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**Notes on the Pre-existences of the First Khalkha Jetsundampa
Zanabazar according to His Biography Written in the Horizontal
Square Script**

Abstract

The article deals with previous incarnations (pre-existences) of the first Khalkha Jetsundampa Zanabazar (1635–1723) called Öndör Gegeen according to the biography written in the Horizontal Square Script invented by him around 1686. Main information about the manuscript and its peculiarities is provided as well as comparison of several lists of previous incarnations of the Jetsundampas.

Keywords: Mongolian Buddhist incarnations, Jetsundampa, Zanabazar, Horizontal Square Script

Life of the first Khalkha Jetsundampa Zanabazar (1635–1723) or Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, known as Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar, the eminent Buddhist master, artist and Khalkha leader¹ was described in various biographies. They were written in Tibetan language either during his lifetime, such as a biography written in 1702 by his disciple, Khalkha Zaya Pandita Luvsanprinlei (Blo bzang 'phrin las, 1642–1715)² or many years

¹ There are numerous publications about this important figure, both in Mongolian and other languages.

² It is included in the (*Sha kya'i btsun pa blo bzang 'phrin las kyi zab pa dang rgya che ba'i dam pa'i chos kyi thob yig gsal ba'i me long*, i.e. “Clear Mirror”, Vol. IV (*nga*), standard Peking xylograph, folios 62v6-77v2 (reproduced by Lokesh Chandra 1982, pp. 124–154. There exists a separate bilingual, Tibeto-Mongolian version entitled: *Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i 'khrungs rabs bco lnga'i rnam thar*. It is included in Lokesh Chandra 1982, pp. 411–549.

later.³ Besides biographies written in Tibetan there were also texts composed in Mongolian. The best known is the biography *Öndör gegen-ü namtar*, examined and published with English translation by Charles Bawden (Bawden 1961).⁴ All these biographies have been studied by scholars, however, they still pose many questions and require in-depth comparative analysis.

Moreover, one of Zanabazar's biographies deserves special attention. It is a short text entitled: *Kö-tög-tö rje-btsin dam-pa bla-mai ča-dig ro-ši-ba*⁵ written in the Horizontal Square Script, which was invented by Zanabazar circa 1686 (Byambaa 2005, p. 9). The biography was discovered by Byambaa Ragchaa while collecting texts written in the Horizontal Square Script among materials presented to him by S. Agvanlodoi (1909–1992). No details about the text's author, composition or transmission of this particular manuscript are known. It seems to be the only extant copy of the text (Byambaa 2005, p. 65).

This biography belongs to a special genre of Tibetan Buddhist writings, namely to accounts of previous incarnations (pre-existences) of a given master. Usually they are based on a prayer to the master called *gsol 'debs*. It is a kind of a reverential petition or prayer which includes a list of previous incarnations and may be combined with a biography of the master, as it is for example the case with the text about Padmasambhava: *gSol 'debs rnam thar dri med ma* by Nyang ral nyi ma'i 'od zer.⁶

In the case of the first Jetsundampa we can find *gsol 'debs* prayer of his previous incarnation, i.e. Tāranātha Kun dga' snying po (1575–1634) written in Tibetan language and entitled: *rJe btsun Tāranātha'i 'khrungs rabs gsol 'debs smon lam dang bcas pa* included in the "Collected Works" (*gsung 'bum*) of Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar.⁷ Comparison of this *gsol 'debs* prayer with the text of the biography written in the Horizontal Square Script revealed that the two texts were quite similar, but not identical. More information about the comparison will follow.

The text under examination written in the Square Script includes in its title the word *čadiy* or *čadig*, which is a Mongolian word based on the Sanskrit term *jātaka*, which denotes "story of a former incarnation of the Buddha or a Buddhist saint" (Lessing 156a). It was used in Mongolian language to represent life-stories of the Buddha or eminent Buddhists, regarded as enlightened beings. With passing of the time it also started to denote 'biography' or 'life-story' of any being.

³ Byambaa 2006, Bareja-Starzyńska 2009.

⁴ Although some of the manuscripts described by Bawden do not bear the title. See also editions by Dashbadrakh 1995, Khürelbayatur 2009, papers by Futaki 2011, Bareja-Starzyńska 2010, 2011.

⁵ Facsimile of the manuscript together with transliteration, study and Modern Mongolian Khalkha translation are published in Byambaa 2005, pp. 65–83. However, the book is not easily available and since information about this biography in English is not widespread the authors have decided to write the present paper focusing on the subject of Zanabazar's pre-existences and to include new details.

⁶ Zaya Pandita in his "Clear Mirror" also included Jetsundampa's *gsol 'debs* (f. 30a) before presenting his biography (f. 63a), see Lokesh Chandra 1982.

⁷ Byambaa 2006, p. 7, No 00006. In the Uрга edition entitled: *rJe nyid kyi gsang ba'i rnam thar tshigs bcad sngon tshe bde gshegs ma pañchen chos rgyan gyis mdzad pa'i rnam thar gsol 'debs dang bcas*.

Hence, it is not the same etymologically as the Tibetan term *rnam thar*, which means ‘exemplary liberation’ or ‘perfect life-story serving as a model for liberation’ from the cycling existence. However, both Mongolian *čadig* and Tibetan *rnam thar* served as terms to denote ‘biography’ or better yet ‘hagiography’ written from the point of view of Buddhists. Therefore, while translating this word into English, terms such as ‘biography’, ‘hagiography’ or ‘life-story’ can be used interchangeably to denote the literary genre which it represents.

The title *Kö-tög-tö rje-btsin dam-pa bla-mai ča-dig ro-ši-ba* consists of Mongolian and Tibetan words: *kö-tög-tö* for Classical Mongolian *qutuγtu*, *rje-btsin dam-pa bla-mai* should be rendered as *rje btsun dam pa bla ma’i* in Classical Tibetan. The word *ro-ši-ba* written in the Square Script stands for Class. Mong. *orošiba* and can be translated as ‘is presented’. Therefore the whole title, which is given in the hybrid Mongolian-Tibetan, can be translated into English as: “The Biography of the Holy Jetsundampa(s)”. Such hybrid nature of writing is characteristic for the whole manuscript which is written in the Classical Mongolian language, however, includes many Tibetan words, mainly names and titles.

***Kö-tög-tö rje-btsin dam-pa bla-mai ča-dig ro-ši-ba* as a monument of the Horizontal Square Script**

The Horizontal Square Script was invented in order to facilitate writing in at least three languages: Mongolian, Tibetan and Sanskrit.⁸ It is necessary to explain here that the Horizontal Square Script is a syllabical script which is more fitting to write down the Tibetan and Sanskrit languages since they too employ syllabical scripts, than to write in Mongolian. The 17th century Mongolian language was written in the Classical Mongolian script based on the Arameic script and emphasizing front and back vowels opposition. The Classical Mongolian language did not reflect the actual pronunciation of its users but only conventional orthography. Therefore, while writing Mongolian words in a different script, such as the Horizontal Square Script, a scribe could choose between conventional orthography of Classical Mongolian and the actual pronunciation reflecting a particular Mongolian dialect.

Also, the Horizontal Square Script uses at times a different set of signs for the three languages: Tibetan, Sanskrit and Mongolian. The same sign may be employed to denote different sounds depending on the language it represents, for example: *ga* in Mongolian, but *ka* in Tibetan and in Sanskrit; *da* in Mongolian, *ta* in Tibetan and in Sanskrit, while *ša* in Mongolian and in Tibetan (*sha*), but *śa* in Sanskrit. It was noted that in that particular manuscript a scribe used a dot under the sign to mark that the consonant should not be vocalized.

⁸ Detailed study of the Horizontal Square Script was presented in Byambaa 1997 and in the improved and enlarged second edition: 2005. See also Shagdarsüren 1981.

While examining this particular manuscript of Jetsundampa's biography (*Kö-tög-tö rje-btsin dam-pa-bla-mai ča-dig ro-ši-ba*) one is struck by the flexibility of using letter signs by the scribe. Mongolian words are written with the use of signs designed for both Mongolian and Tibetan. This leads to ambiguous readings of words, which hardly represent the standard Classical Mongolian orthography. On the other hand the use of the syllabical script for copying Mongolian text provides many interesting phonological data, especially when it reflects the authentic pronunciation. For example, quite many words are written with long vowels, such as *a-ri-γūn* ('clear', 'clean'), Class. Mong. *ariγun*, Modern Khalkha *ariun* or *ko-gō-son* ('empty'), Class. Mong. *qoyosun*, Modern Khalkha *khooson*. The forms with long vowels indicate probably the actual pronunciation and though γ/g was not always dropped, there are changes in pronunciation which may lead to omission of γ/g . There are many other examples very interesting from the point of view of linguistics. However, in the case of the examined manuscript it is very hard to draw definite conclusions regarding Mongolian phonology which it represents. The same word is written in two or even more different ways, for example: Tibet or Tibetan are written as: *to-bed*, *tö-ped*, *tü-bed*, *te-büüd*, *te-bed*, *tö-bod* etc.⁹ Therefore, it is also difficult to determine the date of the composition of the text and this particular manuscript on the basis of grammatical forms and phonological peculiarities which it presents.

It is possible to conclude at this phase of the research that the scribe was probably not very well acquainted with Mongolian orthography and probably did not spend much time reflecting on the way of writing and choosing the adequate letter signs. He knew Tibetan language well since the Tibetan words are usually written with more care and with less mistakes. It seems quite probable that he was a Mongolian monk who was well versed in Tibetan and who did not know Classical Mongolian script well, or perhaps at all. The Horizontal Square Script does not require distinguishing between front and back vowels and consonants connected with them as in the case in the Classical Mongolian in which back vowels require certain consonants (such as q and γ) and should not be written with others (g etc.). Therefore, we may assume that the scribe chose freely between several signs of the Horizontal Square Script, even while writing the same words. Nevertheless, we may observe the frequent use of long vowels which may point to colloquial pronunciation of that time, for example: *jū-kā* (f. 2b1), Class. Mong. *jaγyūqu*, Modern Khalkha *zuukh*. The form used in the text is closer to the Khalkha form.¹⁰ It is also possible to propose here an improvement in exposition of the Horizontal Square Script for writing in Mongolian, such as the transcription of the first sign of the syllabical table (alphabet) not only as k and g , but also q and γ , see *qutuγtu*.

⁹ Byambaa 2005 pp. 68–69 discusses peculiarities of the use of the script in the manuscript and provides examples. See also Shagdarsüren 1981.

¹⁰ The use of the final long vowel \bar{a} here is not clear, but it may serve to indicate the case ending. Byambaa (2005, p. 74) translates it in the Instrumental case as *zuuhaar* – 'in order to bite'.

Pre-existences of the First Jetsundampa Öndör Gegen Zanabazar

According to the biography in the Horizontal Square Script the list of pre-existences is as follows:

1. Ma-ši tein a-ri-gūn o-yo-tu = Shin tu blo gros rgyal mtshan (Suviśuddhamati)
2. maṅ-lai Ba-da-raṅ-gūi = 'Bar ba'i gtso bo
3. ye-ke ši-di-tü Ka-la-ca-ra-ya = grub chen Nag po spyod pa (Mahāsiddha Kṛṣṇācārya)
4. ye-ke Rat-na = Ratna chen po
5. Dar-ma-ba-da-ra = Rong zom chos bzang (Dharmabhadra)
6. Dar-ma-dbang-phyugs = Dar ma dbang chug
7. Ge-rel-cog-tu = 'Od zer dpal
8. Lō da-go-to do-ja¹¹ = 'Brug sgra rgyal mtshan
9. Bor-gaṅ ye-ke buṣ-tü = Sang rgyas ras chen
10. Saṅ-gā-ba-dar = Sanghabhadra
11. Jam-yaṅ čor-je = 'Jam dbyangs chos rje
12. Coi-gyi ṅin-byed = Chos kyi nyin byed
13. Güṅ-ge-sgrol-čog = Kun dga' grol mchog
14. Ga'a-byed-sa-sgyong = Dga' byed sa skyong
15. Gün-ga's ṅiṅ-bo-gra-šes-rgyal-čan = Kun dga' snying po bkra shis rgyal mtshan (Tāranātha)

Here fifteen names of incarnations from the time of the Buddha until Tāranātha are provided. Therefore, Zanabazar appears as the sixteenth incarnation.

According to the *gsol 'debs* of Tāranātha which is included in the "Collected Works" (*gsung 'bum*) of Zanabazar under the title: *rJe btsun Tāranātha'i 'khrungs rabs gsol 'debs smon lam dang bcas pa* the list of previous incarnations is as follows:

1. Blo gros shin tu mnam dag
2. 'Bar ba'i gtso bo
3. sPyod pa'i rdo rje
4. Ra tna chen po
5. Rong zom chos bzang
6. Dar ma dbang phyug
7. 'Od zer dpal
8. 'Brug sgra rgyal mtshan
9. Sangs rgyas ras chen
10. Sang gha bha dra
11. 'Jam dbyangs chos rje
12. Chos rje nyin byed
13. 'Jam mgon bla ma

¹¹ Byambaa 2005, p. 75 renders this name in Modern Khalkha as Luu duut duaz and identifies him with the Tibetan name 'Brug sgra rgyal mtshan.

14. dGa' byed sa skyong
 15. rJe btsun rdo rje 'dzin (i.e. Tāranātha)

The list consists similarly of fifteen incarnations. And similarly Zanabazar would be the sixteenth embodiment. The main difference is in position 13, which is 'Jam mgon bla ma according to the *gsol 'debs* and Kun dga' grol mchog according to the biography in the Horizontal Square Script. More about this will be explained further in this work.

If we assume that the *gsol 'debs* was written by Zanabazar himself and on that basis included into his "Collected Works" (*gsung 'bum*),¹² we may regard this version of the list as the most genuine.

Another list of the Khalkha Jetsundampa's previous incarnations was composed by the eminent Tibetan scholar Londol Lama (Klong rdol bla ma, 1719–1794):

1. Gyad stobs chen (*dang po = 1*) – not mentioned in other cited sources
2. Blo gros shin tu rnam dag (*gnyis pa = 2*)
3. 'Bar ba'i gco bo (*gsum pa = 3*)
4. Mi bskyod rdo rje (*bzhi pa = 4*) – not mentioned in other cited sources
5. Ratna chen po (*lnga pa = 5*)
6. Rong zom chos bzang (*drug pa = 6*)
7. Sangs rgyas ras chen (*bdun pa = 7*)
8. 'Od zer dpal (*brgyad pa = 8*)
9. 'Brug sgra rgyan (*dgu pa = 9*)
10. (Not mentioned. According to other sources should be Dar ma dbang phyug)
11. Sangga bhadra (*bcu gcig pa = 11*)
12. 'Jam dbyangs chen po rje bkra shis (*bcu gnyis pa = 12*)
13. Nyin byed bzang po (*bcu gsum pa = 13*)
14. Kun dga' grol mchog (*bcu bzhi pa = 14*)
15. dGa' byed sa skyong (*bco lnga pa = 15*)
16. Jo nang ta ra na tha'am Kun dga' snying po (*bcu drug pa = 16*)
17. Khal kha rje btsun dam pa Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (*bcu bdun pa = 17*)

Zanabazar was the seventeenth incarnation according to this list. There are evident omissions and repetitions on it. The nature of mistakes was discussed by G. Somlai (1988, pp. 449–451). Since names are given together with ordinal numerals it is easy to observe that number ten was omitted. Somlai concluded also that "the lineage given by Klong rdol contains two mistakes. First he left the name of 'Bab/Bha rom pa Dar ma dbang phyug. Second that he (or his copyist) wanted to remedy this mistake and having forgotten the name of 'Bab/Bha rom pa Dar ma dbang phyug, took that of Sangs rgyas ras chen in its place". However, even G. Somlai's explanations require further corrections. Number one, Gyad stobs chen was not mentioned in other sources. His inclusion made Blo gros shin tu rnam dag appear as the second incarnation instead of being the first on the list

¹² Byambaa 2004, p. 7 quotes the colophon, in which his name is given: Blo bzang bstan ba'i rgyal mtshan rang byung gi ming Janana bajra.

in other sources. Number four, Mi (b)skyod rdo rje, may possibly (?) refer to the eighth Karmapa (1507–1554) and was not listed in other sources. The name might have been included in Londol Lama's list to confirm connection of the Jetsundampa lineage with the Karma Kagyu tradition. Certainly the Londol Lama's list requires a separate study.

We may propose a working hypothesis that with passing of the time the list of previous incarnations of Öndör Gegen was changed due to different reasons: scribal mistakes and/or problems connected with Zanabazar's affiliation. Since he was recognized as the reincarnation of a Jonangpa master, Tāranātha, he might have served as an important link in the Jonangpa transmission. However, as it was explained elsewhere,¹³ there are no traces of his activity as a Jonangpa lineage holder. All information that is at our disposal points to his Gelugpa education and affiliation.

Lists of the First Jetsundampa's previous incarnations are included also in other writings, such as for example a composition entitled *Boyda jibčundamba-yin angqan töröl-ün ner-e orusibai*. A manuscript of this text is preserved in the Central State (Now National) Library of Ulan Bator.¹⁴

Here (pp. 1–3), the list of Jetsundampa's previous incarnations is as follows:

1. Lodoisintunamday = Blo gros shin tu rnam dag
2. Bandida Barbajobo = Pandita 'Bar ba'i gtso bo
3. Nayabuujobda = Nag po spyod pa
4. Töbcen Ratnaebegüle = Ratna chen po
5. Rongsongcoisang = Rong zom chos bzang
6. Daramvangcuγ = Dar ma dbang phyug
7. Naljorba Uunserbil = 'Od zer dpal
8. Bürüydajamjin = 'Brug sgra rgyal mtshan
9. Sangnairanijin = Sangs rgyas ras chen
10. Sangyhadari = Sanghabhadra
11. Tasibaldan = Bkra shis dpal ldan
12. Coyijininjid = Chos kyi nyin byed
13. Gungyadolchog = Kun dga' grol mchog
14. Gajidsajung = Dga' byed sa skyong
15. Jibcuntaranatan = rJe btsun Tāranātha

This list is almost identical with the list written in the Horizontal Square Script.

In the biography of Zanabazar written by his disciple Zaya Pandita during the former's lifetime in 1702 Jetsundampa's *gsol 'debs* entitled as *rJe btsun blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i 'khrungs rabs gsol 'debs* precedes the actual biography of Zanabazar.¹⁵ Zaya Pandita starts his list of pre-existences with 'Bar ba'i gtso bo and

¹³ Bareja-Starzyńska 2010b.

¹⁴ Under call no. 5308/96 (on the cover no 6324). The manuscript occupies 80 pages. There are additional pages emended to the main text. Zanabazar's biography is described on pages 4–26, but occasionally there is also information about him elsewhere in the text (for example on p. 30).

¹⁵ See Byambaa 2005, p. 67. It starts with folio 30r6 of the IV vol. of Zaya Pandita's "Clear Mirror". It can be edited separately, see for example its reprint in Byambaa 2004b.

therefore concludes with Zanabazar as the fifteenth reincarnation. This agrees with the title of the biography by Zaya Pandita: *bco lnga pa rje btsun* [+ *blo bzang*] [414-1] *bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i thung mong ma yin pa'i rnam thar pa*.¹⁶

Also a list of the Jetsundampas' previous incarnations appears in the biography written in Tibetan in 1847 by Ngag dbang blo bzang don grub.¹⁷

This one is as follows (f. 10a3-12b1):

1. Blo gros shin tu rnam dag
2. 'Bar ba'i gtso bo
3. Grub chen Nag po spyod pa
4. Ratna chen po
5. Rong zom chos bzang
6. Dar ma dbang chug
7. 'Od zer dpal
8. 'Brug sgra rgyal mtshan
9. Sang rgyas ras chen
10. Sangha bha dra
11. 'Jam dbyangs chos rje
12. Chos kyi nyin byed
13. Kun dga' grol mchog
14. Dga' byed sa skyong
15. Tāranātha

According to Byambaa Ragchaa's study the relevant fragment concerning previous incarnations is closest to the biography in the Horizontal Square Script (Byambaa 2005 p. 67).

Having compared the list presented in *gsol 'debs* (known from Zanabazar's "Collected Works") with lists of previous incarnations of Zanabazar in the above mentioned texts, excluding Londol Lama's list which differs at several points, it is clear that the difference concerns mainly one name in the position 13. All sources except *gsol 'debs* list there Kun dga' grol mchog (1507–1566), an important master in the transmission of the Kālacakra initiation according to the Jonangpa tradition.¹⁸ His name was mentioned in Tāranātha's own writings, namely: *dPal ldan shangs pa'i chos skor gyi 'byung khungs yid kyi mun sel*.¹⁹

As it was stated above, in the biography written in the Horizontal Square Script the name is given as Kun dga' grol mchog, but in Tāranātha's *gsol 'debs* by the first Jetsundampa it is written as 'Jam mgon bla ma, which may be a polite address form which can be used when referring to lamas belonging to different traditions.²⁰ It is important to

¹⁶ Lokesh Chandra 1982, pp. 413–414.

¹⁷ Byambaa 2004b, f. 10a3-12b1.

¹⁸ See Sheehy 2009.

¹⁹ Vol. 34, pp. 194–285 of his Collected Works, dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe mying zhib 'jug khang edition, and other sources. [TSD] <http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/Jetsun-Kunga-Drolchog>.

²⁰ It is most often used while referring to the Sa skya hierarchs or to Tsongkhapa, the most important master of the Gelugpa tradition, see Nitartha. However, it was also used as an address to Tāranātha, see TBRC, *Jo nang*

recall that the recognition of the Jonangpa master Tāranātha's incarnation in the person of a Khalkha Mongolian khan's son seems to be a very intriguing solution. More detailed explanations were presented in Stearns 1999, pp. 71–72 and Bareja-Starzyńska 2010b, pp. 246–247. Here we may speculate that perhaps it was not proper for Zanabazar to mention Kun dga' grol mchog's name in *gsol 'debs* composed by him at the time of Jonangpa's persecutions by Gelugpa, even if he was recognized as Tāranātha's incarnation. It was stressed before (Bareja-Starzyńska 2010b) that Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar followed closely Gelugpa's teachings. And therefore, instead of the name of the Jonangpa incarnation, name of another master was given.²¹

Yet another difference is that Zaya Pandita started his list from the actual first incarnation (and he clearly stated that this was the first embodiment: *dang po*) while other authors included the name of Blo gros shin tu rnam dag, in Sanskrit Suviśuddhamati, the Buddha's contemporary, in their lists.

Conclusion

The biography of Zanabazar in the Horizontal Square Script is an important source material since it is a rare example of the use of the Horizontal Square Script for Mongolian language. The nature of the script provides interesting information about Mongolian language and the manuscript may still serve as a basis for linguistic study.

Regarding the list of the previous incarnations of Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar included in this text, though it does not contain new information, it confirms the information known from other sources. Since it is close to the 'reverential prayer' – *gsol 'debs* referring to the Jonangpa master Tāranātha, Zanabazar's immediate predecessor, we may suspect that it was based on it or even written concurrently with it. Perhaps it served as a basis for the list included in Zanabazar's biography written in 1847 by Ngag dbang blo bzang don grub to which it is very similar. Further study of previous incarnations of Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar from a wider range of sources may bring more interesting information.

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chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me by Blo gros grags pa, TBRC-W4JW5404, p. 0115: 'Jam mgon bla ma rje kun dga' snying po.

²¹ In the commentary to the first Jetsundampa's *gsol 'debs* composed by Zaya Pandita: *rJe btsun blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i 'khrungs rabs gsol 'debs* (ff. 1-50b3, reprinted in Byambaa R. 2004b) it is explained (ff. 23b3-24a25b6) that he was a disciple of Panchen Jampa Lingpa (pan chen Byams pa gling pa). About Jampa Lingpa see Bareja-Starzyńska 2010b, pp. 250–252.

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