PART 2

The Introduction of Printing Into Tibet: Drivers, Impact and New Discoveries

New Discoveries in Early Tibetan Printing History

Porong Dawa

1 Introduction

In May 2013, Paltsek Research Institute (dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe nying zhib 'jug khang) published a collection of early prints from Central Tibet titled *Bod kyi shing spar lag rtsal gyi byung rim mdor bsdus bzhugs so* (A brief introduction to the history of Tibetan printing technology).

The publication includes a CD with copies of 50 printed texts that were produced in Tibet between 1407 and 1689. For each text, the book provides the colophon of the text, images of the initial pages, as well as a short comment on the text.

The book is published in Tibetan and has a very limited distribution. As the main editor of this publication, I provide here an outline and will then highlight some of the discoveries and avenues for future research based on this publication and related materials. For the sake of simplicity, this book is referred throughout this article and in this edited volume as *Porong Dawa Collection*. This paper is structured as follows:

- a) a brief outline of the process that led to the compilation of the book and the way it contributes to the understanding of the history of printing in Tibet;
- b) an account of some of the most interesting texts;
- c) a discussion of the likely location of the printing of the first edition of the Mi la ras pa's biography and songs. This was done on the basis of the colophons of early print editions, historical sources such as the newly retrieved biography of Kun tu bzang mo, gTsang smyon He ru ka's consort, and my research on place names and historical sites in the actual landscape.

I was born in the nomadic area called 'Brog sa sgang ra, at sKyu mdog, in the sPo rong area which is located between what historically used to be southern La stod and the Kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang. Before 1959 this area was under the rule of the sPo rong ruler, the sPo rong Je dbon, and included one of the main seats of the Bo dong pa tradition: the monastery of sPo rong dPal

mo chos sdings established by Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal himself around 1410/1.¹ For several years, I have generally focused on understanding and documenting his tradition and have been trying to find the volumes that are still missing from the extant copies of his collected works. This led me to collaborate with and then become part of the Paltsek Research Institute in Lhasa. During my research I realised that Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal played an important part in the development of printing in Tibet. In collaboration with colleagues of the University of Cambridge, such as dKon mchog dpal mo (i.e. Hildegard Diemberger), I dedicated to pay special attention to documenting and studying early Tibetan printing.

In this paper, I give an outline of the book that I recently produced and which assembles the early Tibetan prints that I was able to find. I also highlight some of those texts that I believe can contribute significantly to our understanding of the history of printing in Tibet. Finally, having travelled the La stod and Gung thang regions with the Tibetan documents in hand, I was able to locate a site that is most likely the place where the biography and the songs of Mi la ras pa by gTsang smyon He ru ka were first printed. In order to do so, I used, among other sources, the manuscript of the biography of Kun tu bzang mo, which we have recently discovered. Compiled in 1551, by one of her main disciples, mKhyan rab dBang phyug, the throne holder of bKra shis chos rdzong in Dags po, the text was written shortly after her death, on the basis of autobiographical notes and short biographies by other disciples.² It gives insight into the events that unfolded at that time and more generally into Tibetan life in the 15th/16th century which was the setting within which printing became an increasingly popular technology for book reproduction.

2 Outline of the *General History of Woodblock Printing Technology of Tibet*

The materials contained in *Bod kyi shing spar lag rtsal gyi byung rim mdor bsdus bzugs so* are the product of a process of research and collection that took us to monasteries such as sNye mo Bye mkhar and Brag dkar rta so and to many libraries across Tibet. I am particularly grateful to all those who helped

1 This date is given in the local manuscript of the text *dus khor ba mang thos rdo rjes byas pa'i bstan rtsis* which states that dPal mo chos sdings was founded in the iron tiger year, which is the year 1410/1 when Bo dong phyogs las rnam rgyal was at the age of 35.

2 These are mentioned at the end of the biography (biography of Kun tu bzang mo folios 67–71).

in the research, giving access to the original texts, and to all those who contributed to the process of editing and publication in Lhasa. The book consists of an introduction; fifty subsections dedicated to the fifty texts with the reproduction of the initial and final pages, the colophon, and a synthesis of the main information concerning the person who supervised the printing operation, the place and time of printing, the sponsor, the scribes, the editing process, the management, the carvers and the dedication. A set of endnotes and a list of references complete the book.

From the colophons of these prints we gain insight into the aspirations of those who drove and contributed to these printing projects. We can read about their wish that all schools of Tibetan Buddhism prosper and that epidemics, famines and wars be prevented or stopped thanks to the merit accumulated through such deeds. These materials can also provide valuable information for scholars involved in Tibetan studies. For example, the text n. 19 has a colophon that tells about the big families shaping politics and culture in the La stod/Gung thang area such as the headman of Zur tsho (sde pa) and his minister rNam rgyal tshe rten and the official Tsha mda' nang so and his minister sTag la nang pa. The relationship between these families, which can be gleaned from these sources, is otherwise difficult to understand. It seems the area of gNya' nang was ruled from the north – like sKyid grong ruled from rDzong dkar and mKhar rta-Pha drug ruled from Shel dkar – since sTag la Nang pa, located in central gNya' nam (see map), was acting as chief councillor for the official residing in Tsha mda', to the west of Ding ri, where the local centre of power was located (see map); it also seems that Zur tsho was a very influential place, both politically and culturally.

The *Porong Dawa Collection* is to be understood as a contribution to an emerging field in Tibetan studies that focuses on printing technologies. In the article “Tibetan printings” written by Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las³ and included in the second volume of his collected works, it states that in the year 1408, the Emperor Yongle of China sent the minister Tha kyen bzhi to Tibet and invited the Byams chen chos rje to Nanjing and the Tibetan bKa' 'gyur was printed there using wood-blocks. Later, they presented sets of these prints to Sa skya pa, Karma pa and rJe Tsong kha pa. Tibetan lamas were delighted with the gift and this expanded their vision. Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las comments that already during the time of King Srong btsan sgam po the skill of carving stone and wood was known. However there was no systematic carving practice and anyone who carved something did so according to their own inspiration and viewpoint, but in terms of the skill itself, it was easy for them to

3 Dung dkar Phrin las 2004, 138–139.

MAP 10.1 Map of the region of southern La stod and Mang yul Gung thang showing the location of sites discussed.

MAP BY TERRY CHILVERS ON THE BASIS OF GOOGLE MAPS

FIGURE 10.1 1407 print of the 'Grel chung don gsal, produced at Shel dkar.
PHOTOGRAPH PORONG DAWA

carve. Carving for printing required a more specialised skill and letters carved on wood must be identical with the original [manuscript] text, so advanced skills and expertise were needed. Reproducing letters through copper printing (*zangs spar*) and bronze printing (*khro spar*) using casting technology was therefore easier than wood-block printing. However because of the scarcity of copper and bronze in Tibet, it was difficult to find the raw materials that were necessary. Also, wood was plentiful in Tibet and the technology of carving on wood and stone was well developed.

According to this article, the abundance of wood in Tibet as well as Yongle's gift⁴ of canonical sets to Tsong kha pa and other Tibetan lamas gave the main impetus to printing technology based on wood-block carving. However, materials show that wood-block printing was already taking place in Tibet before that time. For example the 'Grel pa don gsal written by the Indian master Seng ge bzang po (Haribhadra) was printed in 1407 at Shel dkar, the capital of La stod lho, with the support of the ruler Si tu lHa btsan skyabs and the supervision of the abbot of Shel dkar monastery Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal. This text is now preserved at sNye mo Bye dkar monastery. Thanks to the cooperation with the local monastic community, it was possible to retrieve and digitise it. This is now included in this book as text n. 1. At that time in Tibet there was still the custom that Buddhist texts had two rings. This was reminiscent of the holes that were used for book binding strings in ancient palm leaf manuscripts. The manuscript bsTan 'gyur produced by Drung chen sMon lam rdo rje (1317–1323) still has these rings. The block-printed version of the 'Grel pa don gsal also has such rings. The discovery of this print therefore not only challenges the com-

4 On Yongle bKa' 'gyur see Jonathan Silk 1996, 153–200; 2009, 35–60.

mon belief that wood-block printing started in Central Tibet after the production of the Yongle bka' 'gyur in Beijing, but it also makes available to scholars an item with remarkable codicological features.

The *Porong Dawa Collection* also provides information on the printing houses: for example Shel dkar is the place where the earliest extant print was produced. Soon after that the *rGyud sde spyi rnam* by Bo dong pan chen and other texts were also printed there one after the other. Called Shel dkar mi 'gyur rdo rje rdzong, this fortress was established by Si tu Chos kyi Rin chen in the 14th century and was a place where political power and religious power were joined together. Here, in the period 1730–1731, a set of blocks for the *bKa' 'gyur* and in the period 1741–1742 a set of blocks for the *bsTan 'gyur* were produced by Mi dbang Pho lha ba when he was the ruler of Tibet. These wood-blocks were later transferred and preserved and used for printing at sNar thang (see map), which was considered the biggest printing house of Central Tibet (dBus gTsang). As far as the other prints are concerned, I provide information about the printing houses and the sites as well as the time and the circumstances of their production as far as I was able to identify them on the basis of the colophons and other sources.

In the *Porong Dawa Collection*, I also discuss the aim of the printing activity. In this respect, the gift of the Dharma is considered to be the best of all possible presents. Patrons have been sponsoring therefore this kind of donation. On the other hand, books are also needed for teaching and recitation. In this way, books – from big collections such as the *bKa' 'gyur* and the *bsTan 'gyur* to small texts for personal ritual usage – were printed and great effort was put into book production. There are all kinds of other reasons behind the production of printed texts and I have commented on them in each subsection of the volume.

3 Highlights of the Collection Included in the *General History of Woodblock Printing Technology of Tibet*

Among the fifty texts described in the *Porong Dawa Collection*, I wish to mention a few that I consider particularly important. I have already commented on text number 1.

Text number 2 is the text of the teachings by Seng ge rgyal mtshan⁵ and was printed under the supervision of Seng ge bzang po, a lama who might be identical with the Seng ge bzang po connected to the Gung thang king Khri rgyal

5 The title is: *Chos rje dbon seng pa'i gsung/ don tshan bzhi bcu zhe gnyis kyi bshad pa / sgom chen gyi mngon rtogs mrjod pa ri khrod long gtam chen mo*. This lama is also known as dBon Seng pa and lHa bdun pa.

FIGURE 10.2 *lHa mdun print of the teachings of Seng ge rgyal mtshan.*
PHOTOGRAPH PORONG DAWA

bSod nam s lde (1371–1404). Around the end of the 14th or the very beginning of the 15th century, this spiritual master established a meditation monastery (*sgrub sde*) with the support from this king at Shag,⁶ a site on the ridge of a hill just south of the more famous Brag dkar rta so and the starting point of one of the main routes from Mang yul to bTsum and Nub ris. There is the name lHa mdun hand-written in small characters in the margin of the folios of this print. This means this print was either produced or preserved at lHa mdun monastery in Nub ris, which is consistent with the fact that the printed works are those of Seng ge rGyal mtshan, founder of lHa mdun monastery.⁷ lHa mdun as the printing place would be consistent with the location of a number of the patrons (mostly from the surrounding areas of rNying, sMyams, rTsang etc.). The hypothetical dating of the print to the reign of Khri rgyal bsod nam s lde would also be supported by his close connection to this monastery at the end of his life before being assassinated. His son and heir, Khri lHa dbang rgyal mtshan, was born to the niece of lHa mdun chos rje, the head of this monastery and successor of lHa mdun Seng ge rgyal mtshan; he was kept there during his childhood to protect him from court intrigues until he ascended the throne in 1419 (see Diemberger 2007, 35–36). It would be plausible that the rGyal tshab chos rje mentioned at the top of the sponsors' list refers to this obviously powerful religious master.

The tentative scenario, which would date this print edition to the early 15th century, is however not the only possible one. There is a lHa 'dun pa Seng ge bzang po who participated in the 1523 celebrations for the Phags pa wati temple (see Ehrhard 2004, 370, n. 95) who might be another possible identification

6 According to the *Gung thang rgyal rabs* a meditation place was established in Shag; see Everding 2000, 122–123. The term *shag* may mean both a monastic housing and a particular location at the border between Mang yul and Gung thang. The second is the most plausible option in this case.

7 Everding 2000, 125; 514–515.

for the spiritual master in charge of the carving mentioned in the colophon. In this case, the print would have been produced a century later.⁸ Since the colophon is incomplete it is uncertain whether this is the original print or a re-edition that includes the first colophon. It is in any case interesting that the Gung thang king Khri rgyal bSod nams lde was also a strong supporter of Grags pa rgyal mtshan, uncle of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal, and Khri lHa dbang rgyal mtshan a sponsor of the prints of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal's works, which may point to an early printing connection between Gung thang and La stod (see Tsering Dawa in this volume).

Text number 3 is the print of a text by Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal made at Shel dkar with the title *rGyud sde spyi rnam*, which is the detailed version of this text also known as the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa chung ba*. No exact date is given in the colophon, but it is mentioned that it was produced with the sponsorship of lHo bdag lHa btsan skyabs⁹ when Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal was the abbot of Shel dkar. Considering the biography of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal, this is likely to have happened before the 1410/1 establishment of sPo rong dpal mo chos sdings, which eventually became his main seat, and probably in the wake of the 1407 print.

Text number 8 is another edition of the Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal's *rGyud sde spyi rnam* produced in the 1468 in the palace of Hing du Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, the ruler (*khri dpon*) of Yar 'brog. This is one of several texts that point to a close connection between the Gung thang/La stod networks and Yar 'brog.

Text number 10 is the print of another key text of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal, the *Chos spyod* of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa'i snying po*, i.e. the practice of the essence of his collected works. It was produced in Zur tsho, also known as rTse chen rdzong in the second half of the fifteenth century. Among the people involved in the production of the print, the colophon particularly praises the editor 'Dul 'dzin Ngag dbang,¹⁰ a spiritual master mentioned in the biography of Chos kyi sgron ma (1422–1455)¹¹ as coeval or more likely older than her. The main patron of this print edition was sLob dpon ma Nam mkha' dpal bzang mo, who was a member of the ruling family of Zur tsho and who

8 The style of the images and the format of the book seems to support the later dating (Michela Clemente personal communication).

9 Si Tu lHa btsan skyabs, the son of Si tu Chos kyi rin chen was the ruler of southern La stod after the death of his father in 1402. See also Diemberger in this volume.

10 On 'Dul 'dzin Ngag dbang see Pahlke 2012, 249.

11 He is briefly mentioned in folio 59; see also Diemberger in this volume.

FIGURE 10.3 *'Od gsal phug, early printing house in the border area between Mang yul and Gung thang. In this site, close to the birthplace of Mi la ras pa, the 1538 edition of his biography and songs was produced.*

PHOTOGRAPH BRUCE HUETT

belonged to a lineage descending from dPang lo tsa ba.¹² She was a female spiritual master with a particular devotion for the Bo dong pa tradition and may have been part of the network of religious women that developed around Chos kyi sgron ma and her disciples. bSam pa blo gros seng ge is mentioned among the carvers involved in this Zurt tsho based printing project and Nam mkha rin chen among the scribes. The print edition was made to commemorate the passing of Drung chen bSod nams rgyal mtshan, a member of the local ruling family with close connections to that of northern La stod (Byang bdag). (For a discussion of the patronage of this print edition see also Diemberger in this volume.)

Number 16 is a biography of mChog ldan mgon po. This is a re-print of an earlier print edition produced in 1527 at rDzong dkar with the patronage of a wide range of members of the Gung thang royal family, including Khri rgyal Zil

12 dPang Lo tsa ba was a great translator and the first of an important nephew-lineage of spiritual masters from Zur tsho, which will culminate with Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal.

gnon mgon po lde (?), the then still very young Gung thang king Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa (1514–1560), his mother dKon mchog bzang mo (died 1554), Shes rabs rgyal mo the widow of his uncle Khri rgyal bsam grub lDe (1459–1506), and others. Compared with the Gung thang prints, the style is unusual and the images belong to the sMan thang tradition of Tibetan painting which was dominant in the dBus' area (for a discussion of the 1527 print edition see Ehrhard 2000, 32–37).

Text number 19 is the 1538 edition of the biography of Mi la ras pa by gTsang smyon Heruka produced at 'Od gsal phug by a number of disciples of gTsang smyon and sponsored by lHa btsun Rin chen mnam rgyal (1473–1557) and the Gung thang King Khri Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa (1514–1560). This edition contains the colophon of the first edition produced at Na zlum Shel phug. For a detailed discussion of the location and the patronage of the first printing site see below (See also Sernesi 2011, 191–197).

Text number 24 is the biography of bSod nams blo gros, a disciple of gTsang smyon Heruka who lived in Be rtse. The print was produced by one of his disciples, Blo gros mchog ldan, a member of the Glo bo royal family, with the sponsorship of the Dharma king of gTing khebs (skyes) and Nam mkha bsod nams, a member of the family of the minister of Tsha mda' nang so, dGe sbyong na me, a descendant of the ancient gDon clan, and others. It was printed around 1545 at Gar phug hermitage near the famous hidden valley of sKyid mo lung (see Schaeffer 2011, 465–466).

Text number 25 is the biography of dBang phyug rgyal mtshan (1474–1552), printed at rDza ri bSam gtan gling, a locality mentioned as close to Jo mo Shel lcag. This print was produced thanks to wide-ranging support described in detail in the colophon: the Gung thang queen dKon mchog bzang mo who offered barely and some of the woodblocks; Chos rje Zla bag rags pa who offered the rest of the wood blocks; the Zur tsho sde pa, who offered barely and an ancient excellent turquoise; the family of the dPal lding nang so; a range of local officials and village headmen; the abbot of Shel dkar monastery; relatives of the master and a long list of male and female followers. This text provides valuable information on a disciple of gTsang smyon Heruka for whom so far no biography was known. The last page of the colophon was damaged and the last but one page is missing, therefore some details of the production of this print edition were lost. The last date mentioned in the text refers to the time in which the master was sixty-seven years old [i.e. 1540], the biography may therefore have been compiled and printed before his death. An interesting feature of this print is that some names of scribes and carvers are mentioned at the page bottom, for example in folio 71v it is stated: "From folio 15 to folio 70, the scribe was Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and the carvers were four people from

FIGURE 10.4 *Na zhum. This seems to be the place where the first edition of Mi la ras pa's biography and songs was produced.*

PHOTOGRAPH PORONG DAWA

gTsang (gTsang pa rnam bzhi)"; again at folio 73v it is stated: "carved by Zur tsho ba". This was a common feature in early printing and was linked to the payment of the craftsmen for their work (see Ehrhard 2000a: 69, 75). Finally there are many words, often names, that were either deliberately highlighted or erased (the images are unclear in this respect). Some peculiar drawings such as that of a long-nosed man holding a whip (folio 58r) and that of two men on horses (folio 151) were added in the margins presumably at a later date. The text shows the traces of handling over many generations.

Some of the texts included in the book are previously unknown print editions, others are further examples of early prints that have already been pointed out and discussed before and can be useful for comparison. Most of the texts are from Gung thang and La stod lho but a few are from other areas in Central Tibet that may be particularly important or relevant in a discussion of early Tibetan printing. The region of Gung thang and La stod seems to have played an important part in early printing and I did some dedicated research on the location of specific places that can cast light on the geographical and historical setting of book production.

4 Location of Na Zlum Shel phug as the Place Where the First Print Edition of Mi la ras pa's Biography and Songs was Produced

West of what is now called Old Dingri is a village called Nas lung or Na zlum, rendered in Chinese as Nailonxiang. A significant variability in the rendition of this place name appears not only in historical sources but also in contemporary uses as witnessed by the inconsistencies on signboards along the road. In the village or the monastery, the explanation for the name is usually given in the following terms: *na* is a type of grassland and *zlum* means encircled space and indicates in this case an encircled patch of very green grass that has the miraculous gift of producing flowers even in winter. The other form *nas lung* means much more simply 'Land of barely' and is a very common place name. Na zlum seems to be rendered also as Na 'dum which has no immediate meaning. The name Na zlum is unusual and is connected to the legend of origin of the place connected to the Mahasiddha Virupa, reflected in a variety of forms in the local monastery of dGe sdings which was established during the Sa skya period. Although the monastic community currently follows the rNying ma pa tradition, it is known to have historically had tight connections to the Sa skya pa and the Bo dong pa. Na zlum is also connected to the birth and childhood of U rgyan pa who travelled widely and supervised the production of a Kalacakra print at the Yuan court in 1292/3 (see Sherab Sangpo 2013, 201–224). Looking from Na zlum dGe sdings across the valley towards the north-east one can see the ragged peaks of the sPud tra spun bdun, the "Seven sPud tra Brothers", where U rgyan pa used to have his main seat (sPud tra monastery) and where he passed away in 1309 (Biography of U rgyan pa folio 105r). In between is the Bong chu river that gathers the waters coming down from the Zur tsho and sMan khab areas.

gTsang smyon Heruka is said to have dwelled in this region. In Na zlum, not far from the old village, are ruins of what must have been a large building locally considered to have been a residence of the great Mahasiddha. Inbetween is a white relatively low ridge dotted with caves that were apparently used for human dwellings. This ridge bears the traces of a destroyed nunnery on its top and currently goes under the name of Ri rgya dkar mo.

According to the biography of Kun tu bzang mo, Na zlum was the place where she met her master, as he was involved in the production of the print of the biography of Mi la ras pa. In folio 16r, it is stated that her assistant first made contact with Heruka who had returned from his trip to Tsa ri as he was "staying at Na zlum Shel phug and was involved in the printing of the biography and songs of the venerable Mi la ras pa" (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo folio 16r).¹³

13 *He ru kha rje btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur par du gzhegs pa la na zlum shel phug na bzhugs pa'i drung du.*

FIGURE 10.5 *Folio 16 of the biography of Kun tu bzang mo referring to gTsang smyon Heruka's printing of the biography and songs of Mi la ras pa at Na zlum.*

PHOTOGRAPH PORONG DAWA

The spelling of the place name is given in this case as Na zlum which is very particular and consistent with the local explanation of the name. The name Na zlum returns repeatedly in the biography, always with this spelling. The name Shel phug, i.e. crystal cave, is however not preserved in the local oral tradition, but it may well have referred to the strikingly white cave complex in the ridge of Ri rgya dkar mo. The overall location is consistent with the biographical narrative as Kun tu bzang mo was coming from dPal mo chos sding, located at about one day by horse to the northwest of Na zlum. Furthermore, narratives of other events that are taking place in the vicinity of Na zlum mention the sMan chu river, i.e. the river flowing through sMan khab which is located directly to the north of Na zlum (see also Diemberger in this volume). The location Na 'dum Shel phug appears in the biography of gTsang smyon by rGod tshang ras chen (folio 134v) as the printing place of the first print edition of the life of Mi la ras pa, but the form Na 'dum has in itself no recognisable meaning. It seems therefore that Na 'dum and Na zlum are variants indicating the same place. The version of the name given in Kun tu bzang mo's biography seems to be the most plausible and is close to other variants such as Nas zlum that appear in other historical sources.

The colophon of the first edition contained in the 'Od gsal phug edition (see text nr 19 and see also Sernesi 2011, 184–185; 217–28) gives a list of patrons that can provide some further circumstantial evidence for the location of the printing place in the sense that a significant number of the people mentioned are either from places in the vicinity of Na zlum or are connected to the area. The first name is that of the Gung thang ruler(s) mentioned in generic terms as Gung thang khab pa; we know that this was principally Khri rNam rgyal lde, but other members of the royal family may have been involved. Following this is the Zur tsho headman (*sde pa*) and his chief councillor (*blon chen*) rNam

rgyal tshe rten; they were both from the Zur tsho area to the northwest of Na zlum. Following this is the Tsha mda' official (*nang so*) from the village next to the hot spring area, located directly to the south of Na zlum and to the west of Ding ri. He was a local headman (*sde dpon*) claiming to have the Gung thang royal lineage in his ancestry. His chief councillor (*blon chen*) sTag la nang pa, mentioned immediately afterwards, was the uncle of Kun tu bzang mo and belonged to the lineage of dPon chen Shakya bzang po; he was based in the locality currently known as sNang yul or sNgor ra 'bugs stag in the gNya' nang area and had a sister married into the Zur tsho ruling family. After some names of unspecified provenance, there is mention of the three brothers from upper Ar (Ar stod spun gsum), including 'Phags pa skyabs. Assuming that the name Ar is identical with A ra, they also are from the Zur tsho ruling family, as the A ra ba people are mentioned in the biography of Kun tu bzang mo. In there, it states that her paternal aunt married into the Zur tsho ruling family (see Diemberger, in this volume). A special mention is also made of the people of sMan khab stod, just north of Na zlum, who are collectively praised for their effort and great support. Among the religious supporters, there is mention of dBu mdzad rGyal le who might belong to the same family as the master involved in the 1443 print of the *Chos spyod* of the *De nyid 'dus pa snying po* at Zur tsho. There are a few names of people from other areas in the region, in particular Shakya bshes gnyen, the main person from gNyi shangs,¹⁴ Ting lung Grags pa bzang po, mDo chen bla ma from the Gung thang monastery (see Ehrhard 2008, 63) and gNya' nam Ngag dbang grags pa. There are also several disciples of gTsang smyon, both male and female, that are not mentioned with an area of origin. Overall, the people connected to the Na zlum area and its surroundings are in the majority. All these sponsors are mentioned as having offered gold, silver and all what was needed for the printing and the colophon concludes by the wish that all those who enabled the printing, those we know of and those we don't, may become like Mi la ras pa, avoiding the eight worldly concerns and quickly reaching enlightenment.

Finally, there is also mention of the scribes that were of all sorts and the craftsmen for the printing who consisted of Kha khyu Chos bzang and his disciples (folio 112 r).¹⁵ Most interesting is the fact that the craftsmen for printing seem to have been part of an existing "school", i.e. teacher and disciples, cen-

14 Currently gNyi shangs is usually identified with the Manang region in Nepal, further to the west, but this identification would not seem to be necessarily accurate in this case. Sometimes this toponym indicates the area around the Trisuli River. See also Franz-Karl Ehrhard's discussion of the toponym sNye shang, 2013, 291.

15 *mam thar yig mkhan nges med sna tshog te / par mkhan kha kyu chos bzang dpon slob yin.*

tred in Kha khyu, which is a village located immediately to the north-east of the Zur tsho capital. Most of the lay sponsors are from the region surrounding Na zlum, especially Zur tsho, sMan khab and Tsha mda' which would be consistent with this locality being the printing site of the first print edition of Mi la ras pa's biography and songs.

From the biography of Kun tu bzang mo (folio 19v), we learn that the printing blocks carved at Na zlum were eventually taken to Nya' lam Grod phug, the famous cave of Mi la ras pa and where 'Phel rgyas gling monastery was later built (and which is currently a regular tourist spot, see map). Following the ancient route, this is at some two days walking distance from Na zlum via Ding ri Glang 'khor and the Thong la pass (see Chang 1994: 271) or via another parallel route slightly further north. After gTsang smyon's death in 1507, a new print edition was produced by Kun tu bzang mo who remembered the fact that her master was unhappy with the small size of the letters of the first printing blocks (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo folio 29r). This time she had the blocks carved in Ze phug, the holy place of Mi la ras pa in La phyi, by craftsmen from sMan khab and Zur tsho whom she invited there for the operation. These blocks were also taken to Grod phug in gNya' lam after their carving (on this story see also Diemberger in this volume). Over the years Kun tu bzang mo produced various print editions of gTsang smyong Heruka's works and the works of other masters for which she often used craftsmen from the Zur tsho and sMan khab areas (see Larsson in this volume; Ehrhard 2000, 188; and also Sernesì 2011, 154–158).

Although many questions remain open until we find actual samples of these earliest print editions of Mi la ras pa's biography and songs, we can glean from what is currently available to us that the areas of Zur tsho and sMan khab were particularly important for scholarship and craftsmanship connected to printing. Perhaps it was the local availability of craftsmen and sponsors that made Na zlum attractive for gTsang smyon's initial printing operation. This region was also located in a strategic position linking southern La stod and Gung thang, which probably promoted borrowings and collaboration. For example Text nr 14, a biography of rGyal ba Yan dgon pa printed in Tsibri in 1520, has main scribes from sMan khab and carvers from Gung thang.

5 Conclusion

In the last few years it has been possible to find several manuscripts and prints that were unknown or believed lost. Going around Tibet, I am aware that there are still a lot of undiscovered materials and I am glad that for this publication,

I was able to collect texts that could give an insight into the early days of printing in Tibet. From the colophons of these prints we gain insight into the aspirations of those who drove and contributed to printing projects as well as information on the material circumstances under which they were operating. It is particularly important to compare printing colophons with biographies because we can then gain a better picture of the overall setting of the printing projects. It is also useful to look for place names in the actual landscape, where oral tradition has preserved some of them, and where ruins can elicit many stories and memories often encapsulated in place narratives (*gnas bshad*). The identification of Mi la ras pa's biography printing place is just an example of this process. Place names preserved in oral narratives of course cannot provide historical proofs but can often offer useful circumstantial evidence. They also remind us of the fact that some of these ancient stories are very much alive in peoples' memory and shape their understanding of the place they live in. Having presented these preliminary materials, I hope that further research will cast new light on Tibetan book culture and its technologies.

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