

Glimpses of Tibetan Divination

Past and Present

Edited by

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Contents

- Preface VII
- Background History of the Volume XXII
- On the Contributions Contained in This Volume XXV
- List of Figures and Tables XXIX
- Notes on Contributors XXX
- 1 A Case of Prophecy in Post-imperial Tibet 1
Per Kværne
- 2 Three Dice, Four Faces, and Sixty-Four Combinations: Early Tibetan
Dice Divination by the Numbers 11
Brandon Dotson
- 3 A Preliminary Analysis of Old Tibetan Dice Divination Texts 49
Ai Nishida
- 4 Divinations Padampa Did or Did Not Do, or Did or Did Not Write 73
Dan Martin
- 5 Landscaping Time, Timing Landscapes: The Role of Time in the *sa*
dpyad Tradition 89
Petra Maurer
- 6 Signs and Portents in Nature and in Dreams: What They Mean
and What Can Be Done about Them 118
Charles Ramble
- 7 Identifying the Magical Displays of the Lords of the World:
The Oneiromancy of the *gSal byed byang bu* 136
Donatella Rossi
- 8 Vibhūticandra's *Svapnohana* and the Examination of Dreams 161
Rolf Scheuermann
- 9 Prognosis, Prophylaxis, and Trumps: Comparative Remarks on Several
Common Forms of Tibetan Cleromancy 181
Alexander K. Smith

- 10 The Role of Lamyn Gegeen Blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan in the Dissemination of Tibetan Astrology, Divination and Prognostication in Mongolia 198
Agata Bareja-Starzýnska
- Index 213

Divinations Padampa Did or Did Not Do, or Did or Did Not Write*

Dan Martin

There is a widespread notion when it comes to the subject of divination that it is about knowing future events ahead of time. People who look more deeply into the subject are likely to know that it is not so much about finding out the future as it is for *revealing*, more generally, the unknown and thereby *resolving* a situation of indecision. Very often this indecisiveness does indeed come from not knowing what the future will bring. We humans engage in these widely varied practices because we cannot make up our minds in matters belonging to all three times: past, present and future. For example, a divination meant to solve the problem of a lost object may reveal the past event of its losing, the place where it is in the present, as well as where we may be able to locate it in the future. In any case, it told us where to look when we could not decide for ourselves.

I might say that even the Tibetan word we normally translate as *prediction* or *prophecy*, *lung bstan*, shares in this temporal ambiguity. This is especially clear when we consider the negative form of the word, *lung ma bstan pa*, that means something neutral, neither fish nor fowl, indefinite, not well defined, out of order and even perhaps chaotic. The positive word *lung bstan* promises a resolution of this negative situation of ambiguity and uncertainty.¹

* I would like to express my appreciation to the librarians of Leiden (Silvia Compaan-Vermetten), Stuttgart (Kerstin Losert) and Copenhagen (Anne Burchardi) who responded to my arcane inquiries about Padampa texts in their holdings with much warmth and efficiency. I thank very much Rolf Kramer of Munich for pointing me in the right direction to locate the Stuttgart manuscript. I must give thanks to Karma Phuntsho (Thimphu), without whose help I would not have been able to make use of some unique Bhutanese manuscripts, texts that will continue to prove their importance, as well as to Kurtis Schaeffer who first alerted me to their existence.

1 *Lung bstan*, used in the Kanjur and Tanjur texts to translate Sanskrit *vyākaraṇa* as well as in works by Tibetans, is frequent in the most strongly Buddhist contexts, particularly predictions of the future attainment of Buddhahood. But it is also used in prophecies of other future events (including prophetic genres of strongly political tones predicting future disasters). We even find it used in grammatical contexts as a term for the field of Indic grammar as a whole

I should point out, too, that even the most secular sorts of people resort to methods like flipping coins and drawing straws. Divinations may require cosmological concepts that permit their working, views that may not necessarily be religious in nature, yet religions including Buddhism do find practical ways to employ them. Making choices and achieving consensus often prove difficult, and it may be foolish to entirely neglect tools that can be this useful. Bearing this in mind will help keep a more even-handed attitude about a practice we may no longer believe in, or no longer believe in very much.

Still another point should be emphasized. In the past we humans regardless of cultural differences have always been extremely sensitive to signs in our environment that could help us decide what our next steps ought to be. Stars, clouds, shadows and footprints may help determine directions to take, how to prepare for weather conditions, what game to hunt. In the absence of such signs provided by nature we have often sought ways to deliberately provoke them. I think that this is where divination methods enter in. The irony of these methods is in the fact that they present indeterminate situations of their own. We seek methods to overcome indecision such that we *cannot*, by our own volition, predict or predetermine the results. We have no idea how the dice will fall, and we should not. And out of that cloudy indeterminacy comes a more or less clear answer that determines the right path for us to take, where to look for a lost object, which horse to bet on, and so on.

A little indeterminacy in our own approaches may be called for, in the sense that we should be prepared to let down the definitional boundaries, and admit to ourselves that predictability is as much a problem for modern science as for the diviners, or agree that twenty-first-century medical diagnostic procedures may have much in common with, or at least much that is comparable to, divination. When we try to answer our questions about authorship and attribution, we too find ourselves in search of signs, looking for indications that could help us find our way in what can be a field of inquiry as perplexing as it is, to myself at least, fascinating.

My present plan is to look briefly, one at a time, at four different divination manuals connected to the name of Padampa that deal with four different types of divination. Then I will cover everything I can discover about Padampa's personal practice of divination from the earliest sources so far known, identifying which types *they* were. Since I know of few such incidents, this should not take very long. After that, I consider briefly how these divination texts may

(although in this case Tibetans translated the term differently). The negative expression *lung ma bstan pa* was used to translate Sanskrit *avyākṛta*.

fit a pattern when taken together with *other* Padampa-attributed texts. Then I will conclude something or another on the basis of these, or at least suggest something interesting enough it could repay further testing. Now I suppose we have more or less determined the path lying ahead of us, so we can get things underway with a little confidence.

1 Introducing Padampa

Since the question always comes up and is foundational for rightly comprehending the authorship ascriptions, we must look briefly at the name problem. Padampa (Pha dam pa) is not in any sense a proper name, or even a name that was used while he was alive. Although some have attempted to Sanskritize it, it is a term of respect awarded him by Tibetans, so the attempt is anachronistic and, if we reflect on it, slightly ludicrous. No source tells us what his childhood name, surely an Indic name, would have been. His childhood was spent in south India, so it could have been from a Dravidian tongue, or since he was born into the Brahmin caste, and his parents' names are given in Sanskrit forms, they may well have named him in Sanskrit. The most commonly encountered Indic names are in fact the two ordination names he received at Vikramaśīla Monastery as a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old novice and later on as a full monk. These two names are, respectively, Kamalaśrī and Kamalaśīla. There are other rarely encountered Indic names that are not important for present purposes: Karuṇasiddhi, Ajitanātha and a few others.²

Of all the sources on Padampa there is one that stands head and shoulders above all the others because of its provenance. The original title of the *Zhijé Collection*, as restored by myself, may be translated into English as, "Among the Peacemaking Teachings that Lay at the Heart of the Holy Dharma, this is the Text of the Later Oral Transmission known as *The Exceptionally Profound*". The physical manuscript was made in 1246 or so in very large part based on a 1207 golden manuscript. I regard this as the closest thing to contemporary evi-

2 Although there may be occasional confusions also in the Tibetan literature, I believe that all of the following names can be understood as different ways Tibetans have referred to the same figure: Pha dam pa, Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas, Dam pa Sangs rgyas, Na gu, Nag gu, rGya gar Na gu, Dam pa rGya gar, Dam pa Nag chung, Dam pa rGya gar Nag chung, A tsa ra Nag po. In the earliest sources, when he is not addressed simply as Dam pa (especially in texts recording words spoken in his presence), he is most likely to be called Dam pa rGya gar, meaning Venerable India[n].

dence about Padampa that we have available to us today in published form. The manuscript originally had four volumes, even if they were published in five.³

I have long had the idea to do a cultural history of Padampa Sangyé (d. 1105 or 1117) along lines similar to those drawn by Jan Assmann in his book *Moses the Egyptian*. It is not so much about finding the ‘true’ biography of a person as it is about the culture that made use of—created or recreated—that biography for its own often quite valid purposes, or at least for understandable purposes. One could also understand this as the afterlife that anyway has to enter into the writing of any biography of a historic figure. After all, the cultural afterlife may help determine why biographies continue to be written and read, and then supplied to us as our textual evidence. What was the person’s legacy, what effects did they leave behind in the broader culture? If we can answer this question, it is surely an important part of their biography. Ironically, it can help us see the person better by keeping him or her in less sharp focus. Indeed, a biography that ends in death cannot be a complete biography. We have to allow ourselves to imagine Padampa living on until this very moment, and imagine ourselves as implicated in some kind of cultural process that goes on producing images of him (so to speak). With this sort of approach we can seriously entertain Padampa’s ‘authorship’ of works that he very possibly or even very likely had no role in authoring. It seems too simple to label these texts *pseudepigrapha* and then simply reject and ignore them, when a more interesting and productive question may be: To what degree is the attribution of these texts to his authorship appropriate? Is there something about the ways people lead their lives that effectively select which works or sorts of works will be attributed to them in their afterlife?

2 Four Divination Texts

So to get to the business at hand, here is a list of the types of Padampa-attributed divination texts that have been located so far:

3 My own restoration (justified elsewhere) of what the partially illegible title must have once said is *Dam chos snying po zhi byed las / brgyud pa phyi ma'i snyan brgyud zab khyad ma*. From now on this collection will be called *Zhijé Collection*. For the published version, see *The Tradition of Pha Dampa Sangyas: A Treasured Collection of His Teachings Transmitted by T[h]ug[s] sras Kun dga'*, Kunsang Tobgey (Thimphu 1979), in five volumes. The texts have been made freely available online, together with a detailed table of contents, at Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center website, although once there it is necessary to search for the artificially made and inaccurate title *Zhi byed snga bar phyi gsum gyi skor*, or follow this link: <http://www.tbrc.org/#:rid=W23911>.

1. Five Finger Divination—*mdzub mo lnga'i mo*
2. Arrow Divination—*mda' mo*
3. Stone Divination—*rdo mo*
4. Rosary Divination—*'phreng mo*

All four of these may be found within a set of eighteen Tibetan divination practices listed in an article by Jiangbian Jiacao.⁴ So they may be regarded as typical for Tibetan culture, in a general way.

2.1 *Five Finger Divination*

I do have one text for Padampa's Five Finger Divination. I have little to say about it right now, just to say that there *is* one. It involves correspondences between the fingers and the Chinese-style elements of water, iron, earth, fire and wood.⁵

2.2 *Arrow Divination*

The only source I know about for the Arrow Divination text attributed to Padampa has an interesting history of its own.⁶ It was a gift, in the eighteenth century, from the Empress of Russia Catherine the Second to the court of the Duchy of Württemberg in Stuttgart.⁷ Prior to its arrival in St. Petersburg it is

4 These correspond to nos. 4, 7, 10 and 14 in the list given in Jiangbian Jiacao, "An Investigation", 405–406: 1. String Divination, 2. Bootlace Divination, 3. Bird Divination, 4. Rosary Divination, 5. Tsampa Ball Divination, 6. Shoulder Blade Divination, 7. Pebble Divination, 8. Grain Divination, 9. Drum Divination, 10. Finger Divination, 11. Song Divination, 12. Dream Divination, 13. Oracle Divination, 14. Arrow Divination, 15. Dice Divination, 16. Mirror Divination, 17. Sling Divination, and 18. 'Six Birds' Divination (*bya drug gi mo*). I don't mean to suggest that this list is an exhaustive one, just that it would seem to be rather representative of what divinations one might expect to encounter in Tibetan culture.

5 For the published version of this, see the bibliography under *mDzub mo lnga yi mo*.

6 Schlagintweit, "Verzeichnis der tibetischen Handschriften", 261–262: "Invocation of Nagpo Chenpo by Moving the Arrow." For some more interesting discussion of arrow divinations, and of staff divinations that may work along the similar lines, see Marco Polo, *Travels of Marco Polo*, vol. 2, page 243 (the discussion is by Yule or Cordier, and not by Marco Polo). As one may see here, the main idea of this sort of divination is that the two or more lengthy pieces of wood, after being released, will seem to move on their own in relation to each other and to the directions in space.

7 The text is contained in a booklet with an outer cover having a Guru Rinpoche mantra in place of a title, as well as the seal of the German library, the Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart, with the shelfmark "Cod. orient. fol. Nr. 9." Our particular text contained in place of a title the words *Dam pa Sangs rgyas la phyag 'tshal lo*, "Prostrations to Dampa Sangyé." The title appears on the next page: *Dam pa Sangs rgyas kyis mdzad pa'i mda' mo*, "Arrow Divination composed by Dampa Sangyé." The colophon title is: *Dam pa'i mda' mo thong ba gdon gsal mngon shes me long*. Of course "*thong ba gdon gsal*" must be read as *mthong ba don gsal*, and then the title can be translated, "Dampa's Arrow Divination: Mirror of Clairvoyance [that supplies] Clear Significance by [just] Seeing It".

likely to have been in some sort of Mongolian-inhabited region, and given the dates it may be that it was transported to Russia by Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811).⁸

The name of Dampa Sangyé is the first thing in this text, which is characterized by unusual spellings throughout. The divination is to be done using a white wool blanket (*rnam pu is snam bu*) as an altar cover on which a sinistrally turning *zungdrung* has been drawn with rice (*'brus* is to be read as *'bras bu*). The diviner visualizes herself as Dampa, dark brown in color and wearing a fur cloak. His right hand is displaying the possibilities, and there you imagine the decorated arrow and the mirror. There are preliminary practices of food, drink and smoke offerings. The actual practice involves placing “four” arrows (actually, only two arrows are used later on in the text where they are called the *god arrow* and the *ghost arrow*) with their notches together at the center of the altar cloth, with their points sticking into the hollow of the hand and then released. Comparing the behavior of the two arrows determines the reading. Does one fall while the other stands? Does one push the other down? Conclusions can also be drawn from the sounds the arrows make and whether they shake or not.

The text goes on and gives readings for nine folios, ending with a colophon that once again attributes this arrow divination text to Dam pa, meaning of course Padampa. There have been a few writings about Tibetan arrow divinations associated with the legendary epic hero Gesar.⁹ For now we will just notice this difference in attribution and go on to look at the next divination text.

2.3 *Stone Divination*

This very brief text I only know in one single version, in two modern publications entitled “Clairvoyance of the Stone Divination.”¹⁰ It “never actually says it is by Padampa, so one might wonder if we ought to count it as one.”¹¹

8 This was suggested by Emil Schlagintweit in his catalog of 1904 where he describes its contents quite briefly. After I wrote a brief blog about Padampa’s Rosary Divination, Rolf Kramer of Munich wrote to inform me that the Stuttgart texts traveled to Marburg and Munich in the 1960s, and probably had not been touched for the last fifty years. He also said that it was very likely the text is still situated in Stuttgart. He suggested I write to the library and request a copy, and I received a very prompt response.

9 Jiangbian Jiacao, “An Investigation,” as well as the brief treatment of this type as one of many by Chime Radha, “Tibet”, 14.

10 See the bibliography under *rDo mo'i mo'i mngon shes*.

11 However, this very type of stone divination, described in Bawden, “Some Mongolian Divinatory Practices”, 7, is ascribed as follows: “These [sic] originator of this process is said to be one Pa(a)damba”. (Surely Padampa, later on spelled “Padamba,” is the one intended

However, it does start with a homage to Padampa, and a request (to him, evidently) for the clear clairvoyance that comes from knowledge of Stone Divination.

The diviner imagines herself as Padampa (just as in the Arrow Divination text), then says, “Somebody bring a stone!” The bringing of the stone is analyzed in two ways, first by the direction from which the stone is brought. This is interpreted according to the spirits and fates that are associated with those directions, and this also determines the choice of rituals in favor of the indicated spirits. Secondly, the stone is examined for its color, and this again is interpreted along similar lines, including recommendations for acts of worship or ritual. Interpretations are provided for five simple colors and two combinations. A bare reference is made to round-shaped rocks that are guaranteed to result in wish fulfillment. Round and red stones would be regarded as yielding the most favorable results.

2.4 *Rosary Divination*

Rosary Divination is widely rumored to be the most commonly performed divination in Tibetan culture, and this makes sense since so many Tibetans constantly have them close at hand. The particular manuscript attributed to him is one with the title *Pha dam pa sangs rgyas kyi 'phrungs mo*, found in the university library of Leiden. A full transcription of this text has been provided online.¹²

We might notice the strange spelling *'phrungs mo* in the title, later on spelled *'phrengs mo*. Notice also *theg mar* in place of *thog mar* in the first line. This careless orthography is typical of many divination manuals I have seen, but I see it as a point in their favor if we are in fact wanting to learn about popular laypeople's practices back before there were automated spellcheckers. We just have to get used to it. To paraphrase the text, it says that you first say the Buddhist refuge, followed by a three-part mantra that is given. After that you blow on the rosary to 'mantraize' it, and imagine your right hand as Śāriputra, your left as Maudgalyāyana.

here, but he is credited with the origins of the practice, and not with the authorship of any particular text, it would seem.)

12 In an entry for the blog *Tibeto-logic* (tibeto-logic.blogspot.co) dated May 31, 2013, entitled “Phadampa's Rosary Divination”. The location details for the manuscript are these: “Leiden University Library, Collection Institute Kern, 2740/M 463”. One may notice the very brief but useful treatment of Rosary Divination in Namkhai Norbu, *Light of Kailash*, vol. 1, 203–204.

The continuation does not make complete sense to me, but here is a rough translation anyway:

[2r] Divide the rosary in two (not three) halves at some point, and stack the beads three by three. If the result is *one* on top of *one*, it means that xxxxx (something cut off [or punished?]) will continue?). It means that the dry mountain has water bursting out of it. It means that the dried up tree has leaves sprouting on it. It means that running away results in freedom. It means that an issueless woman bears a child. [2v] It means the poor man finds wealth.¹³

This certainly bears comparison with another divination manual. This other manual, attributed to Atiśa, has a little different title.¹⁴ It starts with the words *Phreng mo*, so you know it is a rosary divination. It has an homage to the Three Precious followed by 108 repetitions of the Maṇi Mantra. It then gives a brief history of the Rosary Divination emphasizing its Indian-ness. Once, it says, while Jowo Je was on his way to Tibet from India he received a prophetic utterance from Tārā, “Atiśa, when you travel in the dark continent of Tibet, you will need to orient the wicked Tibetans with no faith in ‘it’ toward higher perceptions, so I am granting this divination to you”.

The Atiśa Rosary Divination—

It is important to know [2r] how to count off in threes after dividing [the rosary] in two ... If *one* follows *one*: The matter is decided yet the merits are unclear. On the dry tree leaves grow. On the dry mountain water bursts forth. To the dry woman is born a child. The poor man finds wealth. The childless get children.

-
- 13 *'phrengs ba gsum du cad gsum dus rtsegs la// gcig thog du gcig byung na// thebs pa chad pa thung pa'i ngo// ri skam po la chu sdol pa'i ngo// shing skam po la lo 'dabs skyes pa'i ngos// bro nas thar pa'i ngo// rab chad ma la bu skyes pa'i ngo// [2v] dbul po la nor snyed pa'i ngo.*
- 14 It was filmed by Karma Phuntsho as part of the “Endangered Archives” project in Bhutan: Atiśa, *Phreng mo mngon shes gtod ma*. Another copy: Atiśa, *Sgrol mas jo bo rje la lung bstan pa'i phreng mo*, never exactly says that Atiśa composed it, just that it was ordained by Tārā upon his departure for Tibet. Another copy with a slightly different title is: Atiśa, *sGrol mas a ti shar lung bstan pa'i phreng mo*. There is yet another copy, untitled, with an *incipit* reading *rje btsun sgrol mas jo bo rje dpal ldan a ti sha la lung bstan pa'i phreng mo*. Clearly, the majority of known versions of this text attribute it to Atiśa rather than to Padampa. I learned *via* the internet that a text of this nature by Atiśa has been translated into French by one Lilian Too, with the title *L'Oracle des 21 Tara: Divination Mo transmise à Atisha par*

We can ignore the remainder for the time being since I believe it is enough to show the different beginnings of the Padampa and the Atiśa texts. It is extremely clear how much they have in common in their readings of the results, as you see in this sample. Indeed, we know of a third example attributed to yet another author that also has parallels in the prognostics section.¹⁵

3 Incidents of Divination Padampa Himself Performed

Now we will have a look at the few clear incidents of the teaching or practice of divination found in the *Zhijé Collection*. The physical manuscript, made in 1246 or so, I regard as providing the closest to contemporary evidence about Padampa that we have, although later manuscripts are just now emerging from Bhutan, and potentially much more important manuscripts are listed in the Drepung catalog and will likely be made available someday. In the meantime, I think we can make some provisional judgments that eventually may be tested further. In the *Zhijé Collection* I find only one incident of Padampa's clear and unambiguous practice of a divination.¹⁶ Although the *Zhijé History* neglects to mention it, we find him teaching a divination system to one of his followers in a newly available historical work of comparable age. Let's look at these two things briefly.

3.1 *The Sixty-Four Pebble Divination*

This is a fascinating topic even if I do not know much about it. That does not matter so much after all, since Alexander K. Smith has published some fine essays on the topic.¹⁷ It has been noticed a few times that Padampa had some

la déesse Tara, published in 2013. Long ago, Bawden, "Some Mongolian Divinatory Practices", 26–28, made some comments about an Atiśa Rosary Divination text in Mongolian language.

15 Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, *Phreng mo 'debs tshul*.

16 See Martin, "Ritual Indigenization", which concerns Padampa's employment of an indigenous Tibetan shamanic rite performed in order to determine the source of a woman disciple's severe ailments. This could count as an incident of divination, but it is never clarified by what particular method the divination is supposed to be effected, or at least it remains unclear to me.

17 Smith, "Remarks concerning the Methodology", and Smith, "Prognostic Structure". The latter publication is especially significant for us since it supplies the title of a divination text attributed to 'Brug lha and translates an account of how 'Brug lha passed the same divination practices to both Padampa (here called Dam pa rGya gar) and to A da lHa sras. The latter was responsible for the Bon transmission. It is interesting that, just like the Chinese classic text on yarrow-stalk divination, the I Ching, and just like some four-sided Dice Div-

contacts with the Bonpo Tertön by the name of Druglha ('Brug lha), and that he even received teachings from him about pebble divination. Their contact is known and recorded in a Bon pebble divination manual that was used by Namkhai Norbu.¹⁸ In the *Zhijé* literature itself, we find that this teaching was only passed on and preserved in the Intermediate Transmission, and not in the Later Transmission period meaning the teachings given at Tingri.¹⁹ So we should not expect them to be contained in the *Zhijé Collection*, and indeed they cannot be found there.

Some Bhutanese manuscripts have surfaced recently, but I have not yet had a chance to study them closely. One of them belongs precisely to the Intermediate Transmission lineage that is supposed to include these divinatory teachings.²⁰ Although no separately titled divination manuals have been located therein, we do find some significant references to the divination teachings.

It would be great to learn about a pebble divination text explicitly attributed to the authorship of Padampa, but so far I am not aware of one. The stone

inations known to both Tibetans and Turks (in the *Irak Bitig*), Padampa's Pebble Divination is known to have 64 (one text says 60) possible results. See Dotson, "Call of the Cuckoo," Yakovlev, "Divination", and especially Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*, 112–118. Strickmann argued that such systems are quite ancient in India, yet possibly of Greek origin. The Turkic divination system *kumalak* as described by Yakovlev very closely resembles Tibetan pebble divination, and this similarity merits serious investigation.

- 18 Namkhai, *Drung Deu and Bon*, 25. I should point out, since it could create difficulties, that in the translated account, 'Brug lha is called "Jedrug," and Padampa is called "Pha Tampa". Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 466–470, has an early discussion of different types of pebble divination. There is a mention of rMa receiving the 'Sixty-Arrangement Pebble Guidance' (*bkod pa drug cu'i rde'u khrid*) in Khams smyon's biography of Padampa, at page 168 (and notice mention of Khro tshang 'Brug lha at pages 38 and 83, in both cases in the form "*bon po Khra tshang 'Brug lha*"). This same source is translated in Molk, *Lion of Siddhas*, 29–174, with relevant pages here being 57 and 139, where "Bönpo Falcon Nest Dragon Deva" translates *bon po Khra tshang 'Brug lha*. The most pertinent source is *Zhijé History* by Zhig po Rin chen shes rab (1171–1245), as contained in the *Zhijé Collection*, vol. 4, 324–432, at page 343. In dGe ye's 1474 history, page 63 (folio 42 *recto*), we note the curious difference that here Khra tshang 'Brug lha is given teachings by Padampa rather than the other way around. John Bellezza's *Antiquities of Northern Tibet*, 133, tells of a local oral tradition in Byang thang explaining the origins of two *chortens* that the two of them built there.
- 19 Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 873, ought to be copying from the just-mentioned *Zhijé History*, but when we look there at what ought to be the corresponding passage what we find (at *Zhijé Collection*, vol. 4, page 346) is quite laconic and without any mention of the Pebble Divination. Indeed, when Khra tshang 'Brug bla is mentioned a few pages earlier (page 343) there is also no mention of any divination teaching.
- 20 This text with the front title *brGyud pa bar pa'i lo rgyus kyi rim pa* was filmed by the British Library Endangered Archives project of Karma Phuntsho in Bhutan, "Dramatse Thorbu 041".

divination text we spoke of before is obviously not at all the same kind of divination, as it works along very different lines. Observe that here Padampa is very much an Indian, but at the same time overtly receiving an indigenously Tibetan tradition and then passing it on to a Tibetan (to be preserved for posterity *via* the rMa lineage of the Intermediate Tradition of Zhijé). This makes much sense in a situation of cultural exchange that better explains what was happening in early Zhijé than does the usual picture of unidirectional India-to-Tibet traffic.

3.2 *The Bamboo and Feather Divination Incident*

Another time Dampa said, “Inhabitants of Langkhor! Gather together! Because there is a big desire for it, we need to do a divination.”

When everyone had gathered there, they seated a girl on a piece of white felt. The Jetsün took a bamboo in his right hand, and in his left hand a feather. Then he pronounced these words, “Oh lord of the sky! Lord of the earth! This sickness has plagued us enough, and now it is too much! We may die! Bring down the divination, bring it down!”

The girl made her selection and [someone] said, “Be on guard not to let the disease spirit enter in. It is ready to overcome both the doctor and the medicine. If not vanquished now, there will be no other chance. If not vanquished, it is liable to bring death again and again. Be strong and act quickly!”²¹

4 Conclusions

I have to say that for myself this has always been a Padampa-centric enterprise. The desire to know more about *him* drives my interest in divination, more than the other way around. So perhaps inevitably I think about all the types of literature, and not only the divination manuals, that have been attributed to him over the centuries. There are two areas besides divination where we may well doubt authorship attributions to Padampa, and I have written about them elsewhere. These are: Tingrian Couplets and medicine texts.²² The Tin-

21 I located a second exemplar and used it for comparison: Drametse Thorbu no. 105, section PHA, *Dam pa'i yon tan gyi zhus lan shing lo rgyas pa*, complete in 36 folios, with the relevant passage at folios 20–21. For an alternative English translation, see Molk, *Lion of the Siddhas*, 249.

22 The Tingrian Couplets were dealt with in a paper given at the Vancouver meeting of the IATS in 2010. The medicine text was subject of a Tibeto-logic blog entry entitled “The Mag-

grian Couplets are by far Padampa's most famous works today. It is hardly even known that the original collections of such couplets are in the *Zhijé Collection*, where twelve of them are from the mouth of Padampa at the time of his death, with another set of 118 spoken by his disciple Kunga at the time of *his* death. If we add these together to make 130 couplets, we find that the collections that circulate today have at most 25%, but more likely only 5 to 10 percent of their couplets in common with those in the *Zhijé Collection*. The collections with the least number of authenticable verses are the ones that are the most commonly reproduced.

In the case of the medicine text, only recently appearing for the first time in a modern published format, we may say that the *Zhijé Collection* evinces hardly any interest in medicine, except in the later-added parts, and then in only one text.²³ What we have is a late fourteenth-century excavated text full of magical remedies for a long list of physical ailments.²⁴ Apart from the sources just mentioned, I have only learned recently of a medical text belonging to the rMa lineage of the "Middle Transmission" (*bar brgyud*) of the Zhijé, and await more details.²⁵ This rMa lineage is the very same as the one involved with the pebble divination we mentioned before.

The simple conclusion is that while at least four divination texts, each with its distinct system of divination, are attributed to Padampa, these practices do not in fact correspond to those he is known to have performed in the earliest sources we have. In the case of one of the four, the Rosary Divination, we have a more frequently attested alternative attribution to Atiśa. This raises doubts about not only this, but the other divination texts attributed to Padampa as well. My position at the moment is that all these practices are local Tibetan popular practices, actually authored by no one in particular, that at some point required ascription to Indian figures such as Padampa and Atiśa. Padampa

ical Medical Bag Texts", dated February 12, 2011. The Copenhagen manuscript is listed in Buescher and Tarab, *Catalogue*, vol. 1, 474 (no. 983 or alternatively PP 44). Here we might also mention a tract against beer drinking.

23 This text with significant medical content are not attributed to Padampa, but to a later member of his lineage, after all, being teachings of Pa tshab written down by his disciple rTen ne late in the twelfth century; see *Zhijé Collection*, vol. 4, 213–215, 254–257, 287–291.

24 It was found in around 1370 in a place in Kham known as Klong thang sGrol ma by an obscure *tertön* named Khams ston Shes rab dpal. Manuscripts exist in Copenhagen and in my own personal library, while the first modern publication is this one: *rTen 'brel gyi rtags spyad mkhyud dpyad dkar nag khra gsum rnams*, 1–53 (but note that the *tertön* is nowhere identified in this publication).

25 This is a five-folio manuscript recently reproduced as part of a set of medical manuscripts. Its specific subject would seem to be head injuries, although this is not yet very sure.

might be deemed a more likely choice for such ascriptions than Atiśa, precisely because of his known association with yet another divination practice, the Sixty Pebble Divination.²⁶

I suggest that what we are seeing with these authorial ascriptions may be analogous to what is known in quote ascription studies as “Churchillian Drift.” In case you want to repeat a famous quote, do not know who is actually being quoted and if it sounds like something an astute politician might say, ascribe it to Churchill. If they are clever words of earthy wisdom in daily life, attach the name Confucius.²⁷

Cultural figures live on and on. Although it may *appear* ironic or even somewhat contradictory, we have to take *some kind* of a cultural historical approach, finding out what the culture was doing with its cultural heroes, if we want to better approach the historical realities of that person’s life. By not separating the two concerns, for the time being, we may at some future point be better enabled to separate the two concerns. History brings back to mind prior acts of memory, much in the way Jan Assmann described his own way of pursuing history he calls “mnemohistory.”²⁸

Padampa was one of those towering figures whose spirit went on to haunt people in varied apparitions through Tibet’s history, as he continues to do today, only now with an audience scattered throughout the world. It may very well be that awarding ascriptions of authorship to him is one of the ways that image was recovered, reclaimed and reconstituted. My position is: It is not as if these ascriptions came from nothing. Things were there from the very beginning that could have initiated them and later on gotten recovered in order to justify them (‘rationalization in hindsight’, I would like to call it). Many historians, just like myself, see the need to dig back into the earliest levels of documentation and

26 I suppose Atiśa would be a suitable choice primarily because of the prophecy he received from Tārā about his future life in Tibet, and not necessarily because he was directly involved in divination practice.

27 A real example: Confucius said, “Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” This is entirely true, particularly for those who have chosen Tibetology as a way of life, but its attribution to Confucius is false. For more on Churchillian Drift, a coinage of the prominent gnomologist Nigel Rees, an inhabitant of the British Isles as you might have guessed, see McKean, “Wise Words of Maya Angelou”. The *drift* of Churchillian Drift is always from the less toward the more famous person. North Americans might prefer to call it Emersonian Drift, as in “Life is a journey, not a destination”, usually attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, although nothing like it appears anywhere in his collected works.

28 Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, especially the introductory chapter. *Nota bene*: Assmann does not present mnemohistory as the only way to do history, but recommends it as one of a spectrum of alternative (and perhaps complementary) approaches.

bring forgotten things to mind. In doing this, we take a vital part in the very same cultural memory processes we are supposed to investigate. We ought to take responsibility for what we do in our quests for the truths of the matters, try to perform our tasks well, have faith, and hope the results will be good ones even if we cannot know what they will be, concealed as they are in a future largely unforeseeable.

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