Emperor Khri Srong lde btsan (742–c.800) ruled over the Tibetan empire from 756 CE, expanding it to its greatest extent. In the northwest, the Tibetans threatened the Abbasid Caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashid on the banks of the Oxus; in the east, they sacked and briefly occupied the Chinese capital Chang’an (present day Xi’an) in 763. Khri Srong lde btsan also predated over the growing institution-alisation of Buddhism in Tibet, epitomised by his patronage of Bsam yas Monastery. In later histories and biographies, he is said to have invited Sāntaraksitā, Padmasambhava, and a growing list of masters from outside Tibet in order to fulfil his pious wish to firmly establish the dharma. The sources generally report that he acted in emulation of his royal ancestor, Khri Srong btsan (d. 649), later known as Srong btsan sgam po. The mature historiographical tradition identifies both emperors as emanations of celestial bodhisattvas, respectively representing the wisdom of Mañjuśrī and the compassion of Avalokiteśvara. As I discuss below, the Dba’ bzhed describes Khri Srong btsan revealing himself as Avalokiteśvara to monks from Khotan (3v:1–5) in the seventh century. Yet, its depictions of the eighth-century ruler are more ambivalent.

The Dba’ bzhed includes conflicting representations of Khri Srong lde btsan, some positive but others less flattering and suggestive of a more human and fallible form of kingship. The former strata of representations may be the oldest, either reflecting an Old Tibetan proto-Dba’ bzhed, drawing on narratives also found in the imperial inscriptions and Dunhuang documents, or copying earlier sources—as yet unidentified—into its compiled text. The latter strata, I argue here, are influenced by later intrusions into the narrative, such as the inclusion of Padmasambhava and the prophesied decline of the dharma that is blamed on the emperor by Dba’ Gsas snang (as his name is spelled almost exclusively in this manuscript).

Given the influence of this narrative on later historiography, the less than perfect depiction of Khri Srong lde btsan has caused some problems for those recounting the spread of Buddhism under imperial rule. Tibetan philologists have tried to overcome the contradictions in various ways, mostly typically by a selective use of different threads in the narrative. However, the strata in the text all have value as expressions of different cultural milieux within Tibet and we should not seek to privilege one over the other or, more especially, jettison the later strata to regain an Ur text—a text that probably never existed in any case. Rather, each stratum represents an important part of the evolving culture of Tibet and should be appreciated in its own right and compared with the other strata. In order to do this, it is vital first to distinguish the strata, as set out in the conclusion to Chapter 1.

The aim of this chapter is to bring out some of the tensions in the portrayal of Emperor Khri Srong lde btsan arising from the accretion or compilation of various strata in a single manuscript. The oldest narratives contained in the Dba’ bzhed appear to represent Khri Srong lde btsan in ways akin to the Dunhuang texts’ portrayals, while the interpolations depict him from slightly different perspectives. The eleventh-century redaction of the Dba’ bzhed brings together these divergent descriptions of the emperor in one narrative, while also adding its redactors’ own representation of Khri Srong lde btsan. The extant Dba’ bzhed thus presents a number of vignettes that each favour one or more of the different redactors’ visions of Khri Srong lde btsan. By retaining the episodic style of creative compilation, at times perhaps even a ‘scissors-and-paste’ historiographical method, the Dba’ bzhed juxtaposes these different representations in one text.

New eleventh-century themes are also evident, especially the rise of religious power in Tibet. This means that the Dba’ bzhed goes beyond the ninth/tenth-century laudatory descriptions of Khri Srong lde btsan. It portrays him occasionally as inferior in status to the narrative’s main Buddhist masters, Sāntaraksitā and Dba’ Gsas snang/ Ye shes dbang po. I believe that this is due to the increasingly
religious-focused, rather than royal-centred, trajectory of Tibetan histories in the eleventh century and beyond—a process I have mapped out in other publications. Here, I shall focus on the supposed decline of the dharma in Tibet. From the perspective of the ongoing project of Tibetology, the Dbā’ bzhed should not be misunderstood as either representing the ‘historical’ Khri Srong lde btsan or as a single work of literature by an author. Rather, the text should be seen as a collection of different representations of varying dates and affiliations. The resulting composite depiction of Khri Srong lde btsan arising from the core eleventh/twelfth-century narrative of the Dbā’ bzhed is at once problematic and pivotal, when viewed from the perspective of his changing portrayal in the increasingly pious histories and biographies of subsequent centuries.

The History of Buddhism in Tibet

The earliest Tibetan documents describing Khri Srong lde btsan, dating from the eighth to the tenth century, present wholly positive appraisals of his reign. One of the oldest of these is an imperial ‘self-presentation,’ the almost first-person proclamation (gtsigs) in support of Buddhism recorded in the Bsam yas Inscription. Its short text promises that he and future emperors will continue to protect the main shrines of the religion—including Bsam yas Monastery—with the requisites for continuing dharma practice there in perpetuity. Dpa’ bo Gtsug lag phreng ba’s sixteenth-century Mkhas pa’i dga’ ston contains, alongside quotations from the Testimony of Ba, a faithful transcription of both this and longer versions of the proclamation, including the ‘authoritative exposition’ (bka’ mchid), in which Khri Srong lde btsan narrativises his decision to give state sanction to the practice of Buddhism in Tibet. He recounts how the ministers opposed his enthronement in 756 and sought to block Buddhism’s rise in Tibet; how Khri Srong lde btsan heeded the bad omens arising from their calumny and the teachings of kalyāṇamitra-s; and how, in response, he increased the practice of Buddhism in Tibet and built Bsam yas Monastery so that it would continue in perpetuity—in a manner vowed in the Bsam yas Inscription.

Over the generations, Tibetan historians augmented the imperial image of Khri Srong lde btsan with a complementary and likewise idealised Buddhist portrayal of the emperor, akin to that of the legendary Buddhist ruler, Aśoka. One Dunhuang document, IOL Tib J 466/3, actually makes a direct and positive comparison between the two as Buddhists teaching the dharma, while another, IOL Tib J 370/6, contains a similarly glorified image of both Khri Srong lde btsan and his ancestor Khri Srong btsan. A bodhisatva status of some description (whether enlightened or on the path to Buddha-hood) is accorded to Khri Srong lde btsan at the borders of the empire, and in the post-imperial Dunhuang text Pelliot tibétain 840/3.

One proximate source of inspiration for such descriptions (apart from the more well-known Buddhist works of South and East Asia) was the Central Asian kingdom of Khotan, either in the late imperial period or shortly

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6 Michael L. Walter, Buddhism and Empire: The Political and Religious Culture of Early Tibet (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 7 raised the issue of the imperial “self-presentation.” On the inscriptive (self-)presentation of Khri Srong lde btsan’s rule as mighty and beneficent, see Lewis Doney, “Emperor, Dharma-raja, Bodhisattva: Inscriptions from the Reign of Khri Srong lde btsan,” Journal of Research Institute, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies 51 (2013): 63–84.

7 Doney, “Emperor, Dharma-raja,” 69–70.


9 Richardson, “The first Tibetan chos-’byung,” 93.


11 This work is known as The Single Volume of Scriptures that Fell from Heaven. For a transliteration, translation and discussion of this depiction, see van Schaik and Doney, “The Prayer,” 196–97.

Khotan was first conquered by the Tibetans around 670, and monks from Khotan, perhaps even indigenous Khotanese, appear to have settled in Central Tibet by the eighth century at least. Khotanese Buddhism exerted influence on the form of dharma adopted at the Tibetan court. According to the Khotanese history translated into Tibetan as the Prophecy of Khotan (Li yul lung bstan pa), the founder and first ruler of Khotan is the miraculous child of King Aśoka and his chief consort, born with the signs (lakṣaṇa) of a great being. The narrative then identifies the next—perhaps also mythic—generation of Khotanese royalty as bodhisatva-s—and also their ordained preceptors. A king and a monk, Vijaya Sambhava and Ārya Vairocana, are said to be emanations of the bodhisatva-s Mañjuśrī and Maitreya, building vihāra-s and stūpa-s in the area. All later kings, from Vijaya Jaya downwards, are not referred to as bodhisatva-s, while the text describes an arhat spreading the dharma during the reign of King Vijaya Kirti as an emanation of Mañjuśrī. Another text, the ninth or tenth-century Prophecy of the Khotanese Arhat (Li yul gyl sgra bcom pas lung bstan pa), speaks of an unnamed Tibetan emperor as an emanation of a celestial bodhisatva, spreading the dharma in Tibet. 

Just as the Khotanese histories increasingly focus on the religious rather than royal acts of their rulers, over time Tibetan historians forgot the battles and even victories of the emperors (such as that in 763 over the Tang). Instead, they expanded the details of acts that they and their spiritual preceptors and ministers performed on behalf of the dharma. As such, twelfth-century Tibetan histories omit mention of Khri Srong lde btsan’s military might, which was lauded in earlier sources, in favour of recording his acts as a Buddhist patron. Parts of the Dba’ bzhed may date from around this period (see Chapter 2 in this volume) and express a similar shift in values.

Much the same narrative arc of the imperial-period Bka’ mchid is present in the core narrative of the Dba’ bzhed, which likewise recounts how opposition to Buddhism at court was overcome and how its practice and teachings received state sanction through proclamations and the construction of Bsam yas Monastery. Further, the descriptive sub-title in the first line of the Dba’ bzhed is “the authoritative exposition (bka’ mchid) describing how the dharma of the Buddha came to the region of Tibet.” This encapsulates the frame narrative of the text, which focuses on Tibet (without any preceding chapters on the history of either Indian or Chinese Buddhism or the cosmogonic beginnings of Buddhism or the world) and tells its story through narratives of the royal propagators of the

13 These themes are explored in more detail in Doney, “Early Bodhisattva-Kingship,” but I shall outline some of the most salient connections here.
16 Tao Tong, The Silk Roads of the Northern Tibetan Plateau During the Early Middle Ages (from the Han to Tang Dynasty): As Reconstructed from Archaeological and Written Sources (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013), 21–22.
18 Emmerick, Tibetan Texts, 24–25.
19 Emmerick, Tibetan Texts, 32ff.
20 Emmerick, Tibetan Texts, 46–47.
21 IOL Tib J 598, see Frederick William Thomas, Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Turkestan. Selected and Translated by F. W. Thomas (London: Luzac & co., 1935), 73–87; and van Schaik, “Red Faced Barbarians.” Van Schaik gives tentative dates to his sources in “Red Faced Barbarians,” Appendix I.
22 The capture of Chang’an in 763, for instance, is described in glorious terms in version II of the Old Tibetan Annals, Or.8212/187, line 55ff., see Brandon Dotson, The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet’s First History, With An Annotated Cartographical Documentation by Guntram Hazod (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 132. Early Chinese sources on Tibet are more mixed in their portrayal of Khri Srong lde btsan and the Tibetan empire more generally. The Old Tang History (Jiu Tang Shu) describes the generals under his reign briefly seizing Chang’an in 763, saying that “the Tibetans, taking advantage of our difficulties, daily encroached on the borders, and the citizens were either carried off to be massacred or wandered about to die in ditches…” (Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew T. Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, eds. Sources of Tibetan Tradition. [New York: Columbia University Press, 2013], 16).
23 In general, the Dba’ bzhed records only Tibet’s cordial diplomatic relations with China and, when ‘Ba’ Sang shi and Dba’ Gsas snang visit China, the Chinese praise the Tibetan emperor as a bodhisatva rather than as a worthy opponent. A Chinese Buddhist patriarch prophesies Khri Srong lde btsan as “the bodhisatva who will bestow the noble dharma on the land of Tibet.” (DBA’ 2000, 9v:4–5 reads: khyed kyi btsan po ni bod yul du dam pa’ichos ‘byin pa’i byang chub sms dpa’ yin te/). This prophecy does not appear to be given in the later Testimony of Ba tradition, and so may be unique to this recension or even this exemplar.
24 As I noted in Chapter 1, Philip Denwood, “Some Remarks on the Status and Dating of the sBa bzhed, ” The Tibetan Journal 15, no. 4 (1999): 135–48 argues that the Testimony of Ba may have originally been a charter (bka’ gtsigs) that Khri Srong lde btsan disseminated to the Dba’i’s clan and/or after the Bsam yas Debate that was expanded over the centuries (Denwood, “Some Remarks,” 146), though probably not the actual Bsam yas Inscription or Bka’ mchid. See also Chapter 4 in this volume.
25 DBA’ 2000, 1v:1: sangs rgyas kyi chos bod kham su ji ltar ‘byung ba’i bka’ mchid kyi yi ge /
Buddha’s teachings in Tibet. However, we should be cautious here because the Testament of Ba tradition is documented by the name Dba’ bzhed | Rba’ bzhed | Sba’ bzhed only from late twelfth century, as indeed is its description as an ‘authoritative account.’

The same caveat should be attached to the opening descriptions of previous Buddhist rulers of Tibet in the Dba’ bzhed up to the middle of folio 4r, since these are not found in the later Testament of Ba tradition and may be unique to the shared narrative of DBA’ 2000 and RBA 2011 I. Nonetheless, like the imperial bka’ mchid, the opening of the Dba’ bzhed appears to regard the most note-worthy act of an emperor to be temple building. These acts also live on as tangible artefacts within the Tibetan landscape and often continue to be a part of Tibetan ritual or pilgrimage practice. Thus, linking these sacred sites with their alleged founders may also have served to connect the history’s ‘present’ with the imperial Buddhist past that its compiler(s) sought to recreate. The Dba’ bzhed states that all of the Buddhist rulers before Khri Srong lde btsan performed the task of constructing temples. It goes into more detail on the four main Tibetan Buddhist emperors, adding to the task of constructing temples. It goes into more detail on the four main Tibetan Buddhist emperors, adding to their characters in line with the Dba’ bzhed’s overarching message about exemplary Buddhist kingship.

The Dba’ bzhed devotes less than two lines to the Tibetan ruler named in the historiographical tradition as Lha tho do re. It merely relates that he received and treated with care (scriptures concerning) the six syllables oṃ maṇi pad me hūṃ. An interlinear note to line 1v:3 states that he also worshipped them and, although eighty years old, became like a youth of sixteen. This miracle is a literary topos of Indian Buddhist narratives, such as the story of Tantipa, the thirteenth of the eighty-four Mahāsiddhas. The important point here is that the emperor not only patronised, but also worshipped, the dharma. In fact, even the main text has Lha tho do re advocating the practice of the dharma “regardless of whether the kingdom prospers or declines.” In contrast, the Dba’ bzhed does not mention any of the secular acts of this ruler, such as internal peacekeeping or international empire building. In only two lines, this section of the Dba’ bzhed fulfils the promise of its sub-title by focusing on rulers only in as much as they were focused on the dharma.

The Dba’ bzhed’s biography of the seventh-century Khri Srong btsan broadens its conception of kingship slightly. It describes how he earned the title “wise” ([b]sgam po) by displaying tact and authority in internal politics (2r–2v), supernatural knowledge and a sense for the dramatic in foreign policy (2v–3r) and divine authority in religious affairs (3r–3v). This latter quality is demonstrated in the most famous episode from Khri Srong btsan’s life, where he meets the two monks from Khotan (Li yul) and shows them that he is an emanation of Avalokiteśvara (3v:1–5). The Dba’ bzhed makes an important connection between the emperor as bodhisatva and as legislator in that episode, which I explored in more detail in a previous article. The Dba’ bzhed cites an apparent Khotanese source for this narrative, but it is not found in any exemplar of this work that we possess. As Martin Mills has already pointed out in his discussion of this vignette in many versions, the narrative is a Tibetan adaptation of an episode from the Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra. However, the Dba’ bzhed incorporates the narrative in such a way that Khri Srong btsan’s corporal punishments are not mere display (as in the Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra). The punishments that the monks witness being inflicted in the Dba’ bzhed are apparently in line with the emperor’s legislation according to other relatively early sources—and indeed the text itself, which recounts how Khri Srong btsan devised a legal decree and ordered his subjects to follow it in no uncertain

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Royal and Religious Identity of Khri Srong lde btsan

In the core narrative of the *Dba’ bzhed*, Khri Srong lde btsan plays an important role in internal politics, international diplomacy and religious affairs. Yet, his depiction is not as uniformly positive as that of Khri Srong btsan and, in this section, other characters besides Khri Srong lde btsan perform actions on behalf of the *dharma*. Indeed, a few of these characters show themselves to be in some sense superior to the ruler of Tibet.

When the thirteen-year-old Khri Srong lde btsan takes over the governance of the realm (4r:6), the narrative shifts from the emperor to the Tibetan ministers and their conspiracies against the *dharma*. Here, the *Dba’ bzhed* deals first and foremost not with Buddhist building projects but with the destruction of all that the previous Buddhist rulers had achieved. From a narratological perspective, perhaps this desecration of the earlier (Chinese-inspired) temples clears the way for Bsam yas Monastery to take centre stage. One of the *Dba’ bzhed*’s principal protagonists in this section is the Buddhist minister, Dba’ Gsas snang. Despite the other ministers’ interdiction against its future practice, he goes in search of the *dharma* to India and Nepal where he worships at Buddhist pilgrimage and monastic sites. He then travels to China, a wellspring of Tibet’s older Buddhist tradition, but it is India that appears to offer new hope for the spread of the *dharma*.

Khri Srong lde btsan takes on an important role in that spread of Buddhism, though it is largely limited to acting as a royal patron. Dba’ Gsas snang convinces the emperor to invite the Indian abbot Šāntarakṣita to Tibet. The ruler is sceptical at first, (7v–8r), displaying the kind of worldly wisdom that Khri Srong btsan showed in internal affairs but this time with respect to religious matters. The abbot proves himself through dramatically revealing supernatural knowledge of his past lives, akin to Khri Srong btsan’s displaying his pre-knowledge of the Chinese emperor’s replies to his questions before hearing them (2v–3r). Šāntarakṣita then transmits the *dharma* through abbatial succession to Tibetan religious figures, Dba’ Gsas snang and then Dba’ Dpal dbyangs. This transmission obviously bypasses Khri Srong lde btsan, but he is also not represented as either an active practitioner of Buddhism or an advanced *bodhisatva*. Although the *Dba’ bzhed* recounts that the emperor made aspirational prayers with Šāntarakṣita during a former life, and later appears to maintain some connection with the horse-headed deity Hayagrīva (16r:6–7), he does not actively practise the doctrine during this life. He is a lay patron of Buddhism rather than a devotee—in this regard he is less self-consciously divine than his ancestor Khri Srong btsan, whom the *Dba’ bzhed* portrays as fully-cognisant of his identification with Avalokiteśvara. The rest of the *Dba’ bzhed* cements this teacher-disciple relationship; the lineage transmission from India bypasses the emperor and flows instead to Dba’ Gsas snang. In fact, far from depicting the emperor practising the *dharma*, the *Dba’ bzhed* indicates that Khri Srong lde btsan is inferior in spiritual attainments not only to Šāntarakṣita but also to Padmasambhava and Dba’ Gsas snang under his ordination name Ye shes dbang po. Both of the latter figures actually blame the emperor for the decline of Buddhism, as we shall see below.

In the same year that Bsam yas monastery is consecrated (17v:3), Khri Srong lde btsan outlaws certain seemingly barbaric corporal punishments or, by implication, all corporal punishments. He proclaims that “henceforth, among the subjects under the rule [of the emperor] men might not have their eyes put out, women might not have their noses cut off.” The *Dba’ bzhed* thus depicts him as repealing the corporal punishments that Khri Srong btsan instigated earlier in the manuscript. As I have argued elsewhere, the references in both *Dba’ bzhed* episodes to severe corporal punishments appear to reflect the earlier associ-


33 Note that, in contrast, Šāntarakṣita is given the epiteth-title “Bo-dhisatva” both in the *Dba’ bzhed* and in other works from the Dunhuang corpus. He is named Mkhan po Bo de sva dva at the head of the list of Spiritual Friends (dge ba’i bshes gnyen) of Bsam yas and “Phrul snang temples in IOL Tib J 689/2, and in the narrative Pelliot tibétain 149, where he performs the same role of spiritual preceptor to the emperor; see van Schaik and Doney, “The Prayer,” 191–92 and 205–206. It should be noted that the same scribe who wrote out Pelliot tibétain 149 also copied the *Prophecy of the Khotanese Arhat* (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) from IOL Tib J 598 into IOL Tib J 597 (van Schaik and Doney, “The Prayer,” 180–81). In depicting Khri Srong lde btsan as more of a patron than a practitioner, this part of the *Dba’ bzhed* again mirrors the narrative in Pelliot tibétain 149 (see the comparison in Doney, “Narrative Transformations,” 314–17). Thus, there is a striking continuity of themes between Pelliot tibétain 149’s ninth/ tenth-century lineage history’s depiction of Khri Srong lde btsan and this *Dba’ bzhed* portrayal.

34 DBA’ 2000, 17v:4 reads: slan chad chags ’og gi ’bangs la phyi mig mi dbyung / mo sna mi gcad par gnang /.
ations of emperors with rewards and punishments. The Dbā’ bzhesd manuscript, as it stands, highlights the differences between the characters of Khri Srong btsan and Khri Srong lde btsan and how they embody contrasting values of Tibetan bodhisatva-kingship. We should be aware that the Testimony of Ba tradition in general does not recount the narrative of the Khotanese monks in Tibet, and so does not make this contrast possible; however, the existence of RBA 2011.1 does show that the Dbā’ bzhesd is not an isolated manuscript carrying this opening section.

The Dbā’ bzhesd’s citation of the source of the Khotanese monks as The Great Prophecy (4r:1–2) and its ostensive quotation from an imperial edict (17v:4–6), appears to conform to our modern western concept of writing history. Yet, the lack of the above episode in Khotanese history and the divergence of the Dbā’ bzhesd’s proclamation from known imperial proclamations, alert us to the fact that something more literary is happening here. It seems that the two episodes are linked by more than a ‘use’ of primary sources. Their connection lies in their comparable depictions of two bodhisatva-kings: Khri Srong btsan is a self-aware emanation who displays divine wisdom but also punishes; Khri Srong lde btsan is on the bodhisatva path but more reliant on others, yet is a more humane ruler of his subjects.

**Religious Dynamics and the Decline of the dharma**

Surprisingly, the Dbā’ bzhesd places the beginning of the dharma’s decline during the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan. Šāntarakṣita even recommends a mantra, Padmasambhava, to help halt the decline of the Buddha’s power in the world. He says that the Bhagavat’s power was unlimited across India (dzam bu gling), causing peace throughout the region. Whether due to Tibet’s inferiority as a ‘borderland’ to India, or a decline in the Buddha’s doctrine after his death, untamed forces hinder the spread of the dharma in eighth-century Tibet. As with Šāntarakṣita’s revelations of Khri Srong lde btsan’s previous life in Magadha, his comparison here shows India’s superiority to untamed Tibet, and the past to the eighth-century state of Buddhism, according to this part of the Dbā’ bzhesd.

Šāntarakṣita therefore recommends a master from India, not from Tibet, to restore order. He holds that only mantryāṇa practices can bind the gods and nāga-s to an oath that they will protect Buddhism. Šāntarakṣita compares Padmasambhava to the Buddha. Though Padmasambhava’s powers are limited to the use of mantra, he is as accomplished in this practice as any of his contemporaries (in this time of general decline). The Dbā’ bzhesd thus recommends the Vajrayāṇa as a means of enabling Buddhism to spread in Tibet. This contrasts with the more conservative view of esoteric Buddhism displayed by members of the dynastic line and their ancestors down to the tenth century. Khri Srong lde btsan is ultimately responsible for inviting Padmasambhava to Tibet, creating something like a ‘golden age.’ Unlike in the Dunhuang text Pelliot tibétain 840/3 though, the Dbā’ bzhesd does not describe the emperor as a tantrika.


36 In this way, the Dbā’ bzhesd again builds on themes seen in Dunhuang documents, for instance IOL Tib J 370/6 mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (and covered in inter alia van Schaik and Doney, “The Prayer,” 196–97). This source also deifies both emperors, stating that they “had the bodies of men but their ways were those of gods.” (IOL Tib J 370/6, line 12 reads: myi lus thob kyang tha’i lugs / ḏ/). It also records an edict written on a pillar to record their commitments to Buddhism (IOL Tib J 370/6, lines 6–7). IOL Tib J 370/6 does not describe the content of Khri Srong lde btsan’s inscription. Instead, it mentions his proclamations as symbolic of his attempt to transmit the dharma from India to Tibet. As we have just seen, the Dbā’ bzhesd continues this trend. It describes one of Khri Srong lde btsan’s edicts in a way that differs from the actual eighth-century inscription but that stresses its ‘civilising’ effect of Indian Buddhism in Tibet, like IOL Tib J 370/6.
Willis and Gonkatsang suggest in Chapter 2 that the Padmasambhava section of the Dba’ bzhed may not be original to the Testament of Ba, though it was interpolated early on in the compilation process.40 If so, it is perhaps no coincidence that we find the first open criticism of Emperor Khri Srong lde btsan in this portion of the narrative. Here and at a later point that echoes this, the Dba’ bzhed claims that the dharma will still begin to decline during the emperor’s reign. This is because Khri Srong lde btsan asks Padmasambhava to leave Tibet before he has fully bound the spirits to protect Buddhism.41 Padmasambhava, as he leaves Tibet (causing Khri Srong lde btsan great sorrow), blames the emperor for causing division among Buddhists in the future:

“If the devatā-s, nāga-s and demons in the region of Tibet were bound under oath three times, then his majesty too would live long, the political power of his descendants would also be great, strife in the land of Tibet would also cease [and] the dharma of the Buddha would be established for a long time. This being so, bear in mind there is unfinished work! In the realm of Tibet, as the final five hundred years of the dharma draws near, the attacks of the unbelievers will not take place. [Rather,] (a time will come when) the Buddhists will dispute among themselves [and] a huge turmoil in the realm of Tibet will come to pass.”42

This “dispute” is the Bsam yas Debate, a division in the sangha that the Dba’ bzhed views as a sign of the doctrine’s decline. Ye shes dbang po later quotes Śāntarakṣita as saying:

The beginning of the final five-hundred-year period is here placed in the eighth century. The Dba’ bzhed therefore depicts the Bsam yas Debate as falling within the degenerate age. In this way, Padmasambhava’s sojourn in Tibet is not completely unrelated to the narrative of the Dba’ bzhed, even if it was perhaps not original to it. Another connection is a mention of Padmasambhava after he has left Tibet, describing the continuing benefit of his tantric rituals (14v:5). However, though Śāntarakṣita portrays Padmasambhava as equal to the Buddha in tantric power, after he leaves the emperor raises Ye shes dbang po to the highest Buddhist position in the land, because he is “like the Buddha’s presence” (sangs rgyas kyi zhal dang t’dra ba; 17v:6–7).

Ye shes dbang po uses his service of increasing the longevity of the emperor and Buddhism, then the prophecy of his predecessor Śāntarakṣita, to assert his own religious superiority over his royal patron. In this episode (19r:6–19v:3), Ye shes dbang po complains that his solitude, which was supposed to be of benefit to Khri Srong lde btsan and the dharma, has been interrupted. Śāntarakṣita, the personification of Buddhism’s triumphal arrival in Tibet, has also seen that the introduction of the dharma will lead to not only redemption but also discord between adherents of Buddhism.

In the Bsam yas Debate itself, it is noteworthy that Heshag Moheyen’s side is subtly depicted as the threat, for which Kamalāśīla is the solution. This does not reflect an anti-Chinese sentiment, since China is portrayed positively elsewhere in the Dba’ bzhed, but rather an indication that the future of Tibetan Buddhism lies with gradualism and perhaps India—the land of the Buddha. The above quote of Śāntarakṣita in the mouth of Ye shes dbang po seemingly privileges the Indian side, represented by Kamalāśīla, as the prophesied victors. Most importantly, however, the reference to Kamalāśīla places his contemporary, Khri Srong lde btsan, in the age of decline. Śāntarakṣita foretells the Bsam yas Debate as part of a trying
time for Tibet’s Buddhicisation, a solution to an internal feud with which Khri Srong lde btsan finds it hard to deal. Thus, the emperor calls Ye shes dbang po, who rebukes him for interrupting his meditation and makes it clear that the emperor will die and Buddhism will decline earlier because of it. Although Kamalaśīla’s side later wins the Bsam yas Debate and the emperor declares that his gradualist approach helps to halt the decline of the dharma (24v:2–3)—this is, over all, a positive narrative of the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet—his preceptor’s rebuke marks the beginning of the emperor’s final aporia, whereas Ye shes dbang po has fully assumed the mantle of his predecessor as superior in spiritual status to the mundane ruler.

In a coda to the main text, as the death of Khri Srong lde btsan approaches, the Dba’ bzhed describes his final sense of doubt. Ye shes dbang po dies first and the emperor says: “reflecting on the fact that the ācārya passed away, my own life cannot last long.” This remark mirrors Ye shes dbang po’s last recorded words just preceding the ruler’s, which describe the emperor’s food as divine and fitting for his final earthly meal (25r:4). Further, and despite this section being added on to the core narrative, the ruler’s final thoughts appear to allude to the fact that Ye shes dbang po is no longer helping to keep Khri Srong lde btsan and himself alive through his meditation (19r:7). Their deaths bind the two men together again, as they were in life and in their previous lives.

Yet another way in which this coda rounds out themes in the earlier narrative is that, at the very end, Khri Srong lde btsan voices a deep uncertainty over his final decision in the Bsam yas Debate: “‘[I] regret the fact that the doctrinal scriptures (dar ma) of China were not translated.’ This is the end [of the main text].” Behind the triumph of the powerful emperor is a poignant expression of regret and self-doubt. The Dba’ bzhed here portrays Khri Srong lde btsan as a frail human figure. However, as a good Buddhist, he is most concerned for the future of the dharma, rather than of the empire or his dynastic lineage.

The Tibetan emperor’s representation in the Dba’ bzhed constitutes a literary construct, rather than an attempt to find the ‘historical emperor.’ Many of the Dba’ bzhed’s less flattering depictions of him are also contained in the Indian literary tradition of the ‘Death of the Dharma,’ which is told as a prophecy in five-hundred-year periods. Jan Nattier gives this precis of the prophecy:  

[A king,] fearing the karmic consequences of his bloody military campaign, will turn to his Buddhist preceptor for advice. Anxious to gain merit, the king will follow the advice, inviting all the Buddhist monks in the known inhabited world to a great religious feast... But by bringing together monks from many separate lineages, the king will inadvertently create conflict in the Sangha. On the occasion of a great religious assembly, this conflict escalates into open warfare, resulting in the death of the last remaining arhat. The monks in turn all kill each other, leaving not a single one of their number alive. And with that, the history of the Buddhist religion on earth comes to an end, leaving the good king to mourn the results of his well-intentioned actions.

This tale strongly resembles the main elements of the final folios of the Dba’ bzhed. It only diverges at two points, both of which are easily explained. Khri Srong lde btsan fights no bloody military campaign, perhaps since all later post-imperial histories are loath to attribute such bloodshed to Khri Srong lde btsan’s reign. Ye shes dbang po only metaphorically represents the last arhat, since the Dba’ bzhed is not a narrative of total apocalypse set in the future, but a history of the rising and falling fortunes of Buddhism in Tibet. These two differences are outweighed by numerous similarities between the two narratives. These suggest that those Dba’ bzhed episodes that show Khri Srong lde btsan following Śāntarakṣita’s advice or his doubt about the outcome of the Bsam yas Debate may be based on literary tradition rather than dimly remembered facts about his actual reign. The Dba’ bzhed’s creator apparently saw enough similarities between Khri Srong lde btsan and the king in the ‘Death of the Dharma’ narrative to place the period of decline during the eighth century.  

47 See the beginning of this chapter on this tendency. Nattier, Once Upon a Future Time, 130, notes that the military prelude “does not seem to be decisive” for the decline of the dharma narrative. Thus, the Dba’ bzhed can omit it without creating a contradiction in its narrative.
48 However, the ninth and tenth-century texts, above, placed the decline in their age. Two possibilities present themselves, of which I favour the latter. Either:

a) This narrative represents one of the earliest strata of the Dba’ bzhed, dating to the ninth century. In which case it places the decline in its own age, just after Khri Srong lde btsan’s death.

b) This narrative represents an eleventh-century gloss on an older history on Khri Srong lde btsan, which alters its depiction in line with the increasingly influential ‘decline’ genre entering Tibet. In this case it places the decline in the eighth rather than the eleventh century in order to make the tale consistent with its exemplar, which places the Bsam yas Debate and decline of the dharma together.

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44 Dba’ 2000, 25r:5–6 reads: btsan po’i zhal nas a tsarya tse’ das pa dang shyar na kho bo’i tse yang ring po mi thub ces gsung.
45 Dba’ 2000, 25r:7–25r:1 reads: nga’i dar ma’ gyur ba yid la gcags gsung ngo // rdzogs so //
The decline narrative was evidently popular in Tibet, since it is included in several versions in the Tibetan canon and at Dunhuang. One version is contained in the *Li yul lung bstan pa*, a prophecy text with a similar title to the *Dba’ bzhed*’s cited source on Khri Srong lde btsan and the Khotanese arhats. The *Dba’ bzhed*’s decline narrative necessitates depicting Khri Srong lde btsan as responsible for causing a division in the *sangs gter*. Whether the *Dba’ bzhed* bases this narrative on a specific text or on a more diffuse Indic/Khotanese tradition remains to be investigated. Yet, it seems to mark a watershed moment: the first crack in the façade of Khri Srong lde btsan’s idealised image.

In each episode, the *Dba’ bzhed* invests key characters with roles related to the main concerns of the Buddhist communities flourishing contemporaneously with its various stages of production between the ninth and twelfth century. It incorporates both historical details and supra-mundane metaphysics in its account, as does the earlier historiography evidenced in the Dunhuang Tibetan corpus (such as IOL Tib J 370/6 and IOL Tib J 466/3). Also, it promotes the practice of Tantra in Tibet while simultaneously warning of Buddhism’s inevitable decline (like Pelliot tibétain 840/3) and describes Khri Srong lde btsan as an important patron but not as an apotheosised religious figure (in a way that resembles Pelliot tibétain 149). The *Dba’ bzhed* neither overrides these concerns nor wholly harmonises their depictions of Khri Srong lde btsan into its narrative, leading to an episodic blend of literary genres where the emperor is first prophesied as destined to spread the *dharma*, but then blamed for accelerating its decline.

This patchwork narrative gives Khri Srong lde btsan a multifaceted and complex character. In the *Dba’ bzhed*, the emperor initially takes most responsibility for spreading Buddhism in Tibet. He outlaws corporal punishment, suggesting that he is a humane ruler who acts according to Buddhist principles of non-violence. Yet the text also focuses on Sāntarakṣita and Ye shes dbang po, reflecting the true succession of Tibet’s spiritual preceptors or a wish to maintain an authentic Indian Buddhist lineage. The resulting narrative partially eclipses the emperor and robs him of his previous infallibility in the later part of the narrative of his reign. Finally, in a coda to the main narrative, Khri Srong lde btsan is filled with doubt over his unfinished work and the decisions he has made with respect to Tibetan Buddhism.

**The Testimony of Ba Tradition**

Over the following centuries, this important narrative of Khri Srong lde btsan’s establishment of Buddhism in Tibet grew through interpolation and redaction. Comparing the *Dba’ bzhed* with three previously-known versions—SBA 1961.1–2, SBA 1982.1–3 and SBA 1962—sheds light on the recension process. Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger began this work, outlining the *Dba’ bzhed*’s relationship to later versions of the same narrative in copious notes to their translation of the text.

Tibetan historical editors of the *Testimony of Ba* interpolated large sections into the patchwork, and even rewrote some important passages to reflect an increasingly Buddhist historiography. Despite these alterations, the core story remained the same. This depiction of Khri Srong lde btsan influenced many portrayals of the emperor in later histories as a human patron of Buddhism rather than an apotheosised practitioner. However, this changing tradition slightly alters the *Dba’ bzhed*’s description of Khri Srong lde btsan. For example, it presents him as a more faithful Buddhist by ascribing the doubts that he has about Sāntarakṣita to his ministers (see Chapter 2, above). This ‘pious alteration’ suggests the influence of growing Tibetan religiosity on historiography. It further emphasises that the emperor’s conversion and the transmission of the *dharma* from India to Tibet was predestined from a previous lifetime. Finally, the later *Testimony of Ba* tradition reduces Khri Srong lde btsan’s responsibility for dismissing the increasingly popular Padmasambhava, whom I shall focus on here. It seems that the redactors reworked those parts of the *Dba’ bzhed* that depict the

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50 On variations of this theme in Tibetan translations of Khotanese texts, again found in Dunhuang and in the Tibetan Canon, see Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*, 188–204; van Schaik, “Red-faced Barbarians,” 53–57.


52 See Doney, “Narrative Transformations,” 315–17 for a discussion of the way that Sāntarakṣita’s revelation of his previous life with Sba Gsal snang and Khri Srong lde btsan are combined in the later *Testimony of Ba* tradition, strengthening the karmic bond of these three important figures. This depiction stands in contrast to accounts in the biographies of Padmasambhava, which replace Sba Gsal snang in this triad with Padmasambhava himself (Doney, “Narrative Transformations,” 317–18).
emperor as a shrewd, secular ruler, in order to create an equally positive image of Khri Srong lde btsan as a religious king.

In one of the most conspicuous examples of the later alteration of the core Dba’ bzhed narrative, Khri Srong lde btsan’s ministers, rather than the emperor himself, are made responsible for Padmasambhava’s dismissal from Tibet.53 SBA 1982.1–3 reads:

The ministers said: “If [Tibet] is connected with the power of the one skilled in mantra, [Padmasambhava, although he] is acting for the good [of] Tibet, India is going to seize the [Tibetan] realm.” Having discussed in a small committee, [his work] was left unfinished. Since Master [Padmasambhava] said “now I shall make a field,” [the ministers] said “Yar khulungs [valley] is enough for a field.” Then, having prostrated (phyag byas) and offered great gifts [they] asked him to return back to India. So King [Khri Srong lde btsan] was upset, and offered the master a full bre-measure of gold [and] made circumambulations. Since [the ministers] requested as before, the master said “without desiring gold (i.e. payment), I subjugated the harmful demons in the borderland, Tibet, and enabled the emperor to practise the dharna. [I] acted for the good [of] Tibet, and happiness and jollity arose [among your] subjects. But, if I desired gold, it would be sufficient to act in this manner.” Then the one skilled [in mantra] grabbed stones, wood, straw and sand with his hand [and] that amount became the same amount of gold dust. In order to please the emperor, [Padmasambhava] took a handful of the gold dust [Khri Srong lde btsan had offered, then] offered it back to the emperor with his other hand.54

Comparing this to the Dba’ bzhed version (13r:6–13v:5), it is obvious that SBA 1982.1–3 has the ministers become suspicious of Padmasambhava’s dangerous character; it even omits the ruler’s request for the master to return home.55

SBA 1962 follows this version closely,55 so does SBA 1961.1–2, except that its ending is rather different. SBA 1961.1–2, 25.14–16 reads:

That amount of straw (tsa = rtswa), earth and stones, etc. turned into gold. However, in order that the emperor should save face, [Padmasambhava] took a handful in his hand and offered it back to the btsan [po] by hand.56

I believe that the latter difference is not the result of a line-skip or a misreading of the text, i.e. a transmitted error. Rather, it may constitute an extended hypercorrection, necessitated by an earlier transmitted error, or it may equally be another sign that SBA 1961.1–2 represents a different recension to SBA 1982.1–3 or SBA 1962. These alterations do not change the overall narrative, however, wherein Padmasambhava is dismissed after an argument with Khri Srong lde btsan’s ministers rather than with the king himself.

This shift of blame in the later Testimony of Ba tradition notwithstanding, it agrees with the Dba’ bzhed in recounting that Padmasambhava leaves Tibet less than halfway through the narrative of Buddhism’s establishment there. The later Testimony of Ba’s redactors do not omit his dismissal entirely, or even have him then return to Tibet.

53 Wangdu and Diemberger, Dba’ bzhed, 58, n. 177 already briefly noted this discrepancy.

54 SBA 1982.1–3, 31.15–32.5 (with what remains of the main text of the DBA’ 2000, 13:6–13v:5 in bold) reads: blon po dag na re / bod yul bzang por byas pa’i sngags mkhan gyi mthu dang sbyar na rgyal srid rgya gar gyis phrogs te ’gro zhes ’dan sa chung ngur gor byas nas ’pho’ gum par chad ste / slob dpon gyis de zhi bya’o gsungs pas zhi byar lungs kyi chog zer te sngags mkhan la phyag byas te bya dga’ chen po phul nas slar rgya gar du bzhud par zhu ba phul has rgyal na ma dgyes nas / slob dpon la gser phye bre gang phul / bskor ba byas / sngar ltar zhus pas slob dpon gyi zhal nas / nga gser ’dod pa ma yin te / bod mtha ’kho’ pho dren gdu gpa can btul la btsan po chos byar btub par bya / bod yul bzang por byas la / ’bangs bde ba la gdog pa’i phyir ’ongs na / ’ger ’dod na ’di tsug byas pas chog gsungs nas / mkhan pos rdo dang / snga dang / bya ma la sogs pa phyag gsis bzang tshad reg tshad gser phyer red do / btsan po’i thugs brsung pa’i ched du gser phye khyor gang zsang bsam / rgya ma gzhans lar btsan po rang la phul nas / ... .

55 SBA 1962, 88r:2–5 reads: blon po dag na re bod yul bzang por byas pa’i sngags mkhan gyi mthu dang sbyar na chab srid rgya gar gyis phrads te ’gro zhes ’dan sa chung ngur gor byas nas ’pho’ gum par chad ste / slob dpon gyis de zhi bya’o gsungs pas zhi byar lungs kyi chog zer te sngags mkhan la phyag byas te bya dga’ chen po phul nas slar rgya gar du bzhud par zhu ba phul has rgyal na ma dgyes nas slob dpon la gser phye bre gang phul / bskor ba byas / sngar ltar zhus pas slob dpon gyi zhal nas / nga gser ’dod pa ma yin te / bod mtha ’kho’ pho dren gdu gpa can btul la btsan po chos byar btub par bya / bod yul bzang por byas la / ’bangs bde ba la gdog pa’i phyir ’ongs na / ’ger ’dod na ’di tsug byas pas chog gsungs nas mkhan pos rdo dang / snga dang / bya ma la sogs pa phyag gsis bzang tshad reg tshad gser phyer red do / btsan po’i thugs brsung pa’i ched du gser phye khyor gang zsang bsam / rgya ma gzhans lar btsan po rang la phul nas / ... .

56 The whole passage, SBA 1961.1–2, 25.8–16, reads: blon dag na re / bod yul bzang por byas nas / sngags mkhan gyi mthu dang sbyar na rgyal srid rgya gar gyi phyog brang te ’gro zhes mdun ba chu ngur gor byas nas ’pho’ dgon par chad / slob dpon gyis de zhi bya’o gsungs pas / zhi byar lungs kyi chog zer nas sngags mkhan la phyag byas te bya dga’ chen po phul nas slar rgya gar du bzhud par zhu ba phul has / rgyal na ma dgyes nas / slob dpon la gser phye bre gang phul / bskor ba byas / sngar ltar zhus pas slob dpon gyi zhal nas / nga gser ’dod pa ma yin te / bod mtha ’kho’ pho dren gdu gpa can btul la btsan po chos byar btub par bya / bod yul bzang por byas la / ’bangs bde ba la gdog pa’i phyir ’ongs na / ’ger ’dod na ’di tsug byas pas chog gsungs nas / mkhan pos rdo dang / snga dang / bya ma la sogs pa phyag gsis bzang tshad reg tshad gser phyer red do / btsan po’i thugs brsung pa’i ched du gser phye khyor gang zsang bsam / rgya ma gzhans lar btsan po rang la phul nas / ... .
Tibet. As in the *Dba’ bzhed*, Šāntarakṣita takes over religious authority in Tibet, especially the building of Bsam yas, which the later *Testimony of Ba* describes in much greater detail than the *Dba’ bzhed*. In fact, it is not so much Padmasambhava’s image that benefits most from the later *Testimony of Ba*’s alteration, but rather Khri Srong lde btsan’s character.

While the later *Testimony of Ba* blames the ministers, and thus removes the stigma of being dismissed by the emperor, Padmasambhava still leaves Tibet; whereas Khri Srong lde btsan is almost completely purified of the stain of dismissing such a great master. By altering the *Dba’ bzhed*’s text here, as in the above two episodes, the redactors of the later *Testimony of Ba* apparently seek to improve the image of Khri Srong lde btsan in line with the prevailing religious sensibilities of their time. Whereas the *Dba’ bzhed* showed the emperor’s specifically royal power by having him ask Padmasambhava to leave Tibet (despite its consequences for the dharma), the later *Testimony of Ba* saves Khri Srong lde btsan’s religious credentials by placing a blame on his ministers. Both accounts show the ruler in a positive light, but their archetypal source for positive characterisation had shifted from the emperor to the Buddha over the centuries. The growing religiosity of histories necessitated a change in the content of these key episodes and the portrayal of Khri Srong lde btsan. In the later *Testimony of Ba*, Khri Srong lde btsan is already beginning to embody dharmic values rather than the qualities of an emperor that are evident in the *Old Tibetan Annals* and *Chronicle* and imperial-period inscriptions.

Conclusion

Every age reinvents its ‘national’ story to suit the tastes of its contemporary audience. This involves processes of accretion or alteration, perhaps stemming from oral retellings and ad hoc adaptations to the penchants of particular patrons. Each reiteration has value as an expression of a particular cultural milieu. In the Tibetan context and the tradition of the *Testimony of Ba*, I have resisted the long-standing practice of discarding more recent strata in a pursuit of an Ur text and a ‘real’ or ‘historical’ Khri Srong lde btsan. The redactors of the *Testimony of Ba* interwove their interpolations into a pre-existing and seminal narrative fabric rather than creating completely new histories of the imperial period. Furthermore, the imperial-era metaphors that the redactors incorporated into the *Testimony of Ba* resisted complete Buddhicisation. The earliest strata in the *Dba’ bzhed*, such as the invitation of Šāntarakṣita, appear to express ninth/tenth-century concerns and, concomitantly, greater pride in the power of the emperor. The later *Testimony of Ba*’s redactors depict Khri Srong lde btsan from a more religious perspective, removing his ambiguous proclamations and adding their own lengthy digressions concerning other characters. Perhaps the redactors were too conservative to invent many new scenes for him or, more likely, there were more highly valued, religious aspects of his reign—such as his construction of Bsam yas—already in existence that cried out for inclusion. These episodes suggest the growing veneration for Bsam yas or the burgeoning cult of Padmasambhava. Yet, Khri Srong lde btsan seems not to have flourished as a focus of religious attention between the *Dba’ bzhed* and its redaction in the later *Testimony of Ba*. In some respects, we might conclude that the core story of Khri Srong lde btsan ossified with reiteration.

Tibetan histories’ depictions of his ancestor, Khri Srong btsan, remain positive throughout the premodern period. The biographies of the seventh-century emperor transform him into a monumental religious figure. In contrast, from the eleventh century, Khri Srong lde btsan becomes fallible. In Buddhist cosmology, Padmasambhava and Srong btsan sgam po are more similar to each other than to Khri Srong lde btsan is to either. Both of the former are traditionally considered to be the *nirmanakaya*.

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57 Wangdu and Diemberger, *Dba’ bzhed*, 67, n. 221 claim that in the later *Testimony of Ba*, after Padmasambhava leaves Tibet, the contents of a *stupa* are brought from India according to his instructions. However, the nameless *slob dpon* (‘religious master’) consulted according to the earliest extant version (SBA 1982.1–3, 50.15–19) is most likely Šāntarakṣita (who has just been called a *slob dpon*, SBA 1982.1–3, 49.15), rather than Padmasambhava.

58 See further discussion in Doney, “The Degraded Emperor,” 30f.

59 On these sources, see Chapter 1.

60 In contrast, Khri Srong lde btsan is reimagined in the works of Nyang ral Nyi ma od zer (1124–1192) and those he inspired; see Daniel A. Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born: Padmasambhava in the History of Tibet’s Golden Age* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom). For example, the Zangs gling ma biography attributed to him depicts Khri Srong lde btsan as an emanation of Mañjuśrī (Doney, *The Zangs gling ma*, 120–22, 19v:3–20v:2; 241–42, 17r:1–18r:2). Interestingly, there Mañjuśrī emanates as Khri Srong lde btsan in order to spread Buddhism in conscious emulation of Avalokiteśvara-Khri Srong btsan. It may be that the narrative, not only the protagonist’s narrated motivation, is inspired by the example of the earlier bodhisatva-king. Also, despite being an emanation of a celestial *bodhisattva*, Khri Srong lde btsan is still a fallible figure in this incarnation (Doney, “The Degraded Emperor,” 45–46).
emanations of Amitābha/Avalokiteśvara. This incarnational status allows the royal figure, Srong btsan sgam po, to become a religious figure, the embodiment of Avalokiteśvara, and so continue to be idealised in histories that postdate the Dba’ bzhed. In mainstream Tibetan historiography, Khri Srong lde btsan is never a self-aware bodhisatva, whereas Padmasambhava is fully enlightened and thus takes over the main role as the ruler’s master and wrathful converter of non-Buddhist forces in Tibet. This trend appears to have begun with the main narrative of the Dba’ bzhed, which is presented in Part Two of this volume.
