 65 thangka paintings called the “Array of Life-Stories” (*rtogs brjod kyi zhing bkod*, which had been sponsored by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. These paintings were completed in 1681, but no longer seem to be extant.<sup>33</sup>

The presentation of the actual “succession of births” (*’khrungs rabs*) of the Fifth is dominated and driven by the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, since the extended lineage after all consists in a potentially infinite succession of Avalokiteśvara’s manifestations. Reduced to a logical core, the ideological and teleological argument that Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho constructs for the supremacy of the Fifth and its continuation, on altogether 324 pages, is not a formally rigid argument. It is rather made by accumulating a large number of variations on core themes. In keeping with the scholastic character of Tibetan intellectual practices,<sup>34</sup> exegesis is a key element in argument. Quotations from authoritative sources make up a large part of the text, as is the case for all of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho’s works.<sup>35</sup> The text begins with an extensive *florilegium*, a compilation of passages from Mahāyānasūtras, the *Maṇi bka’ ’bum* and other authoritative sources that establish the legend of Avalokiteśvara, including his residence on mount Potala[ka] (13b–30a)—not an uncritical *florilegium*, for a number of apparent inconsistencies between these sources have to be

31 The lineage exposition is followed by an account of the Iron-Bird year (19 February 1681–7 February 1682) in which Blo bzang rgya mtsho died. The DGS concludes with an account of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho’s own rule during the years 1679–1682. Only the lineage exposition itself (1–203a) has been translated into English so far (Ahmad, *Life*). Ahmad has announced a translation of the remaining parts of the text (203b–360a), but it has not yet been published.

32 DGS 137b1–2.

33 I owe this information to Nancy Lin.

34 See Dreyfus, *The Sound*, for an in-depth study of Tibetan Buddhist scholasticism and its intellectual practices revolving around commentary and debate.

35 Schaeffer, “Ritual”.

explained away. The section on the Tibetan kings is prefixed by a similar compilation—notably drawing also on the “Book of Bka’ gdams”—that recalls Avalokiteśvara’s special task of protecting the domain of Tibet, and presents his salvific activities as a frame in which Tibetan history is inscribed (77b–82b). No comprehensive study of the DGS has been undertaken so far; its extent, complexity and exuberance make this a daunting task, which certainly cannot be accomplished here.<sup>36</sup> To bring out the tensions in Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho’s argument, I will highlight three aspects: the very constitution and composition of the list, problems of chronology and evidence, the use of predictions, and, lastly, the conceptual foundations of the extended lineage.

*The Constitution and Composition of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho’s  
List of 66 Avalokiteśvara Incarnations*

A list of altogether 66 incarnations can be extracted from the “Silken Dress Supplement”—not without some difficulty, however, as the incarnations are not sequentially numbered in the text, nor is the number 66 mentioned anywhere as the total.

The list in table 9.1 follows the order of appearance in the text; life dates have been added for historical figures wherever available.<sup>37</sup> Sangs rgyas rgya

36 This, of course, also prevents any assessment of the originality of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho’s presentation. As far as more immediate models for the DGS are concerned, one may note that a biography of the Fifth by Smon ’gro pa ’Jam dbyangs dbang rgyal rdo rje, composed before 1647 and thus predating it, exhibits at least two features that also characterize the DGS: the use of an array of authoritative quotations, and the appeal to various prophetic traditions (Karmay, “A Most Pleasing Symphony”).

37 Life dates are given in accordance with Martin, *Tibetan Histories*, Schaeffer, “Der Fünfte Dalai Lama”, Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”, and van der Kuijp, “Die Dalai Lamas”. Ishihama, “History”, 312–14 gives a chronological arrangement of the same list, counting 67 items. No. 36 Dge ba dpal also occurs as no. 47 in her list, after Khri ral pa can; he does not occur twice in the text, and hence this may be a simple mistake (but one, interestingly, also found in Klong rdol bla ma’s genealogy, Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”, 284, n. 23). Schaeffer, “Der Fünfte Dalai Lama”, 83 and Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”, 247 count 58 rebirths. Sørensen only counts three Tibetan kings, not ten, and while he lists the eight additional rebirths, he only counts seven in his numbering. References to the sets I, II and IV dispersed in the DGS expressly mention the number of the elements that they comprise. For set III, the number five of its elements is fixed by the enumeration of body, speech, mind, qualities and action in various places where the set is referred to in the text. Lastly, the identification of actual lineage members—among the large number of other figures mentioned in the text—is also helped by markers on the xylograph print, as lines of small circles underline the names of incarnations in the text.

TABLE 9.1 *The Dalai Lama's extended lineage according to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's "Silken Dress Supplement" (DGS)*

I		
The 36 Indian incarnations of Avalokiteśvara <sup>38</sup>		
1. (King) Jig rten dbang phyug (*Lokesvara)	13. Dge bsenyen btson pa	25. (Prince) Ge sar
2. The boy Sngang ba	14. Nor bu bzang po (*Sudhana)	26. The hare (*Śaśa)
3. The boy Gsal ba	15. The boy Zla ba (*Candra)	27. The eight-year-old boy
4. Prince Chags med (*Asaṅga)	16. The boy Rin chen snying po (*Ratnagarbha)	28. The herdsman
5. Prince Kun tu dga' (*Ānanda)	17. The boy Padma	29. Rin chen mchog the Brahmin
6. King Lha skyes (*Devajāta)	18. The boy 'Od zer (*Raśmi)	30. Bsam gtan bzang po
7. (Prince) Dkon mchog 'bangs (*Ratnadāsa) <sup>39</sup>	19. Byams pa (Maitreya)	31. The yogi of the charnel ground
8. (Prince) Dad pa brtan pa	20. Seng ge sgra (*Simhanāda)	32. The king of a small country
9. King Dpal bzang (*Śrībhadra)	21. Prince Bde mchog or Ba lang skyong (*Sañjvara/Gopāla)	33. Kun tu rgyu the <i>sro-long</i> -bird
10. (Prince) Dad pa rab brtan	22. Lha'i rgyal po (*Devarāja)	34. King Skyabs sbyin (*Śaraṇadatta)
11. Prince Blo gros 'phel (*Mativardhana)	23. The boy Dge 'dun 'phel (*Saṅghavardhana)	35. King Gtsug 'lag 'dzin
12. The boy Dga' 'dzin	24. Rājā, man without family	36. King Dga' ba dpal or Dge ba dpal

<sup>38</sup> Reconstructed Sanskrit names of Indian incarnations have been added in accordance with Ahmad, *Ljife*, although their significance may be doubtful given that these stories may have been put together in Tibetan idiom from the start, and we might be faced with Tibetans mimicking conventions of Tibetan translations of Sanskrit names without such names ever having been in use. Identifiers—"king", "prince", "the boy" are in many cases part of the names that are used as headings to the Indian life-stories. In some cases these are supplied on the basis of the story's content, and then given in brackets.

<sup>39</sup> The variant spelling *cog* for *mchog* is used consistently in the text.

TABLE 9.1 *The Dalai Lama's extended lineage according to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's "Silken Dress Supplement" (DGS) (cont.)*

II	<b>Ten Dharmarājas (<i>chos rgyal</i>) of Tibet</b>
	37. Gnya' khri btsan po
	38. I sho legs
	39. Lde 'phrul gnam gzhung btsan
	40. Lde rgyal po
	41. Khri sgra dpung btsan
	42. Lha tho tho ri gyan btsan
	43. Strong btsan sgam po
	44. 'Dus strong mang po rje
	45. Khri strong lde btsan (742–97)
	46. Khri ral pa can (805–36)
	47. 'Brom ston (1004/5–64)
III	<b>The successive incarnations of body, speech, mind, qualities and actions of Padmasambhava and Khri strong lde btsan</b>
	48. Nyang ral (nyi mai 'od zer) (1124–96) [body]
	49. Chos dbang (1212–70) [speech]
	50. Mnga' ris pañ chen (Padma dbang rgyal rdo rje) (1487–1542) [mind]
	51. Dharmarāja Bkra shis stobs rgyal (1551–1602) [qualities]
	52. 'Phags pa (1235–80) [actions]

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53. Paṇḍita Padmavajra of Nepal (14th century)<sup>40</sup>

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**IV Eight further reincarnations of Avalokiteśvara**

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54. Kha che dgon pa ba  
 55. Dpal ldan sa skya pa chen po kun dga' snying po (1092–1158)  
 56. G.yu brag pa of Zhang (1123–93)  
 57. G.ya bzang pa (1169–1233)  
 58. Sum ston ye shes gzuings (12th/early 13th century)<sup>41</sup>  
 59. Lha rje dge ba 'bum (1200–50)  
 60. Blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po (1384–1435)  
 61. Dpal ldan bla ma rin chen mkhyen rab chos rje (1448–98)
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**V The Dalai Lamas**

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62. Dge 'dun grub (1391–1475)  
 63. Dge 'dun rgya mtsho (1475–1542)  
 64. Bsod nams rgya mtsho (1543–88)  
 65. Yon tan rgya mtsho (1589–1617)  
 66. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–82)
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40 Dge 'dun grub is said to be a direct rebirth of Paṇḍita Padmavajra, hence the latter can be dated to the 14th century. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho mentions that he had no biographical information on Padmavajra (DGS 107b5–108a1).

41 According to Martin, *Tibetan Histories*: 30, Sum ston was a student and contemporary of G.yu thog pa (1127–1203).

mtsho arranges the incarnations into sets; only 'Brom ston (no. 47) and Paṇḍita Padmavajra (no. 53) are not part of any expressly labelled set. It is quite possible that a total of just how many incarnations there are was omitted deliberately, in order to avoid stating what was obvious, yet potentially problematic, namely that Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's list is not fully identical to the list of 78 given in the Fifth's own Sarasvatī prayer, even though that list served as his point of reference and must have enjoyed authority. The sequence in the Sarasvatī prayer differs in several places regarding the order of the members.<sup>42</sup> The Sarasvatī prayer places Avalokiteśvara himself at the very beginning, before \*Lokeśvara. Moreover, the prayer mentions 21 Tibetan kings, while Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho only regards ten as proper Avalokiteśvara incarnations, although he connects the even larger number of 46 with Avalokiteśvara by admitting all of them as the bodhisattva's "illusory appearances" (*sgyu 'phrul*).<sup>43</sup>

Quite obviously, this lineage is not just an extension of the lineage of Dalai Lamas by tracing further and further "rebirth ancestors" into the past. Several members of sets III and IV lived at the same time as one of the Dalai Lamas: Blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po (no. 60; 1384–1435) overlaps with the First Dalai Lama Dge 'dun grub (no. 62; 1391–1475), Rin chen mkhyen rab chos rje (no. 61; 1448–98) and Mnga' ris paṇ chen (no. 50; 1487–1542) both overlap with the Second Dalai Lama Dge 'dun rgya mtsho (no. 63; 1475–1542); Bkra shis stobs rgyal (no. 51; 1551–1602) overlaps with the Third Dalai Lama Bsod nams rgya mtsho (no. 64; 1543–88). Further examples of temporal overlap can be readily amassed, between as well as within the individual sets, especially in the sets III–IV. Even sets I and II overlap. According to his life story, King Gtsug lag 'dzin (no. 35) is the father of the famous Indian scholar-monk Śāntarakṣita (725–788), whom Khri srong lde btsan (no. 45) invited to Tibet. It does not take a historian of Tibet of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's calibre to notice this; he must have been aware of such overlaps.

The list, basically a product of Blo bzang rgya mtsho's selection, cannot be read as a genealogy informed solely by a strict logic of rebirth succession, such that each member would have a single ancestor; this would logically rule out the simultaneous existence of two members in the line. Although one may agree with Sørensen that chronological inconsistencies in the lineage were not considered a major problem either by the Fifth or by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, it seems, however, overstated to say that many of these were tacitly

42 I owe this as well as other information regarding the Sarasvatī prayer to Nancy Lin.

43 DGS 81a6; see also 108a1. The individual names of the ten proper incarnations are listed at DGS 137a5–6. See also Ahmad, *Life* 358, n. 570. The concordance of lists of Tibetan kings in Haahr, *The Yar-Luñ Dynasty* (supplemented by Sørensen, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography*, 526–34) contains only 42.

accepted.<sup>44</sup> Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho addresses problems of chronology and evidence in relation to the individual sets. He balances different kinds of evidence, including predictions, which, while effectively supporting the teleological character of the genealogy, are nevertheless subject to critical evaluation and creative use. Lastly, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho also explicitly discusses the concepts of rebirth and incarnation that inform the list in more fundamental terms.

### *Problems of Chronology and Evidence*

To bring the problems of chronology and evidence that Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho raises into sharper relief, it will also be helpful to discuss the Fifth's possible motivations for including certain figures, or types of figures, in his own list of 78 incarnations in the Sarasvatī prayer.

The 36 Indian pre-existences, also found in the Sarasvatī prayer, are not regarded as problematic as a whole, though some aspects of this set are seen to be in need of justification. The 36 existences are for the most part taken from the "Book of Bka' gdams", the KLB, which the Fifth Dalai Lama expressly mentions as a major source. The KLB was, as a matter of fact, the topic of the Fifth's first public teaching, delivered in 1630,<sup>45</sup> which demonstrates the importance he accorded to it as a vehicle for instruction even prior to 1642. Some differences between the KLB and the DGS may in fact go back to the Fifth's own incorporation of additional material from other sources, while Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho also exercised his own judgement, which essentially amounted to conducting source-criticism to find evidence in support of his master's selection.<sup>46</sup>

44 Sørensen, "Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie", 248.

45 Schaeffer, "Der Fünfte Dalai Lama", 65.

46 The list in the DGS largely follows that of 20 rebirth stories in the KLB's section on the "Teachings for the Son" (*bu chos*), after which a further ten are given in the section on the "Teachings for the Nephew" (*ku chos*). The story of Skyabs byin (DGS no. 34) is found separately after the *ku chos*-section. See Schuh, *Tibetische Handschriften*, nos. 1–3. Although the KLB contains further stories (see again Schuh, *ibid.*), the Fifth confined himself to these 31, which he extended to 36. Although a more in-depth study would be needed that also compares the KLB stories in detail to those found in the MKB and the "testament" literature, it appears in general that the further five figures were obtained by extracting subsidiary figures from the KLB, and through adding figures from (as yet unidentified) other sources. The KLB contains no separate stories for \*Lokesvara (no. 1), Sngang ba (no. 3), king \*Śrībhadrā (no. 9), and the two kings Gtsug lag 'dzin (no. 35) and Dge ba dpal (no. 36). King \*Lokesvara's life-story is found as the first in the relevant section of the MKB (see the table in Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilisation*, Appendix 1). Sngang ba has been extracted from the KLB's story of Gsal ba (no. 2). \*Śrībhadrā's life story in the DGS (46b5) only consists of a quotation from a "supplement" (*phros don*) to the life story of

Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho must have attempted to establish a chronological order among the Indian existences, but the sources at his disposal seem to have only allowed him to place them very broadly in particular aeons: king \*Lokeśvara lived 991 aeons ago, Lha'i rgyal po before the previous aeon, and others many aeons ago. By contrast, king Dkon mchog 'bangs, like Srong btsan sgam po and the other Tibetan kings, belong to this aeon. Concluding that there is no evidence for any specific chronological sequence, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho notes, wryly, that the Indian existences “were all either before or after each other and were of the same mind-continuum (*thugs rgyud gcig pa*)”. But beyond that one cannot determine the order of their lives intelligently.<sup>47</sup> This observation seems to go back to the Fifth himself.<sup>48</sup>

As for the ten Tibetan kings, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's departure from the Fifth's list of 21 in the Sarasvatī prayer is, again, a matter of lack of evidence. The Fifth Dalai Lama had quoted a prophecy from the life story of the Indian incarnation Lha'i rgyal po in the KLB that predicted most of the kings, ministers and bodhisattvas in the future would be incarnations of 'Brom ston, in turn an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho suggests that some interpreted this prophecy to mean that all Tibetan kings were incarnations. But there are only “ad hoc papers” (*skabs thob*)<sup>49</sup> on them; life stories showing the true descent of many of these do not exist.<sup>50</sup>

The sets III and IV, comprising Tibetan religious luminaries from the 11th to the 15th century, are heterogeneous, and the reasons for their inclusion as

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Dad pa rab tu brtan pa (no. 10), which identifies him as a previous existence of Dad pa rab tu rtan pa. The bird Kun tu rgyu (no. 33) is taken from the KLB's *ku chos* section where Kun tu rgyu is the narrator of the ten stories, in what is effectively a Buddhicized Tibetan adaptation of the popular Indian parrot-book, the *Śukasaptati* (Herrmann, *Die tibetische Version*). Conversely, the child god 'Od zer mchog, subject of the tenth of the bird's stories, is not recognized in DGS, as no complete life story was available to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, who states that the Fifth mentioned 'Od zer mchog in the Sarasvatī prayer (DGS 136b2f.). On the two kings Gtsug lag 'dzin and Dge ba dpal, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho states that they were commonly known to have been Indians and were therefore included (DGS 77b3f., 136b6). Blo bzang rgya mtsho listed Dge ba dpal among his pre-births in the “Silken Dress”, and also claimed a family connection with the ruling family of Za hor to which Gtsug lag 'dzin belonged (DGS 145b). According to the life stories in the DGS, Gtsug lag 'dzin was the father of Śāntarakṣita, and Dge ba dpal that of Atiśa, hence they are connected to two Indian masters of vital importance in the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

47 DGS 77b1-2, as well as 136b3-6.

48 See his *Bla ma'i stod tshogs*, as related in Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”, 284, n. 14.

49 This translation of *skabs thob*, some kind of hand-written document not considered an authoritative source, follows Ahmad, *Life Sañs-rGyas*, 396, n. 908.

50 DGS 137a1-5.

incarnations are manifold. Some of these came to be remembered for having contributed to the protection of the Jo khang temple of Lhasa, erected by Srong btsan sgam po, or were already known as incarnations of Avalokiteśvara.<sup>51</sup> Both sets contain masters from the tradition of the “ancients”, the Rnying ma pa, for which the Fifth Dalai Lama had a special personal preference. Nyang ral nyi ma'i 'od zer (no. 48) and Guru Chos dbang (no. 49) are major revealers and historians of treasure. Nyang ral in particular was regarded as responsible for “discovering” and disseminating the testamentary literature ascribed to Srong btsan sgam po that had played an important role in establishing Avalokiteśvara's special connection with Tibet. Sum ston ye shes gzungs (no. 58) is also a treasure-revealer.<sup>52</sup> Mnga' ris pañ chen padma dbang rgyal rdo rje (no. 50) and Bkra shis stob rgyal (no. 51) belong to the Fifth's Dalai Lama's preferred lineage among the treasure cycles of the Rnying ma pa, the “Northern Treasures” (*byang gter*) lineage.<sup>53</sup> The Sa skya hierarch 'Phags pa, also included among the 78 incarnations in the Sarasvatī prayer, has special historical significance, marking the Fifth's recognition of 'Phags pa's relationship with Qubilai Khan as a precedent for his own relationship with Güüshi Khan. The Fifth identified himself as 'Phags pa in his autobiography, the “Silken Dress”.<sup>54</sup> On a sectarian background the inclusion of 'Phags pa in an Avalokiteśvara-based lineage can also be interpreted as a statement of Dge lugs supremacy, as is also the case with 'Phags pa's great-grandfather Sa chen kun dga' snying po (no. 55), the first patriarch of the Sa skya school. But while Sa chen had already been recognized as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara in quite early sources of the Sa skya school, in their doctrinal position the erudite scholar 'Phags pa was an incarnation of the bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjuśrī, and not of Avalokiteśvara.<sup>55</sup>

Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's distribution of these altogether 13 Tibetan masters<sup>56</sup> over the two sets III and IV may well be due to the recognition of different sets of evidence supporting their acceptance as Avalokiteśvara incarnations, and

51 Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”, 247. Several of these are also found in the Fifth's *Gsal ba'i me long*, see Sørensen, *ibid*.

52 Sum ston is also mentioned in the Fifth's “teachings received” (*gsan yig*), see Ehrhard, “Flow”, 94.

53 Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”, 247; Ehrhard, “Flow”, 86.

54 A passage to that effect is quoted in DGS 105b. In his biography of the Third Dalai Lama, composed in 1646 and therefore predating the “Silken Dress”, the Fifth refers to the Third as 'Phags pa, and inserts himself in this episode as having been Qubilai Khan (van der Kuijp, “Die Dalai Lamas”, 16).

55 Van der Kuijp, “Die Dalai Lamas”, 18.

56 Only five of these are found in Blo bzang rgya mtsho's *Gsal ba'i me long*: Kha che dgon pa ba, Sa chen, and Lama Zhang (no. 54–56), as well as Nyang ral (no. 48) and Lha rje dge ba 'bum (no. 59) (Sørensen, “Eine Sieben Thangka Sukzessions-Serie”, 247).

the anticipation of objections related to that evidence. The five Tibetan masters in set III can be determined as incarnations on the basis of their own testimony, and of that by individual incarnations in their lineage. Hence they are not subjected to any critical examination.<sup>57</sup> More generally, as regards the 36 Indians, the ten Tibetan kings, the four consecutive Dalai Lamas, 'Brom ston and Nyang ral, as well as the other masters in set III, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho believes that their life stories are consistent with historical accounts (*lo rgyus*) and other sources,<sup>58</sup> and offer sufficient evidence. Set IV, the “eight additional rebirths”, presents greater difficulties. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho notes there was no direct succession of rebirth from a single mind-series after the appearance of the first figure in this group, that is, Kha che dgon pa ba (no. 54). These eight rebirths, extolled in the Sarasvatī prayer and elsewhere, are consequently counted individually, on the basis of whatever documents are found regarding their status as incarnations.<sup>59</sup> If this verdict is to be consistent with an earlier statement in the text that all eight incarnations are “of one mind-series” (*thugs rgyud gcig pa*),<sup>60</sup> one has to understand him as saying that while all eight belong to one mind-series, they are not a chain of rebirths. That would require their chronological succession, but as historical research reflected in the life-dates given in Table 9.1 demonstrates, and as Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho must have known, some of them lived at the same time. Elsewhere in the text, the eight incarnations are compared to the many reflections that the moon casts in vessels filled with water.<sup>61</sup> We have seen that the moon-simile had already been used in the 1494 biography of the Third Dalai Lama in a more general sense, simply to support a large number of Avalokiteśvara incarnations irrespective of their temporal alignment. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho uses it for the more specific purpose to support simultaneity; as usual, he supports its use with an array of authoritative quotations (135a–136b). The figure of Paṇḍita Padmavajra of Nepal (no. 53) is not part of any set. While Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho includes him in the list, he is not entirely satisfied with evidence. A prediction is quoted from the life story of prince Dkon mchog 'bangs, which says, “One incarnation will go to Nepal”. The First Dalai Lama Dge 'dun grub mentioned a prediction that a scholar reaching 80 years of age would appear, and Padmavajra, this much is known, was not only well-versed in all five fields of learning, but also long-lived. Yet Sangs rgyas

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57 DGS 137b1-2.

58 DGS 108a2.

59 DGS 137b2f.

60 DGS 116a5.

61 DGS 108a1-2.

rgya mtsho adds that he has never seen a biography or other documentation on him (*nam thar sogs*).<sup>62</sup>

### *The Use of Predictions*

As the case of Padmavajra shows, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's discussion balances different types of evidence in his endeavour to provide a well-supported list of incarnates. He evaluated historical records, and carefully read life stories. Predictions, found in historiographical literature as well as religious biographies, are repeatedly used as evidence, but as the example of Padmavajra shows, their use involves interpretation and critical evaluation.

In the study of authoritative sources that must have been involved in the composition of the DGS, the search for predictions that could be put to use must have played an important role, considering how many of them can be found throughout the text. Some predictions are directly attributed to earlier sources such as the MKB and the KLB. Already in the first life story, that of king \*Lokeśvara, the buddha 'Od mdzes ye shes tog predicts his incarnations under ten subsequent buddhas, and foretells that under buddha Śākyamuni—the buddha of our current world-age and the last one in the line—he will be born as king Srong btsan sgam po, and that the holy Dharma will flourish in Tibet (32b5–33b1). A considerable number of predictions are taken from the life stories of Dkon mchog 'bangs (no. 7) and Lha'i rgyal po (no. 22) from the KLB, which we discussed above. In a long passage cited from Lha'i rgyal po's life story, various Tibetan kings are predicted right down to etymological explanations of their names.<sup>63</sup> In Srong btsan sgam po's (83a–b) and 'Brom ston's (89b) life stories, prophecies are cited that establish them as rebirths of Dkon mchog 'bangs.<sup>64</sup> The teacher Dri ma med pa from Dkon mchog 'bangs' life story is reborn as Padmasambhava during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan (86b). For Khri srong lde btsan himself, a prediction that 'Brom ston (qua Avalokiteśvara) will be his rebirth is quoted from Lha'i rgyal po's life-story (86a)—and so on.

While these fulfilments of predictions remain within the historical frame of the KLB—put down in writing in 1302—Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho extends the same stories from the KLB to also predict more recent figures, and in doing so applies more creative interpretations to connect the KLB with biographies of

62 DGS 107b5–108a1. The prediction is also referred to at 86b1 (two folios are numbered 86, distinguished as *gong* and *og*; this passage is found on the one labelled as *gong*).

63 DGS 80a–81a.

64 See DGS 43a for these prophecies in the context of Dkon mchog 'bangs' story.

later Tibetan masters. The birth of the Second Dalai Lama Dge 'dun rgya mtsho was predicted by *ḍākinīs*, who produced a song on the occasion of Dkon mchog 'bangs' meeting with the *ḍākinī* Gsang ba ye shes: Dkon mchog 'bangs would be reborn on a plain (*thang*) where colourful flowers (*me tog*) grow. Together with a passage that states Avalokiteśvara would take residence in a field, to work for the benefit of others, these words predict the place of Me tog thang (119b). The same song of the *ḍākinīs* unfortunately does not provide much material for the prophecy of the birthplace of the Third Dalai Lama Bsod nams rgya mtsho, but Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho solves this problem by drawing on a *ḍākinī*'s generic prediction of Dkon mchog 'bangs' future rebirths as a holy man in Tibet, combined with the Third's own account of his birth (124b). Lastly, the coming of the Dalai Lamas as a whole is famously supported by the prediction of the monastery of Rwa sgreng in the KLB's story of Dkon mchog 'bangs: they are the seven "Victorious Ones" (*rgyal ba*) symbolically represented in the seven layers of bark of Rwa sgreng's juniper trees.<sup>65</sup> Although Tibetan history was thus the fulfilment of predictions from the past, just how this was to be the case had to be shown and demonstrated through a careful and conscientious reading of sources. Predictions are here not embedded in a deterministic eschatology, but form part of an epistemology that demands interpretative genius to reveal the teleology of history. While Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho invests great effort in appealing to tradition—showing compliance with authorities—he also expands and "invents" tradition.<sup>66</sup> As a matter of fact, he appears to have done so quite self-consciously, for in the end he also composed a "succession of lives" (*'khrungs rabs*) for himself.<sup>67</sup>

### *The Conceptual Foundations of the Dalai Lama Lineage*

Prior to presenting the life-story of Blo bzang rgya mtsho as the culmination of the lineage, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho addresses the conceptual foundations of the lineage, motivated by the observation that some unnamed fellow Tibetans had not paid proper attention to them (134b–137b). Here he draws attention to the distinction between "(re)birth" (*skye ba*) and "incarnation" (*sprul pa*). One speaks of rebirth when consciousness takes hold of a later body after an earlier one had passed away, and of incarnation when further and further physical manifestations appear, yet the "incarnation basis" (*sprul gzhi*) does not pass away. This distinction points to two different dynamics: rebirth rests on the

65 DGS 89b; see also 116b. See Karmay, "A Most Pleasing Symphony".

66 See Schaeffer, "Ritual", for a more wide-ranging account of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's activities through the lens of Hobsbawm's "invention of tradition".

67 Ishihama, "History".

continuity of consciousness (in a series) and the succession of physical existences, whereas incarnation allows for a multiplicity of (possibly even simultaneous) appearances while the “basis” for incarnation—buddhahood that becomes manifest in various aspects—does not pass away.

This distinction makes it possible to conceptually detach incarnation from rebirth. Rebirth and incarnation, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho goes on to stress, are not always conjoined. Rebirth necessarily occurs within one and the same (consciousness-)series (*brgyud*), but the new existence may be an incarnation or not. Prince Siddhārtha, the future buddha Śākyamuni, was for instance an incarnation, but the brahmin boy Snang byed, one of Siddhārtha's rebirths, did not seem to have become an incarnation, that is, in addition to a rebirth also a manifestation of some aspect of enlightenment. Moreover, even within one and the same rebirth lineage, different “incarnation bases” may manifest themselves, although these all are ultimately grounded in the one Vajra essence (*rdo rje'i snying po*) that permeates all buddhas; this would help to explain why in one rebirth lineage one might find, for instance, incarnations of Avalokiteśvara as well as Mañjuśrī. A bodhisattva may incarnate in numerous bodily appearances, comparable to the moon, which can have innumerable reflections in various water vessels. Just as there are not two moons in this simile, neither are there two separate bodhisattvas or buddhas behind these multiple manifestations. While these arguments may have more specific targets than we can currently determine, the conceptual distinctions that Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho introduces here can be read as informed by the same tendency than his discussion of problems with set IV, the “eight additional rebirths”, which apparently did not constitute a single rebirth lineage: this is the tendency to separate incarnation in its function to support a “single mind-series” (*thugs rgyud gcig*) from the dynamics of rebirth as demanding strict temporal succession.

### The Tensions of Spiritual Genealogy

In a way, the Fifth had left Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho with a conundrum when he extended the lineage of his rebirths to a potentially unlimited succession of Avalokiteśvara incarnations. He drew on the precedent of the Bka' gdams pa's recognition of themselves as incarnations of the bodhisattva in his various manifestations among mythical Indian figures, as well as their acclaimed incarnational connections with Tibetan kings. He further selected Tibetan luminaries from the past who were already recognized as Avalokiteśvara, had made achievements that he regarded as personally important, or had contributed to Tibetan Buddhist histories in other crucial ways. The extension of the

Dalai lama lineage to 78 members was clearly not informed by the same logic of spiritual genealogy that had come to underlie the narrative structure and social practice of child recognitions as *sprul sku*.

The retrospective incorporation of many past figures into an array of Avalokiteśvara incarnations comes into conflict with the expectation that this “array” should conform to the genealogical structure of a single line. The problems of chronology and evidence that Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho raises demonstrate that this single-layered linear structure indeed, at first, served as a standard: it is precisely because one should *expect* a single line of succession that the obvious contemporaneity of some incarnations in the Fifth’s list becomes problematic. Yet Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho also speaks of incarnations, even simultaneous ones, as being “of one mind-series” (*thugs rgyud gcig pa*). The oneness of this series cannot be achieved through belonging to the same mental series in the logic of rebirth, but, if we rely on his final remarks, it is probably warranted by the oneness of the “emanation basis” (*sprulgzhi*) that is the source of all the various appearances. The simultaneous reflection of the moon in many vessels filled with water is designed to make such possibly simultaneous multiple incarnation intelligible.

Although the Fifth’s inclusion of individual figures from the past was driven by a variety of motives, the very impulse to expand the list by such a large number—from five through 16 to 78—signals an attempt to connect as many of the noble aspects of Tibet’s past with the present as embodied in the figure of Blo bzang rgya mtsho himself—and, in turn, to anchor the Fifth Dalai Lama and his office in a reconstituted vision of Tibetan history. This expansive attitude to revising the past effectively undermines a narrower notion of spiritual genealogy that is premised on the norm of rebirth lineages as a single successive line. This norm, it can be argued, is not a logical consequence of a rigorous analysis of lineage as a concept, but rather has its basis in lineage as a social practice to regulate succession. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho wrote his “Supplement” at a point in time when the Fifth Dalai Lama had already passed away, and the establishment of his successor was a vital and immediate concern; the work was completed in 1696, 14 years after the death of the Fifth, and his successor, the unfortunate Sixth Dalai Lama, was enthroned in 1697. The events of the time, and the historical shift that the Dalai Lama lineage had undergone with Blo bzang rgya mtsho, would have enforced a strict conception of rebirth lineage. It is only logical that when succession to the position of supreme authority in the state is to be regulated by finding a rebirth of a deceased master, the pressure to reduce lineage to a single line increases considerably. Yet at the same time the arguments in favour of the Fifth’s

supremacy involved an expansive vision of the past as populated by a large number of manifestations of Avalokiteśvara that could not subscribe to the same logic. Perhaps ironically, at this moment in Tibetan history it seems that the application of spiritual genealogy as a method of guiding the future introduces stricter limitations on its structure, while the past is almost liberated from genealogical elements and acquires its coherence by different means.

### Abbreviations

- DGS Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's Supplement to the *Du kū la'i gos bzang*. Full title: *Drin can rtsa ba'i bla ma ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i thun mong phy'i rnam thar du kū la'i gos bzang glegs bam gsum pa'i 'phros bzhi pa*. Xylograph print from 'Bras spungs, n. d., Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre (<http://tbrc.org>), W8239. Vol. 1. Based on pagination, it can be established that these prints were produced from the same blocks as the Xerox copies from the India Office Library and British Library used in Ahmad, *Life Sañs-rGyas*.
- KLB *Bka' gdams glegs bam* or "Book of Bka' gdams".
- MKB *Mañi bka' 'bum*.

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