

We have been named for the renowned Tibetan translator Berotsana, who flourished during the ninth century. Berotsana translated hundreds of texts and played a pivotal role in the establishment of Tibet's literary culture. Many accounts of his life were composed in his native land. They recount his childhood in Tibet, his studies in India, the challenges he faced, his many accomplishments, the students whom he trained, and his eventual death. We have translated a brief retelling of his story drawn from traditional sources and present it here.

A Brief Account of the Life of the Translator Berotsana

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The quintessential instructions that dispel the torment of wanderers is a river of amṛita
Brought to Tibet by the great bodhisattva,
The magical emanation of Vairochana called "Bero."
To the meaningful legacy of this magnificent protector I bow.

The boundless dharma of Sūtra and Mantra, both vast and profound,
Was translated into the symbols of the Land of Snow by this supreme paṇḍita
Whose aspirations blaze like one hundred thousand suns.
The youthful lotus of scripture and realization blossom everywhere.

You are the very form of the knowledge of all the buddhas, heir of the victorious ones,
Great manifest translator, holder of the treasury of the supreme vehicle,
If we aspire to the supreme path that you have given us,
May our hopes and prayers to benefit the Buddha's doctrine and wanderers be completely fulfilled.

This homage, a garland of flowers, serves as a preface. The actual subject follows here. The omniscient lord, emanation of Vairochana, great translator, the supreme Berotsana, was both scholar and siddha in the snowy land of Tibet, and a great pioneering translator of the doctrine. In accordance with the definitive meaning, he had already achieved buddhahood as the nature of great Vairochana, the pervasive lord of the hundred families; however, in accordance with the longing of boundless disciples, to tame them he has shown a theater of emanations, like moons in water. Except for sublime persons, who could fathom this? Nevertheless, from the incomparable legacy that is as deep as the ocean and as vast as the sky that he established in this realm, let us plant just a seed that will inspire the fortunate to have pure faith. The basis for the emanation of this lord is, as mentioned previously, the sambhogakāya Vairochana and also the nirmāṇakāya called Vajradharma, otherwise known as Vajrapāṇi. Then, as an emanation of the Lord of Secrets (Vajrapāṇi), he became Ānanda, the supreme listener and follower of Shakyamuni, who compiled all the words of the sūtras. As foretold in the *Compendium of Intention*^a and other scriptures by the Victorious One himself, he became the second Indrabhuti, who was known also as King Dza. As Thönmi Sambhota, an emanation of Mañjushrī, he served as a minister in the Cabinet of the Dharma King Songtsen Gampo and became the founder of Tibetan literature.

^a mdo dgongs pa 'dus pa

As stated in the *History of the Nyingma* composed by Dūdjom Rinpoche Jigdral Yeshe Dorje (1904-1987), he was born in the year 824 A.D./C.E. in the land of Nyangmey Zangkar^a to Pakor Dorje Gyelpo, his father, and Drönkyi, his mother.¹ How did he come to be discovered? Taking their direction from the master Padma’s prophecy, the Dharma King Trisong Deutsen and his retinue of ministers began searching the land of Tibet far and wide for the emanated child, endowed with intelligence, who would match the prophecy. At last, arriving in Tsang at Nyemo Chaykar, they found the home of Pakor. The parents were nowhere to be seen, but when the search party laid eyes upon Ganjag Thangta, they felt conviction. Then, King Trisong Deutsen asked the child, “Where have your parents gone?” The boy replied, “Daddy went looking for conversation, and Momma went looking for eyes.” For a moment the King wondered what he meant, and then he understood that the boy’s father had gone to buy beer and that his mother had gone to buy oil for lamps. He then knew for sure that this young lad had a sharp mind. Then the Dharma King asked this remarkable child, “Please tell us clearly who your parents are, what your name is, which clan you belong to,” and many other questions. The child replied, “My family is uncertain; I belong to the family of the Buddha. I have no name; I am none other than Vairochana. I have no country; I abide in the sphere of reality. I do not take birth in vain; I am Ānanda. I did not just stumble upon this place; I am the vajra that occurs naturally. I have no purpose other than to dispel darkness in the land of Tibet.” His answer gave great pleasure to the King, who replied, “This must be the one of whom the master spoke.” After a short while, the child’s parents arrived and the King offered them an abundant variety of wealth—gold, silver, brocade, coins of great value, horses, mules, and so on. Then he addressed them, “This child is a special person, one who will benefit the teachings and wanderers, just as the master foretold. You, his parents, love him so dearly that you can hardly bear to part from him, but please take heart, consider the future and his greater purpose by giving him to me. Whatever happens to you, his parents, as King I promise to look after you.” His father and mother loved their son so fervently that when they heard these words they suffered as if their hearts were being torn out. Even so, opening their minds, they made the great sacrifice and relinquished their child to the King.

The King then offered the child to the great master Padma, under whose tutelage the boy practiced the *dhāraṇī* for the increase of incisive knowledge. In the presence of the great Khenpo Bodhisattva, he received ordination among the first seven men to be tested. He was given the name Berotsana Rakṣhita, which in Tibetan is *Nampar Nangdzay Sungwa*.²

After some time had passed, the Dharma King mused, “The doctrine of defining characteristics that requires effort has flourished but wouldn’t it be wonderful if the dharma cycle of the effortless Ati were to flourish as well?” He asked all his subjects, “Who among you is able to travel to India, the land of the sublime ones, to learn this cycle of profound quintessential instructions?” Berotsana replied, “I’ll go,” and, having made this promise, he departed for the land of the sublime ones, accompanied by Tsang Lekdrup.^b After undergoing many great hardships, they arrived in India safely. From the holder of awareness Shrī Siṃha, he received the dharma cycle of the effortless vehicle of Ati, and from more than twenty other scholars and siddhas he received many

^a *myang smad zangs dkar*

^b *gtsang legs grub*

profound quintessential instructions. Upon returning to Tibet, he met with the King, who in a gesture of unsurpassed respect offered the hair upon his own head as a carpet for Berotsana to walk upon. Even though the King received Berotsana formally and had begun to learn profound dharma under Berotsana's guidance, due to slander that came from India and the evil intent of the Tibetan ministers and the Tibetan Queen Margyen Za, the transmission of profound dharma that the Dharma King was receiving had to be left incomplete. For the time being, the great translator had no choice other than to depart for Gyalmo Tsawa Rong.

As for the unsurpassed activity of this excellent one, through the unrivalled legacy of this scholar and adept in various Chinese provinces, in eastern and southern Tibet in general and particularly in Gyalmo Tsawa Rong, the teaching was established in utmost purity. Among his countless fortunate students, the ones who brought the most benefit to the teachings and to beings were Yudra Nyingpo,^a the Gyalrong Princess Yudra Paldrön,^b Dawö Zang,^c Tsewang Chögyal,^d Mañi Tönyö,^e and others. He translated and propagated many sutras and tantras, such as the scriptures on monastic discipline, *Stirring the Hell Realms from the Depths: The Implementation of the Meaningful*, as well as collections of quintessential instructions on vital wind, feminine fire, and the mind and expanse classes of the Great Perfection. In particular, to his student Yudra Nyingpo, who was the rebirth of Tsang Lekdrup, he gave all the instructions that ripen and liberate without exception. Yudra Nyingpo realized the meaning of these teachings without the slightest difficulty at the moment he heard them. Thus, both as a scholar and as an adept, the student became equal to his guru.

At that time, the great scholar Vimalamitra had been invited to central Tibet and was residing at Samye. Yudra Nyingpo went before him to compare doctrines. In order to reveal the greatness of his doctrine, Yudra showed a kind of knowledge and miraculous ability that surpassed that of Vimalamitra. As a result, the King and his ministers felt great faith, and remorse at having banished Berotsana arose in them. The Kings sent Lord Upadesha, Tanzang Palygyi Dorje, and Lang Palgyi Nyingpo to invite him back, and Berotsana, the father, accompanied by his heir Yudra Nyingpo returned to central Tibet, where they turned a vast wheel of dharma for Nyak Jñāna Kumara and many others. Thus, they placed innumerable fortunate ones on the paths of ripening and release.

Later they once again departed for Tsawa Rong. The three scholars—Vimalamitra, Berotsana, and Yudra Nyingpo—were invited to the great temple of Maitreya near Odu in Kham. With Berotsana serving as translator, they translated many doctrines from the class of tantra. To the retinue of extraordinary ones, they taught innumerable profound doctrines of Ati Yoga. Over the course of his life, Berotsana translated five hundred and ninety great texts of sūtra, mantra, astrology, and medicine. The kindness shown by this great translator in the dissemination and propagation of the topics of knowledge cannot be expressed in words.

^a *g.yu sgra snying po*

^b *g.yu sgra dpal sgron*

^c *zla bo bzang*

^d *tshe dbang chos rgyal*

^e *ma ñi don yod*

Afterwards, Berotsana returned to central Tibet and gave many discourses on provisional and definitive meanings, all of which were suited to the minds of the disciples. In the end, at the invitation of Tsültrim Drön,^a the lady from Li, he departed for the land of Li like lightning flashing through the sky. There, he again furthered the welfare of many disciples, after which he entered the heart of the stone image of Vairochana that was present in that land and became a buddha without leaving a body behind. Among his students, there were seven who achieved the rainbow body in succession.

One may wonder how this translation group had the good fortune to be named after this supreme and utterly authentic translator. It came about in the following way. We explained to Dungsey Thinley Norbu Rinpoche, whose kindness is without parallel, our hope to establish a translation group. Knowing the greatness of the blessing and the auspicious connection, he kindly bestowed the name “Light of Berotsana” upon our group.

^a *ishul khrims sgron*

1. Other sources give different years for his birth, but they agree upon the place of birth and the names of his parents.
2. *Berotsana* represents the Tibetan spelling and pronunciation rendition of the Sanskrit name Vairochana. Translated into Tibetan, Vairochana becomes *Nampar Nangdzay* (*rnam par snang mdzad*). *Rakṣhita* comes from the root *rakṣh*, which means guard, watch, take care of, protect, save, preserve, and so on (Monier-Williams, p. 859). *Rakṣhita* was translated into Tibetan by at least two different words: *'tsho*, and *srung ba*. Thus, in the Tibetan translation of the name of the Indian Buddhist master Shantarakṣhita, *Shiwa tso* (*zhi ba 'tsho*), we see *rakṣhita* rendered as *tso* (*'tsho*), and in the Tibetan translation of Berotsana's name, we see *rakṣhita* rendered as *sungwa* (*srung ba*). *Nampar Nangdzay Sungwa* (*rnam par snang mdzad srung ba*). would be translated into English as *Thorough Illuminator Protector*.