LHA BLA MA YE SHES 'OD KYI RNAM THAR RGYAS PA BZHUGS SO

Biography of Lha Lama Yeshe Ö

**INTRODUCTION** 

This is a biography of Lha Lama Yeshe Ö (Lha bla ma ye shes 'od), written in around 1480.

Yeshe Ö was born into one of the ruling families of western Tibet in the tenth century (947–1019 or 1024). His family traced its ancestry back to the ninth century emperor, Langdarma (Dar ma 'u dum btsan; gLang dar ma). Langdarma's great grandson, Nyi ma mgon had established a kingdom in Ngari (mNga' ris) in western Tibet in around 912, encompassing Purang (sPu hrang) and Guge (Guge). This had subsequently been divided into three parts, with Yeshe Ö's family retaining Guge and Purang. Yeshe Ö, himself, succeeded in uniting a much greater area before taking monastic vows in 989 and handing over the kingship to Khor re, his elder brother.

Of his written works, there is a surviving ordinance, in which he forbids certain tantric practices. This is consistent with what is described in his biography as his attempts to suppress Bon and certain tantric practices. A number of religious works are also mentioned, but these are not known to survive.

The biography (*rnam thar*) was written by Drakpa Gyaltsen (Grags pa rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po), commonly known as Guge Panchen, the great pandita of Guge (1415–1486), in around 1480. Guge Panchen was a Sakya scholar, who also wrote a large chronicle of Ngari.

Guge Panchen refers to a number of sources, including scrolls (*dril*) (from Tho ling), along with biographies (*rnam thar*) and other unspecified sources.

Sources

The text is a handwritten pecha (*dpe cha*), discovered at Drepung. It is not free from errors and there is some uncertainty over certain words. Modern editions have been published in Lhasa in 2013 and in Beijing in 2015, with suggested amendments.

The manuscript can be found at TBRC: W1PD153537, v.43 (pi), pp. 283-365

Gu ge pandita Grags pa rgyal mtshan. 2013. *Lha bla ma ye shes 'od kyi rnam thar rgyas pa bzhugs so*. Do rgya dbang grag rdo rje (ed.) Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang.

Gu ge pandita Grags pa rgyal mtshan. 2015. *Lha bla ma ye shes 'od kyi rnam thar rgyas pa'i mchan 'grel ti se'i mgul rgyan*. 'Dar tsha khyung (ed.) Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang.

#### References

On Guge Panchen and the sources and prophecies cited in the text:

van der Kuijp, Leonard. n.d. *A Fifteenth Century Biography of Lha bla ma ye shes 'od (947–1019/24)*. (https://www.academia.edu/12827157/A\_Fifteenth\_Century\_Biography\_of\_Lha\_bla\_ma\_Ye\_sh es od 947-1019 24 Part One Its Prolegomenon and Prophecies)

## On the ordinance:

Karmay, Samten. 1980. The Ordinance of Lha Bla-ma Ye-shes-'od. In M. Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (eds), *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, pp. 150–62.

Schaeffer, Kurtis R. 2013. The Ordinance of Yeshé Öd to Tantric Practitioners. In K. Schaeffer, M. Kapstein, and G. Tuttle (eds), *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 60–64.

On the history of the Ngari region:

Vitali, Roberto. 1997. *The Kingdom of Gu.Ge Pu.Hrang According to Mnga'.Ris Rgyal.Rabs by Gu.Ge Mkhan.chen Ngag.Dbang Grags.Pa*. London: Serindia.

On the biography:

Dalton, Jacob. 2015. Power and Compassion: Negotiating Buddhist Kingship in Tenth-Century Tibet. In O. Czaja and G. Hazod (eds), *The Illuminating Mirror*. Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, pp. 101–18.

# **OUTLINE**

The text of the following extracts is based on the manuscript held in the TBRC archive and includes some of the amendments suggested by the editor of the 2013 edition and others suggested by Dalton (2015).

The manuscript comprises 42 small folios, which have around seven lines on each side.

Introduction (fols 1b-3a)

- 1 Early life (fols 3a–6a)
- 2 Activities as householder and ruler (fols 6a–9b)
- 3 Activities after taking monastic vows, in order to spread the doctrine (fols 9b-40a)

#### **EXTRACTS**

1b

Introductory verse

1b-3a Genealogy and citation of earlier texts and prophecies

## Section 1: Early life

4a Description of West Tibet, Purang and Guge and their natural features, and birth of Lama Bodhisattva Yeshe Ö (bLa ma Byang chub sems dpa' ye shes 'od)

4b Yeshe Ö looks after his subjects by importing medicine and weapons, protecting the clerical and lay populations, providing training in reading, writing, and numeracy, and training in *śastra* (*bstan bcos*) texts.

Rules were made to teach the ordinary people how to be virtuous.

5a-Craftsmanship and payments

# Section 2: Activities as householder and king

6a-References to Yeshe Ö's brothers, Tri Demagon (Khri Ide mgon btsan) and La Korten (Lha 'khor btsan).

6b—Historical lineage: Tri Song detsen (Khri Srong Ide srong btsan) and Nyatri Tsenpo (gNya' khri btsan po) etc.

7a-b Quotation from Byang chub 'od (nephew and successor to Yeshe Öd).

7b—Anti-Bön activities, including fines for practitioners and suppression of rituals. References to earlier sutras.

9b Yeshe Ö, here referred to as Khri IDde srong gtsug btsan, calls a conference in Purang, in which he gathers all his family members and the nobility (*dra ma*).

यवर.सूत्रा.प्रीट्य.त्यक्रत, र्यक्रित, र्या अट्टर.इय.थे.ट्य.त्य.वृत्त्रक्ष, कृष्मित.ग्री.त्यापर भ्रूष्य.तबटी ब्र्ट.ट्र.स्ट.थे.त्यवेताय. र्याचेताय. र् तस.तब्रट्र.तय.ताबुब्य.ग्री.शस्टर.भ्रूष्ट.तय.बि.खेला ब्र.ब्र्य.प्राच्ययताबुख्य.ग्री.

They had a discussion about how to spread the doctrine in mNga ris. He told them, 'I have decided to become a monk and I have asked my elder brother to assume power'. He bestowed texts of the two laws (khrims gnyis kyi bca' yig) on everyone.

## Section 3: Activities after taking monastic vows

9b–11a Concerning monastic vows. Yeshe Ö and his brothers become monks. They act in accordance with the vows.

11b-12b Section on Rinchen Zangpo (Rin chen bzang po) and his life

13a-b Yeshe Ö arrives in Purang and gathers the people of Wi Phug, family members (of the nobility), subjects, and wise people, and explains the means of achieving happiness. He offers them words of advice:

The whole of mNga' ris had one leader and, for a while, a single king exercised power. It was a time in which Tibet's common welfare and merit were increasing, and people followed the correct religious traditions. The central regions (*dbus*) were peaceful and liberation was achieved. Because there was a single powerful ruler, there were no factions in the realm. Since all the people depended upon a single ruler, divisions and factions did not open up. [However], in the intervening period, the collective karma and virtue of Tibet were exhausted. There were many rulers and leaders, factions emerged in mNga' ris, and the people were divided. There was fighting between the central and left horns [of Tibet] and people said harmful and arrogant things, which led to the degeneration of the laws (*bka' khrims*). It seemed that authority was fragmented.

The father and the three brothers who ruled this upper region did not reach agreement.

Very few of the subjects stayed and there was great destruction. Many sons and nephews were

born to the father and brothers. Although each individual did not intend to cause division and destruction, the ruler was small-minded and the people of sPu phra (Purang) could not cope. Things should not be done that will reduce the authority of such matters as the old royal laws (rgyal khrims).

14a He goes on to advocate the benefits of monastic ordination, in order to reduce the number of potential rulers and factions. This will give rise to a Buddhist kingdom in which people are pious, there is proper consultation, people do not break the law (*khrims dang mi mgal*), and the government is good. He concludes:

This is how the emperor made the law.

14bYeshe Ö outlines measures to spread the doctrine.

The lord's advice has not been at odds with the new laws that have emerged from the measures taken to spread the doctrine.

In order for the emperor to prevent people escaping and (causing) disintegration, a great law code ought to be promulgated.

There is a reference to 'dul khrims (Vinaya rules) for monks.

15a The further establishment of doctrine and founding of establishments at Tholing and elsewhere. The making of religious law (*chos khrims*).

15bThe invitation of Indian masters and the making of a nang khrims kyi yi ge.

17a- On temples and statutes.

18bVerse on the benefits of the doctrine (in Zhang Zhung). The establishment of ethical rules (*tshul khrims*).

19b Pandita Dharmapala in Guge.

20b–21b References to Yeshe Ö's writings and his influence on Rinchen Zangpo.

22a On stupas and rituals for the dead.

The author says that according to one biography (rnam thar gcig):

भ्रे'र्ने अवयः द्वा पहेवा हेव ग्री खुवावा ग्री अव्य राप्ते प्यापः खुटा। छुट् रार्म् खुवा द्वा र्दा प्रकंशवा बिट प्रभूता राम्स्य विट प्रभूता राम्स्य स्वाप्त स्वापत स्वाप्त स्वापत स्वापत

For all people, edicts (*bka' lung*) were made in accordance with worldly customs, appropriate to the particular place and time, concerning the way to discern distinctions between virtue and vice, and what is to be accepted or rejected, and many secular tracts (*lugs kyi bstan bcos*) [of this nature] were made.

23b After a passage concerning the establishment of temples and statues, the divine Khri IDe srong btsug btsan (Yeshe Ö) gathers together the subjects of Purang and Guge.

Having conducted a thorough consultation in order to establish means to spread the holy doctrine in upper mNga' ris, he composed a text concerning the two systems.

24a-b Accounts of Yeshe Ö's family, including the death of his father and uncle. Historical events.

25b Instructions for the observance of the doctrine and the practice of the monks.

शह्रमें त्रपुर्व नयोष विश्व क्षेत्र स्टर्न वाक्ष्य में क्षिय पुरिक्ष क्षेत्र क्ष्य क्षेत्र स्व क्षेत्र स्व क्ष में क्षेत्र प्रतिक्ष क्षेत्र स्व स्व क्षेत्र स्व विश्व क्षेत्र क्षेत्र क्षेत्र क्षेत्र क्षेत्र क्षेत्र क्षेत्र

Therefore the present holders of the doctrine and those who later become ordained as monks must act in accordance with religious texts, the laws that formerly governed the Tibetan kingdom, and new lesser laws.

## 25b–26a Regarding the *Vinaya*:

विश्वकाः भूतिः त्यन्नः भुवनः त्यन्याः व्यवकाः त्यन्यः अस्ति । अश्वकाः न्यन्यः व्यवकाः न्यन्यः । अस्य । व्यवकाः विश्वकाः भूतिः विश्वकाः स्वर्वकाः विश्वकाः विश्वकाः । अस्य । विश्वकाः विश्वक

The four parts of the *Vinaya*, as explained in the *Vinayasūtra*, must be followed. One should rely on a king who will spread the Buddhist teaching and protect the kingdom in harmony with the Buddhist doctrine, and cherish the excellent deeds of [such a] ruler.

चेत्रा यान्ता भ्रमातिः क्रमान्ता क

Reverence for the three jewels, and what was formerly dedicated [to them]—subjects, fields, possession, livestock, and so on—has diminished, but the immutable divine doctrine will never be destroyed. In order to achieve this, its dissemination should increase and mNga' ris should be made happy. However, if everyone is indolent and the ruler does not know what to do, he should establish royal laws and related instruments, based on the Advice for King Udayana in the *Sutra of Noble Advice for a King*, on sutras and religious edicts made by the ancestor Tri Song Detsen (Khri Srong Ide btsan) and those of his lineage, and on those made during my time, as they appear in the new laws of Wi Phug.

26b— Then follows advice for the sangha, who should act in accordance with the religious laws (chos khrims) and the nang khrims kyi yi ge.

28a— Then follows a passage on the prevention of heresy, which begins:

ट्यो.पट्य.घी.क्र्य.ज्या.४अय.घु.झटी रापु.घुश्ययाजा

The law against practising the wrong doctrines of [some] Buddhist monks.

28a—b It explains that heretics should be punished by being made to do prostrations, by the burning of their books, and in extreme cases by being branded as a heretic and sent into exile. It explains the *dge 'dun gyi khrims* (law of the *sangha*). However, those who are already practising the tantra should be able to continue. Good teachers should be encouraged and bad teachers should be punished.

# 30a-b

ट.जह्र-पृ।

हु.च.ट्ट.। ग्रूबा.तट्ट.। ट्यूब.क्वा.एक्ट.। ट्यूब.क्वा.एक्ट.) या.ज.क्वाबा.तब.टिब.शट्व. र्यट्यं, वट्यं, व्यं, व्

As regards what is appropriate for lay disciples and renunciates, they should all be in agreement, without enmity, bad deeds, hatred, or disputes; they should not take mutually opposed and partial positions, but act in an even and balanced way; they must act for the sole benefit of the religious establishments and the sangha; they must not act for their own, trivial goals; they must carry out more and more activities for the next world, and must not seek status associated with profit and renown in this life; they must not have particular attachment to, or desire for, lay relatives and friends; their studies should not be affected by disturbances; only virtue should be practised. In accordance with the holy doctrine of body, speech, and mind and by relying upon infallible teachers, they should seek to spend their time listening to the doctrine, reflecting, meditating, writing, reading, recitation, making offerings to the Three Jewels, and so on. These are the things included in the many sets of written rules (*bca' khrims kyi yi ge*) that were made.

Then follows a verse extolling the tshul khrims (ethical rules) as a wish-fulfilling gem.

#### 30b-31a

Accordingly, the father and three sons together became monks. The whole of the kingdom was pervaded by the doctrine, and from then on, edicts were made accordingly. Previously, in Tsang, at Ka se hrag,<sup>1</sup> mainly worldly customs (*khrims lugs*) were made. A summary was made in Wi Phug, in Pu hrangs. The main basis of the religious laws (*chos khrims*) [was] De ba ra' dza'.<sup>2</sup> One hundred and eight lords and commoners became monks. At that time, the spiritual community was lacking. Great appointments were made in the Ka ru hrogs region of Gu ge, and kindness and equality formed the basis of the laws (*bka' khrims*) in the region. It was a period of instruction in which individual deeds occurred, which were not repeated.

31a Many more people become monks. There is a reference to a blue scroll.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This is referred to earlier (as *Ka pe hrag*), on fol. 9b, as the place at which Yeshe Ö gathered the people and delivered the text of the two laws.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> This seems to be a reference to *Deva Raja*.

Measures were taken to support religious establishments and laws were made to support the teaching of the doctrine (*chos 'khor bstan par bzung ba'i khrims*), with military conscription and administrative duties distributed amongst the different regions.

31a-b Yeshe Ö ensured that the *sangha* and their monasteries were supported by property donations, recruitment of exemplary ordination candidates and food donations.

32a- On medicine (from Nepal) and music

#### 32a-b

षव्ययः बीत्राचेट्टी अटपः दुखः बी.पयट्यः भी.स्. क्षेत्रयः ग्रीयाक्ताक्तः क्षेत्रः नेट्टिट्टा अत्याक्षेत्रः भीट्टिंट् स्थाः प्राचित्रः क्षेत्रः भीट्टिंट् स्थाः प्राचित्रः स्थाः स्थ

... If there is a raid, however small, in mNga' ris, there are various forms of response. Those who steal tax revenues should be imprisoned in a cangue (*la khog*) and not executed. Even if it is the military tax official or a local official that is seized, then for each person killed, forty *srang* (silver coins) (as a fine) is generally imposed, even for someone from a hidden land (*sbas yul*) or the east or the lowlands. [In this way] the *sangha* will purify sins and virtue will be practised. When a person is imprisoned, if someone appears and wants to carry out a revenge killing, whether or not the person killed was good or bad, it should be the same—in the same way that the tax levied on each horse is the same, whether it is high, medium, or low quality—if the person seeking revenge chooses, a ransom is due.

The text continues by describing the qualities of bravery, which lay people should acquire.

People who have already studied *Mahayoga* are not to give it up.

On wise people and literacy.

33b-34a On morality: demonic rituals, killing animals, support for religion and its establishments.

यिष्यात्रात्रायुट् कुट, रे टापुची, र्वापुची, रुका,वाकूता,धुट,अकुका,येपटा, टावय, र्यायय, रे प्रथाहट्य, टावय, कुट, रे अस्टी, अयं अप.कट, टेसूय, जवा.कट, टेसूय, अया.क्ट, उट. कुची, प्रथितो, र्वाब्वी, रे जवी.वट, टेटा, अकूट, म्रेय, ज्ञावाय, टायी,पट्य, ट्यो,टा, क्ष्या, श्रेय, रे त्या, कुची, राय, कुची, राय, कुची, प्रविची, रे जवी,या.च्या, कुची, प्रक्य, प्रथी, प्रक्षित, र्वाच्या, प्रथी, प्रथी, प्रक्षित, रत मिं हिंद त क्रिया के यो दिवत में। क्षिया यो प्रति प्रति

A series of powerful emperors principally issued great edicts and took vows [while] they were carrying out religious works, even though they lived as laymen. [They directed that] the Three Jewels—the Buddhas, the doctrine, and the *sangha*—along with the statues and teachings of the Buddha, must not be destroyed. [For] the temples, stupas, and scriptural works, they should not borrow from virtuous monks or be disrespectful to the learned. If it appears that people are asking them to do things that would harm or destroy the Three Jewels, they should not listen to them. The emperor should exercise power. Below, his descendants should be seated according to the lesser ranks, and above should be placed those who had taken the doctrine to heart.

The commoners should not be prevented from studying and practising the doctrine. From now on, commoners should not be prevented from acquiring faith in the doctrine and seeking liberation. By selecting for the ritual practices of the *sangha* those with the relevant ability, the spread and dissemination of the true doctrine must not be harmed. Those who have become monks should not curb their enthusiasm.

#### 34a-b

प्रयूच तम्बी तपु जया अटत दुया की तम्बा ता बिट स्वी विश्वया कुच तू. जा कीच , बुट तम्बी , कियो, ता अच , कट, जे , सूट जा , सीची जीट , सूट कु। तम्बी , त्र या कूया , की , या त्र या क्या , या त्र या क्या , या त्र या त्य या त्र या त्य या त्र या त्य या त्र या त्र या त्य त्र या त्य या त्य या त्र या त्र या त्य या त्य या त्र या त्य या या या त्य या त्य या त्य या या या या या या

Laymen must not quarrel after hurling insults. The fields offered to those within religious establishments (*chos 'khor*), the inhabitants of holy places (*lha ris*) and monks, all three, should never be reduced. Contemporary customs, however they have been established, ought not to be corrupted with others. If anyone among the *sangha*, the rulers, and the subjects, thinks about destroying or maligning the Three Jewels, ought they not to be banished to another region? If the ruling families are increased by many male descendants, in order not to break the lineage, once one son has become established, the later sons ought to become monks. Since it is not appropriate for those who come later to establish themselves [as rulers] in the region, the second and third sons will be [de-]selected, and means will be found to limit the numbers of rulers. If it appears that some people, whether lords or commoners, are preparing to destroy

religious establishments in mNga' ris, they will be exiled, according to the great laws (*khrims chen po*), after which they will not dare to meet their associates.

## 34b-35a

ट्याप सूचा / बूचा / कुचा कुट कटा कुट चाड़की ताड़वा याड़की था अहट में अट्ट से अट्ट से अट्ट स्था पट्ट में जाव सेट अस्ट से अहट से अटि अस्ट से अटि से अट

A way will be found for the inhabitants of mNga' ris to be able to live as they please, without factionalism. On the basis of the intention behind the slightest bias of the spiritual leaders and nobility, minor circumstances will not cause great harm to the commoners, publicly or privately. Enemy and friend, good and bad, hero and coward, those who break the law or not (*khrims 'gal*), and so on, the differences between them will be examined and analysed in detail, and on this basis rewards and punishments will be meted out. Whatever it takes, the subjects shall be introduced to virtue and turned away from non-virtue, and means to prevent [non-virtue] will be found. The ruling emperor ought to issue orders without advisers and conduct a united government. In short, here in Upper mNga' ris, what is good and correct will be promoted.

#### 35a-b

Measures to avoid wrong-doing and error will be introduced, in accordance with what appears in the great law code (*khrims yig chen mo*). The ministers, men and women, and local rulers, from each family lineage, according to these religious laws (*chos khrims*), will swear a powerful oath. Temples established in other regions, like Khyung lung and She be ba, will not be destroyed and harm will not be allowed. The fields of the people in the holy places (*lha ris*), however large or small, will not be taken away. On the basis of literacy, virtues will be disseminated among them. Lords and commoners, those who hold power, if they have not sworn an oath, they must not be prevented from swearing one later. In the circumstances [although] it is often alleged that people contravene their commitments, this is not written about here, because [the consequences] are extremely frightening.

#### 35b-36a

मः बैट.य.क्षिय.कु.श्रम्थ्यत्यत्यत्यत्यत्त्र्यत्यत्त्र्यं, तयत्यः मुक्ते । यद्यं, त्यत्यत्यत्यत्त्र्यं, प्रत्यत्यत्यत्त्र्यं, प्रत्यत्यः मुक्तः विवाशक्रकः यत्त्वात्त्रः प्रत्यत् । क्ष्यः प्रत्यः क्ष्यः प्रत्यत् । व्यत्यः विवाशक्ष्यः प्रत्यत् । क्ष्यः प्रत्यः क्ष्यः प्रत्यत् । विवाशक्ष्यः प्रत्यत् । क्ष्यः प्रत्यत् । विवाशक्ष्यः प्रविवाशक्षयः प

चक्ट. (बाक्ट.) टा.शु.श्रास्ट. प्रपु. कुब. जूवाबा.क्वट. पर्शीट.। कट. कूल. जूट. टे. टेट. \त्येट. / प्री शक्ट. तम्डेच. \हेच. / टेट. तक्. क्वि. टट. श्री. बीडिवाबा. तमांच. वय. क्वी. \क्विया, क्विया, क्व

Moreover, Ye shes 'Od swore an oath to an assembly of the lay commoners and monks: 'If anyone has proposed the destruction or rejection of the Three Jewels, he will be made an example of, by all means possible. There will be no obstacles to the emperor and his subjects achieving faith in virtue. The making of offerings to the religious establishments and holy places will not diminish. The monks will be honest and there will be no means of corrupting them. All the ordinary people will venerate the Three Jewels and respect the monks. What has been dedicated to the support of the Three Jewels—the pastoralists' livestock, domestic animals, and so on, that is, all the monastic wealth that is to be offered—will be given with great endeavour. [As regards] stupas, their bases, and statues, instructions will be enforced and suitable penalties will be imposed' and so forth.

## 36a-

Verse about the benefits of all this.

## 36a-41a

There follow several folios concerning temples and listing their contents.