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The impressive monograph under review, which is the author’s “Habilitation” thesis, represents an important contribution to the history and geography of Tibetan Buddhism. It focuses on an important aspect of Nepalese and Tibetan culture: the cult of the statues of the Avalokiteśvara brothers which miraculously manifested from a sandalwood tree near the Indian-Nepalese border at the time of the first Tibetan Dharma king Srong btsan sgam po (d. A.D. 649), and were then taken each to a different place in Nepal and Tibet (varying according to tradition), one of them being the Tibetan border town of sKyid grong, where Ārya Va ti bzang po (this the name of the naturally arisen statue of one particular form of Avalokiteśvara, namely a standing Padmapāñi Lokeśvara) found a home in the ‘Phags pa lha khang (i.e., the “Temple of the Noble [Va ti bzang po]”). This myth not only contributed considerably to the process of projecting the Tantric version of Mahāyāna Buddhism from India and Nepal onto Tibet, but also played an important role in the forming of a new centralized Tibetan state, with its ruler figuring as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara.

The work under review centres around a rare pilgrimage guide to the statue of Ārya Va ti bzang po and the temple ‘Phags pa lha khang of sKyid grong written by an influential author of the Nyingma and Kagyu schools, Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug (1775-1837). The full Tibetan title of the text is ‘Phags mchog thugs rje chen po rang byang va ti bzang po’i mam par thar pa ngo mthat rmad du byung ba’i gtam dam pa’i nyin byed phyogs brgyur ’dren pa’i rta ljang zhes bya ba bzhus ste, in English: “A biography — [and] the astonishing story — of Va ti bzang

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po, the most noble Mahâkârûnîka, who arose from himself — The emerald-green horse which pulls the sun of faith in a hundred directions.” It is contained in Chos kyi dbang phyug’s Collected Works, which Ehrhard microfilmed in the library of the learned master and lama sLob dpon ’Gyur med in the high mountain village of Sama Gaon during an expedition to Nubri in Nepal’s Gorkha district (NGMPP reel nos. L 380/5 - 381/1, 56 fols.). Based on it and another version of this text from rDzong dkar chos sde monastery in South India, the present critical edition was prepared and the entire pilgrimage guide translated into German. Both the edition and the well-annotated translation are exemplary and reflect a high degree of philological skill.

The extensive introduction (pp. 57-150) consists of several long chapters on the traditions of the Avalokiteśvara brothers (the number of brothers varying between three and five), the statue of Ārya Va ti bzang po, the temple ’Phags pa lha khang housing it in sKyid grong, the biography of Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug, the religious geography of the Western Tibetan area of Mang yul Gung thang, related historical and geographical works, a description of the texts that deal with the statue of Ārya Va ti bzang po, and finally the cult of Avalokiteśvara in Mang yul. Each chapter bears testimony to Ehrhard’s profound knowledge and expertise in the field of Tibetan and Nepalese religious history and geography. All his points are well documented, mainly on the basis of primary sources, some of which were discovered by the author himself during his time as the local director of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) in Kathmandu.

The main part is followed by five interesting appendices. The first two are two additional Tibetan pilgrimage guides to the statue of Ārya Va ti bzang po. The first guide, bearing the title Rang byon jo bo ’phags pa va ti bzang po’i rnam thar nyi ma’i dkyil ’khor bzhugs so, in English: “A biography of the self-arisen lord Ārya Va ti bzang po — The disk of the sun” (Appendix I), was microfilmed during my first expedition to Dolpo (north-west Nepal) in Shey (Sumdo) Gompa in August 1994. The guide edited in Appendix II (the ’Phags mchog spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug va ti bzang po’i rnam thar nam mkha’i nor bu ma rig mun sel, in English: “A biography of the most noble Avalokiteśvara Va ti bzang po — The jewel of the sky which removes the darkness of ignorance”) was discovered on my third Dolpo expedition in Lang Gompa near Bicher Gaon (Dolpo) in May 1996, but not microfilmed there (but in June in the microfilm station at Do Tarap). Appendix III contains an edition of a short sādhana of the five Avalokiteśvara brothers from the National Archives in Kathmandu (’Phags pa rang byon mched lnga’i bsgrub thabs bskyed rdzogs zung ’brel du gdams pa bzhugs so, in English: “The sādhana of the five noble self-arisen brothers — Instructions for combining the generation and perfection [stages]”), and Appendix IV the edition of two short prayers to Ārya Va ti bzang po from the Library of the Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala. Finally, Ehrhard presents in a fifth appendix the detailed contents of the ten volumes of Brag dkar rta so Chos kyi dbang phyug’s Collected Works which he microfilmed in Sama Gaon (Nubri) in April 1992.

For the sake of completeness it may be mentioned that the expected new edition of the Collected Works of Chos kyi dbang phyug by lamas from Nubri (announced by Ehrhard on p. 535) will contain a number of important works which I microfilmed.