THE DUNHUANG 'PHAGS PA'THABS KYI 'ZHAGS PA' PADMA 'PHRENG GIL DON BSDUS PA' 'GRELP A'MANUSCRIPT: A SOURCE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSMISSION OF MAHĀYOGA IN TIBET. A PROGRESS REPORT

CATHY CANTWELL & ROBERT MAYER

Perhaps nowhere in the Buddhist world do questions of the production and reception of texts, of textual and cultural translation, and of the historical transmission of Buddhism across time and place, appear so fascinating yet more obscure and less understood, than in the occasion of the early transmission of Tantric Buddhism to Tibet. This is because for a crucial period of one hundred and fifty years, from the mid-ninth to the start of the eleventh century, much of the Tibetan historical record was obliterated, within a period of civil war and the collapse of the Tibetan state.

We know a little more about what happened before the disaster. Although refracted and patchy, we do possess some historical records of the efforts of Tibetan emperors to introduce Buddhism to their country between the eighth century and the mid-ninth century. We have sources describing their invitation of famous foreign Buddhist masters to Tibet, including Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla and many others. Likewise we have sources for their imperially sponsored Buddhist foundations, their huge official translation and lexicographic projects, and the way they handled some of the controversies following the introduction of the foreign religion to Tibet. Yet after the mid-ninth century, when the three great empires of the Tang, the Uighurs and the Tibetans simultaneously suffered political calamity, our historical record in Tibet becomes much thinner. Tibet enters its notorious 'time of fragments' (sul bu'ī dus) — and for around one hundred and fifty years we know very little about what went on.

1 We are grateful to the British Arts and Humanities Research Council, who provided us with the funding which has enabled us to do the research on which this paper is based. Special thanks are due to Changling Tutu of Shechen Monastery, who so generously offered help with the text despite having so many pressing claims on his time. Similarly, thanks are also due to Khenchen Pema Sherab. We would also like to thank several academic colleagues with whom we have discussed aspects of this paper, including Paul Harrison, Adelheid Hermann-Pfeil, Sam van Schaik, and Peter-Daniel Szántó.
However, when the historical record picks up again with the so-called second diffusion of Buddhism to Tibet at the turn of the eleventh century, we seem to encounter a country transformed. The evidence suggests that Tibet had entered the ‘time of fragments’ with Buddhism still working to institutionalise itself at a grassroots level, but it seems to have emerged as a country more or less predominantly Buddhist at all levels. Tibet entered the ‘time of fragments’ as a disintegrating empire ruled by martial aristocratic clans, but emerged one hundred and fifty years later with old and new leading families alike striving to project themselves as religious aristocracy. It had entered the ‘time of fragments’ as a country where the state actively propagated esoteric Buddhism, but severely restricted, curtailed and some would say even outlawed the translation and practice of the more radical types of esoteric tantric Buddhism that used kāyānīka imagery; it emerged from the period as a country overwhelmingly dominated by such radical forms of tantric Buddhism, with a substantial associated tantric literature, both indigenous and translated. It had entered the ‘time of fragments’ with no single religious specialist identified as the national patron guru; it emerged from the period with a cult and legend of Padmasambhava as a national patron guru clearly developing. It had entered the ‘time of fragments’ with nothing much resembling the clerical lion religion of today; yet shortly after the period, we find the present form of the lion religion beginning to emerge.

It appears that arguably the most significant transformations in Tibetan history occurred within a one hundred and fifty year period for which we have only the slenderest record of events. Moreover, the transformations of this period established fundamental cultural patterns of great importance that still persist: this was truly a formative period in Tibetan history, out of which came the highly influential Rnying ma or “Ancient Tantra” school, with its hereditary tantric lineages, its powerful cult of Padmasambhava, and the Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga tantric systems that remain so hugely popular to this day. In this context, it is interesting to note that the social-historical origins of the Yogni trunustras favoured by the Tibetan New Translation schools is equally obscure: although hugely influential to this day, we know very little about the conditions or circumstances of their production south of the Himalayas at a time not distant to the sil bu’i days in Tibet. 3

In the last few years, following the digitisation and wider distribution in usable form of a significant proportion of the archaeologically recovered Dunhuang Tibetan texts, some evidence is beginning to become more easily available. Yet this too has inherent limits. Current scholarship believes that internal textual clues can help locate a few of these documents (such as the Annals) to the Imperial period, and a few others, such as Pt.849 (see Rapstein 2006: 10-17), to the late tenth century. Yet given the currently still preliminary nature of Tibetan palaeographic scholarship, it remains beyond our capability accurately to locate the bulk of the Dunhuang tantric texts to precise decades within the long stretch of the ‘time of fragments’, so that in the absence of clear evidence, it is hard to draw conclusions about tantric developments through this important period. It is currently suggested by some scholars that the Dunhuang manuscript collections came from a storehouse of the Three Realms (Sanjie) Monastery. Takeuchi (forthcoming) reports that in the tenth century, a monk of this monastery named Dzorzin made considerable additions to his monastery’s library stocks, so that a proportion of the Dunhuang texts might originate from Dzorzin’s time. However, the store also contained earlier materials, from the time of the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang and throughout the intervening period; thus Yoshio Imaea (forthcoming), like many other scholars, emphasises caution in fixing dates or manuscripts with no clear clues. In addition, even if we were able to date them all accurately, the Dunhuang texts at best comprise a partial and possibly unrepresentative sample of the total manuscript corpus of their time, moreover all taken from a single multi-ethnic location, situated at a geographical and political extremity of the Tibetan cultural world. Nevertheless, despite such limitations, they are quite extensive, and do offer our best available sources for understanding an extraordinarily important period in Tibetan history.

In this paper, we wish to report in particular on our ongoing investigations into a single remarkable document: the Dunhuang text 10Tib 1321. This complete and undamaged manuscript in eighty-five folios is the only one of its kind from Dunhuang; it comprises a lengthy commentary on a Rnying ma Mahāyoga tantra called the ‘Phags pa thabs gyi thags pa padma ‘phreng gi don bag pa (The Noble Noose of Methods, the Lotus Garland Synopsis).’ The entire root text (from this point given the short title, Thugs chogs) is contained within the commentary in the form of lemmata, and copious marginal notes in a tiny handwriting further expand on the commentary. It goes without saying that so far, we have much work to do before we can date the literary composition of these texts. Versions of the root text eventually entered not only the Rnying ma canon (Rnying ma’i rgyas ’bum), where it is counted as one of the most important texts, but also the Thül pa transmissions of the Kanjur, the latter inclusion probably by virtue of its endorsement by the newly Sa skya hierarchies. In addition, the commentary eventually entered the Tenjur, albeit in truncated form we discuss these

2. The most sustained attempt so far for investigatory or speculative about the social-historical origins of the Yogni trunustras is Ronald Davidson 2002.

fascinating canonical transmissions in greater detail below. (See Plate 3: folio 1v-2r, showing the layout with the opening yig mo and pagination, the lemmata of the root text highlighted, and the intratextual association with him. Hence this text is only the second extant demonstrably early witness to the teaching tradition attributed to Padmasambhava discovered so far, and certainly by far the most comprehensive. This is because among the thousands of texts traditionally attributed to Padmasambhava, there has so far been only one other that modern scholars can accept as even possibly of such antiquity: a much shorter text called The Garland of Wows, or Man ngag lha 'phreng.2 Along with Padmasambhava, the marginal notes to the Thubs zhya commentary also mention the Indian sage Śāntarakṣita, traditionally a contemporary and colleague of Padmasambhava often associated with the Yogatantras and whom we find mentioned among other places in a later manuscript copy of the ninth century Phang thang ma register of translations authorised by the Tibetan state, where he is said to have consecrated the imperial temple at Bsam yas.3

Our hope is that our study of this extraordinary manuscript of the Thubs zhya commentary will add depth and substance to the understanding of the early phases of the Rnying ma school. We are currently completing a book on the Thubs zhya tradition, including analysis of the Dunhuang version of the commentary. In this short report, we can only give an outline of some aspects of the text’s contents, followed by a brief review of its transmission in Tibet.

General features of the root text suggest it shares some historical indicators with the type of tantric literature represented by the Sarvabuddhasamayalakshin δalālam vajra (a version of which is nowadays counted as one of the Rnying ma pa’s fundamental Eighteen Tantras of Mahāyoga, and which is also mentioned in the Dunhuang text Pt.849). This tantra is historically intermediate between the Sarvatahāhāgatasarasvata-rasabahubali and the Uyoginiśīla on the one hand, and the full-on Yogiṇī or Yoganirūdha tantras on the other hand. Sanderson (2000) locates the production of such literature from the late eighth century through the ninth century. Such shared historical indicators within the Thubs

4 See the study by Samten Karmay (1988), especially pages 142-144 and chapter 6. The Man ngag lha ‘phreng is quoted in the Bstan gsum snang bshad of Grubz Sengs rgya mtsho, which was commented upon by the 11th century scholar Rong zom, and in addition a version of the Shrāvaka (although not the Shrāvaka) describes Padmasambhava as teaching this text in Tibet (for the Shrāvaka mention, see Matthew Kapstein 2000: 157). While such evidence is not sufficient to ascertain if the Man ngag lha ‘phreng was actually taught by Padmasambhava in Tibet, as with the Thubs zhya, it is sufficient to suggest that it was associated with Padmasambhava from a very early date, and hence might in fact represent his teachings.

5 See Diao cheng "phag lung ma’i sgra sbyor bstan yas kyi rabs nor bu ston rnam thos tshul khris dpe shes'i phreng bzhag ba'i thugs'i snying po (2003: Plate 2, f.1v-b.7, p.2: rgya gur gyi stok dpe shes bstan yas kyi rabs nor bu ston rnam thos tshul khris dpe shes'i phreng bzhag ba'is). Elsewhere, the 14th century tantric author Sonam Rinchen included in his Dzogchen gsal ba, a Middle Dzogchen commentary, the 14th century tantric text Dzogchen chos kyi bde rkyen (see Nying ma pa’s commentary on the Dzogchen chos kyi bde rkyen and its anonymous commentary by Sonam Rinchen in van Leuven 2004).
Mahayoga and orients it towards a Rdo-rje chen view. In this commentary, Klong chen pa actually refers to the Thubs chogs commentary’s Chapter 2 on the same as which need not be guarded, and he also cites the Thubs chogs root text on a number of occasions. Rong zom, whose views are seen by many to anticipate those of Klong chen pa, also cites from the Thubs chogs. The evidence of the Thubs chogs commentary suggests that in adopting such an outlook in his Phyogs bcu’i mun sel, which became so definitive for much of the later Rgya-ring ma pa, Klong chen pa was not innovating; on the contrary, such interpretations were current five hundred years before his time.

Let us take one simple example of how such interiorisation works in the Thubs chogs commentary: the description of empowerment rites found in its Chapter 3. Usually, empowerments are described in terms of complex ritual procedures using various implements. But here, in the verse cited from the root text, Vaishravana says to Vaishravana, “Great Being, empowerments are obtained through the expressive power of one’s own innate awareness.” The marginal notes explain, “Empowerment can be obtained both through ritual articles and through awareness.” Here, it is through the expressive power of awareness. The main text commentator adds, “When one is aware of the sameness of all dharmas, this is called, obtaining empowerment through (one’s own) natural qualities; that is what is meant.” After expounding some more on this inward interpretation of empowerment, the main text commentator concludes with a statement attributed to a tantra which became a famous Rgya-ring ma scriptural title, the Supreme Trumpeting of the Elephants: (Glang po rab’i brag): ‘Not indeed from anywhere within the world of the ten directions (Can the buddha be found to come? Since the buddha

6 For a brilliant historical analysis, see Alecis Sanderson 2009: 185f.
7 See Gyurme Dorje 1980: 33-35.
8 See Rong zom, Chos kyi bzang po 1976: 490, where he begins this thon bu with the following statement: rgyud dang khol ’jos pral ma rgyud mi yongs dbang dang dang po ni’i dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang dang
is the aware nature of mind! Do not seek the buddha anywhere else.14

Another aspect of this interiorization process is the interpretation of all
ostensibly worldly Tantric rituals as being for transcendent rather than mundane
goals. Towards the end of the text, for example, we find a series of chapters on
the four rites in which homa and phur pa rituals are used to achieve the ostensibly
mundane goals of destroying, magnetizing, enriching and pacifying. But according
to the Thabs zhags commentary, these four rites are not simply concerned with
the outer performance of burnt offerings rites and liberating troublesome beings
through striking an effigy with a phur pa, but with the transformative power of
the ritual in the path to Enlgiement. Each phur pa comes to embody an aspect
of understanding so that it can infuse the object of the rite with the realisation
it exemplifies: for example, the wrathful phur pa is "a single phur pa of (the nature
of) mind",15 and the pacifying phur pa is "the elemental nature’s faultless essential
purity essence", the samadhi phur pa, so it pacifies everything through its natural
qualities.16 At the end of each of the chapters on the four rites, the ritual
description is concluded with a verse further glossing the ontological meanings,
attributed as in the extract above to named Ruying ma tantric texts.17

These citations are of interest because they add significantly to our knowledge
of which Tantric text titles were current and considered authoritative in the
post imperial period. They possibly might also indicate a possible terminus ante quem
for a number of Ruying ma Mahayoga scriptural titles (but as we show below this
issue is complicated by various anomalies). Some of the titles are cited more than
once, so that in total, there are at least forty separate citations which are attributed
to at least twenty-six different named titles, depending on how one counts: some
of the citations might be using different names for the same text, while others
might refer to collections rather than texts.18

The Dpal medogs dzig pa is cited in Chapter 1, the Glang po or Glang po che
in Chapters 3 and 25 (clarified in the annotations to Chapter 3 as the Glang po
rab 'brog), the Gsang ba'i rgyud in Chapter 6, and Chapter 7’s annotation seem
to refer to a text called the Glog sgra bs bshad pa. The following is a reference to
a text called the Glog bshad in Chapter 8, and one to the Sa rtags 'ba 'tus don phyi
ma, and also in Chapter 8, one verse from the Srgon ma brtag pa is cited, and
a following verse from the Rdo rje sems 'dus 'le le'. Two citations of the Gsug las
srgos pa'i tan tra occur in Chapter 12: the Ri bo brtag pa is cited in chapters
13, 19, 24 and 33; the Dpal 'phreng dkar po is in Chapters 13, 29 and 39 (which
the Dunhuang manuscript labels 37); the Rgyal po'i tshog pa in Chapter 16; the
Kart nag ma le is cited three times in Chapter 18 and possibly again in Chapters
22 and 34 (labelled 32 in the Dunhuang manuscript), whereas a text called the Las
kyi 'phreng ba (Thabs kyi 'phreng ba in the Tenjur’s Chapter 22) is referred to.
The 'Gsum la (Gsum la ti la in the Tenjur) and Ki la ba bcu gru yis kyi tan tra are
cited in Chapter 20; the Srgos 'phul dar bsu is cited in Chapter 21, 32 (omitted
in the Dunhuang manuscript), 37 and 39 (labelled 35 and 37 respectively in the
Dunhuang manuscript); the Rten tra smyang rje rol po is cited twice in Chapter 23;
the Gbang cchen bshad pa'i tan tra is cited in Chapters 24 and 28; the Phur pa
bcu gru yis kyi rgyud phyi ma is cited in Chapter 26. The Gzags pa'i rgyud phyi
ma gru yis (given as Thabs kyi zhags pa'i rgyud phyi ma gru yis in the Tenjur) are
referred to in Chapter 27; the Thabs kyi zhags pa itself is cited in Chapters 30
and 37 (labelled 37 in the Dunhuang manuscript). Of course the entire text of the
root Thabs kyi zhags pa is cited and commented on throughout the manuscript.
However, at this juncture, and quite independently of the ongoing commentarial
progress through the root text, the Thabs kyi zhags pa’s own title is mentioned
in support of a particular view that is being expounded in the commentarial
glosses. The Rten tra Glang po chur 'jug is cited in Chapter 5 (labelled 33 in the
Dunhuang manuscript);19 the Rgyud ge 'grel bshad pa is cited in Chapter 36 (labelled
34); the Rdo rje bkod pa is cited in Chapter 38 (labelled 36). There are possibly
a number of references - in Chapters 8, 23, 31 (which is, however, omitted in
the Dunhuang text), and two references in Chapter 40, labelled 38 - to a tantra
called, Du ma, although this most probably simply means, many tantras. The
first reference in Chapter 40 reads, ma ba yu gsal tan tra dun ma, which probably
means, many mahayoga tantras, but may alternatively mean, the mahayoga tantras
(called), the Du ma. There is a further reference to the Rten tra sde legs (the
‘tenjun version of the commentary gives this as, Tan tra du ma sde legs) in
Chapter 39 (labelled 37 in the Dunhuang manuscript), but this is quite likely to be
a classificatory term referring to the three specified mentioned tantras along with
other, suggesting that many other texts of different classes of tantras share the
same eacheing.20

14 glang po las kyang // phyes cu'i 'jig rten gang nas kyang // sngags rgyus mred par yong mo'i 'gyur 'rig pa'i sems nyid sngags rgyus te/sngags rgyus chen du ma shol cig // chen 'byung ba ба bu 'bo'i (126-6-126-13).
15 sems kyi phur pa ge'ig (64v).
16 chos nyid ma mor par rgya pa nyid tset bere // 'dzin gyi phur pa sbyin tshus cad rang chen la gnyis med ban 'gyur (25v-76v).
17 However, we have not yet been able to locate such passages within the extant versions of
these texts. See our discussion of this below.
18 There is also the question of whether or not to count the references in the Tenjun version of
the commentary in chapters omitted in the Dunhuang text. Of course, these chapters
were certainly once present and omitted by scribal error from the Dunhuang version, but we
cannot use them in quite the same way as evidence for the postimperial period.
19 glong chen pa, in the Dgongs kyi sde dpe skros lugs lugs pa bshad pa's 'brog sgra, classifies the
Glang po chur 'jug as the speech aspect of buddha body, while the Glang po rab 'brog as
mentioned above, also referred to in our Thabs zhags commentary simply as the
Glang po assuming the identification given in the annotations to be correct) is the body aspect
of budha body (Dorji 1988: 33-34).
20 Curiosity is elusive: it is possible that Tan tra sde legs is intended to refer to a specific title
rather than a category. For instance, the Rgyud ma'i rgyud 'bum (Rgy 'dzin edition Volume
Some of these titles are not easily identifiable from the existing titles of the Rnying ma canon; we know of no Gsogs.gru, for instance. Nonetheless, most of the names are familiar from the traditional literature. For example, although we have not found an extant Rigs gcie duslas pa, Dpas bo gsugs lag phreng ba (1504–1566) includes this title in his list of the Eighteen Mahāyoga Tantras. Similarly, the title Dpal 'phreng dkar po is found in Klong chenpa’s list, even though it cannot be found so far amongst the extant NGB texts. Likewise, Dpas bo gsugs lag phreng ba gives a Da ma ‘phro pa,21 possibly to be equated with the Da ma cited in our Commentary, if this is not simply a general statement about many texts containing the teachings referred to. Identification of the Sa rha ‘ba ba’i don phyi ma is not certain: many texts have Sarva buddha in their title, including some Rnying ma’i rgyud ‘bum texts, such as the Sangs rgyas thams cad dang rnyam par shyor ba series (four texts are given in Volumes Ma of the Rigs ’dzin edition).

Most of the other cited titles are highly suggestive of famous Mahāyoga tantras still extant and available in the transmitted Rnying ma canon: the Dpal ngech dang po, the Glang po rab ’bo, the Ri bo brisrgas pa, the Kar ma ma le, the Ks la ya bcu gnyis, the Snying rje rol pa and the Thubs kyi rgyas pa. It is significant that all of these occur in the Rnying ma’i rgyud ‘bum’s core section for Mahāyoga, known as the Eighteen Tantras of Mahāyoga. Other titles found here, such as Snying ’phral dra ba, are highly suggestive of other tantras of his same grouping. We should also mention that other Dunhuang texts mention yet more titles from the Eighteen Tantra section: a Zla gsdang thig le is listed in Pt.849; and a part of it said to survive as Pt.281; a Sangs rgyas rnyam shyor is listed in IOL Tib J 454 and in Pt.849 – this may possibly also be indicated by the Thubs zhangs commentary’s Chapter 8, as noted above; a Ri bo brisrgas pa and Dpal ngech dang po are cited in IOL Tib J 454, as well as in the Thubs zhangs; the Glang ba saying po is said to be cited in Pt.332b and is listed in Pt.849; and the Glang ba ’dus pa survives as IOL Tib J 436.22 One of the mentioned titles in the Thubs zhangs commentary, the Sgyor ma brisrgas pa, may possibly indicate the Bodol rtsi bcad thig (or bcad bdu) sgron ma brisrgas pa ’rgyud, which is classified in the Man ngag sde sbyin ti cycle of Rdzogs chen tantras in the Rnying ma’i rgyud ‘bum. Perhaps the ’Gu thos/Gu hri tshu la ka might indicate the Thig le gsal ba bgra’i rgyud or the Thig le gsal ba de lha na snyid nges po ’rgyud, both of which are in the Man ngag sde gsal ba cycle of Rdzogs chen tantras in the Rnying ma’i rgyud ‘bum.

Unfortunately, however, the situation is not without complications. It is true that some of the Dunhuang Mahāyoga textual survivals, such as the Thubs kyi chags pa and the Gsang ba ’dus pa, are demonstrably more or less the same texts as these extant today under the same titles. Yet this is by no means so clearly the case with what appear to be presented as citations in the Thubs zhangs commentary. Although we have not been able to complete a comprehensive search, we have attempted to search for them all, and we have not found any of the citations in the extant versions of the titles it cites.23 We have also noticed other discrepancies: for example, a Phur pa bcu gnyis phyi ma is mentioned, yet none of the three different extant Phur pa bcu gnyis texts has a phyi ma, and similarly, the Thubs zhangs itself also has no phyi ma, although two are apparently referred to in Chapter 27. However, an old text list from Nyang ral has a Kila ya bcu gnyis phyi ma (Ie. gsgrags ’dus pa vol Had.5).

In fact, the long series of citations at the ends of chapters in the Thubs zhangs, when looked at collectively, seems to form a single coherent thematic literary progression, and these ostensible quotations do not seem necessarily to represent separate short passages taken from many different texts. We even find repetitions of the same turns of phrase in a number of subsequent passages, as exactly the same points are applied to one ritual activity after another. Thus, for instance, the point is made in Chapter 27’s ostensible citation that the dharmadhātu has no characteristic marks, so it is all pervading, and its own natural qualities will bring captivation. The point is reiterated in Chapter 28 with some further elaboration and a slightly different wording emphasizing that pure awareness will bring captivation through its natural qualities. Then again, Chapter 29’s ostensible citation repeats the message of the dharmadhātu as lacking characteristic marks, this time being said to pervade outer and inner material things, so primordial wisdom awareness brings identification with positive qualities, like the sun’s natural quality of heat. Chapter 30 speaks of the dharmadhātu’s primordial wisdom bringing increase through its own natural qualities, and the following chapters continue in the same vein, following the chapters on increasing, with pacifying, for instance, through the natural qualities of awareness mentioned in Chapter 35 (labelled as 33 in the Dunhuang manuscript). Thus, we find virtually the same phrasing is repeated across different chapters, with some development of slightly different nuances relating to the specific rituals under discussion, but on each occasion, the teaching is attributed to quite different texts. The chances of so many different tantras repeating these same phrases in a way that so exactly conforms to the message of this commentarial text would seem rather low. Most

22 Doerge 1988: 34.
23 In collaboration with Sam van Schaik, we are making a distillation of such citations; these references are noted in this work-in-progress. Our thanks to him for the locations in IOL Tib J 454.

Chu: 356-411; mTshalims brag Volume Tha: 527-543) has a text entitled, sgron pa gcod pa sde phyi’i phyum.

24 Rnying ma tantras can vary considerably between different editions. The search cannot be considered complete until the various editions have all been carefully examined. Such tasks will become possible when searchable electronic editions of the texts are available. We have had to rely on our own browsing of one or two versions of each text and quite possibly missed some citations.
tellingly, the commentator cites the Thabs zhags itself in his series of citations, at the end of Chapter 30 – yet his entire work is in fact a word by word commentary on the Thabs zhags – and the words he attributes to the Thabs zhags in the chapter-ending citation do not occur anywhere in the actual text, neither as the commentator presents it, nor even in the accidentally omitted verses of root text! Hence we might suspect that these are not citations at all in the usually accepted sense: perhaps, the commentator himself simply composed these passages, or else adopted them all from a single existent text, with the dual intentions that each one sums up the Commentary’s gloss on the chapter in question whilst simultaneously affording these interpretations to conform with the teachings of other famous scriptures.

In most cases, the references follow a commentarial goss, using such wording as, zhes... las byung ngo (what this) says is given in...), or, las lhod dro (explained in...). It is probable that such phrasing is not intended to indicate direct quotations from the scriptures it mentions, but is rather suggesting a similarity in these sources and the teachings which it is seeking to propagate. Only a few of the references mark off the citations clearly, giving the name of the scripture first, followed by the passage, which is then closed by wording such as, zhes gyangs so. The passage in Chapter 30 (Dunhuang Ms 73v) which refers to the Thabs zhags itself does appear to be referring back to the discussion in the Commentary’s Chapter 5, relating to the natural arising of the five male and female buddhas as the buddha body and the retinue as the major and minor buddha marks. It seems the commentator is suggesting that the teaching given earlier in the text implies the kind of increase now discussed in this chapter on the increasing burnt offerings ritual.

The marginal notes to the commentary mention Padmasambhava on three occasions: once right at the beginning of the text when explaining the title, and twice near the end. The final verse of the commentary’s main text also constitutes a praise to Padma Rgyal po. A comparison between the doctrines, language and terminology of the Thabs zhags commentary with the Man ngag lta phreng (Pith Instructions on the Garland of Views), attributed to Padmasambhava, examining whether any obvious links between the two approaches can be discerned, has not yielded any close parallels. The Man ngag lta phreng aims to provide a comprehensive classification of views, with special attention given to the tantric path, while the Thabs zhags and its commentary give a more limited classification of the variety of paths, focusing primarily on the single Vajrayāna perspective it represents. Moreover, the Thabs zhags commentary says little

---

25 Such clear marking is found only for the Dpal nang dang po in Chapter 1, for the Giang po in Chapter 3, for the Rgyon ma brtsegs pa and Rdo rje sems dpe’i’i’u in Chapter 8, and for the Ri bo brtsegs pa in Chapter 13. However, even if these cases, we have not identified the citations given.

26 However, van Schak’s (2007) overall point, that Padmasambhava seems to be indicated as he architect of the teaching given in this text here, would indeed seem quite likely to be implied.
certainly possible that the assumption here is that Padmasambhava is the main text's architect.

The third reference in the last lines of the text is perhaps to Sāntigarbha finding either Padmasambhava's teaching flawless, or possibly Padmasambhava himself [See Plate 5: folio 83v-84r]. The note addresses the final verse of praise to Padma Rgyal po, here associated with Padmasambhava by the annotator to the text, as it came to be in the Padmasambhava rnam thar literature. We have identified a closely parallel verse in an examination of Nyang ral sgyi ma 'od zer's (1124-1192) Padmasambhava hagiography, the Zhang gling ma and it now seems clear that the commentary's main text does indeed conclude with a devotional praise to Padmasambhava. The marginal note below the first verse line says that, "The master Sāntigarbha, having examined and found flawless, praised Sambhava." It is not altogether unambiguous as to what the implied object of examination is here. Quite likely, the word ma nor (flawless) is picking up on the line in the text above, where the term is used in connection with the realisation of enlightenment and its expression in the teaching. Thus, as in the earlier annotations, the tantra's flawless teachings are associated with Sambhava. Alternatively, it might be that it is Sambhava himself who Sāntigarbha examines and finds flawless, but in either case, an association between Sambhava and the teachings would seem clear. It is not obvious what the commentator is implying about Sāntigarbha's role; perhaps he is assumed to be the author of the appended portion or conceivably of the commentary itself.

Clearly, questions still exist about the references to Padmasambhava in this text. Do they suggest that Padmasambhava was a great commentator or that he inspired the teachings given in the text, or are they hinting even more — that he was a revealer of tantras? The tone of the commentary's main text's final exegogy, parallelised in Nyang ral's hagiography, would seem less to indicate a human scholar or master, than an enlightened figure in some sense linked to the basis of the textual tradition. This impression is reinforced by the three annotations, especially by the final reference, but also perhaps the first, where Sambhava follows in the same breadth as the mention of the Buddha's Inside.

The commentary contains some pure theory and doctrine, for example, on the relative merits of the Sārvakāyins, the ordinary Mahāyāna, and the Vajrayāna, on the ultimate and relative truths, and so on. Most of it, however, comprises dense ritual instruction, but very much in the Mahāyoga idiom of creatively integrating personal experience with Mahāyana view through the medium of Mahāyoga ritual, taking the understanding of the sameness of all dharmas or the dharmadhātu as the key. Hence, we get instructions for transforming the everyday act of eating into a homa offering, and of transforming all sensual enjoyments into offerings to the Buddhas; special Vajrayāna interpretations of the ten pāramitās; mention

27 Our forthcoming book presents the evidence in detail.

28 We have not identified the exact form in other sources, but the principle of a similar kind of ŚrīHenika or Mahāśe Henika as the central wrathful figure unifying a mandala of wrathful deities occurs widely in major cycles, such as the Khöng chen 'do pa (Dharmc Śrīhenika mchog 'dus mdzod, Volume Pa; p.376f) or the Sgrub pa btses 'brgyud cycles (see Nyang ral: 132-133), or in root tantra sources such as the Rgyag dngon bo spyi jung po (Ch. 15, Mchams bskyor edition of the Rgyag ma'i rgyad 'bum, Volume Wa: 200).

For those who are not familiar with the Ancient Tantra Collection, we should mention...
is interesting that the Thubs chugs root tantra was also accepted by the twelfth century Sa skya pa master Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216) as one of only six Rnying ma scriptures included in his tantra catalogue, and his great-nephew Chos rgyal Phags pa's (1235-1280) catalogue of 1273 followed likewise (Elmer 1997: 52). Nevertheless, the Thubs chugs root tantra seems to have been implicitly rejected by the famous fourteenth century compiler of the orthodox Tibetan canon of Bstan 'gyur, Bu ston (1290-1364). However, like the Rnying ma brgyud po and a few others key Rnying ma tantras, the Thubs chugs did succeed in finding a place within the separate Rnying ma tantra section found in some Bstan 'gyur editions, including several descended from the Tshad pa line (whether in unmerged Kanjurs such as Jang sa tham, or in mixed Kanjurs like Snar thang). Although none descend from the Thams pang ma line, there are also two important witnesses from independent Kanjurs. The Thubs chugs is therefore one of the few tantras that survives in Bstan 'gyur and Ancient Tantra Collections alike.

The transmission history of the commentary is more surprising. Although the commentary ends with a praise to Padma Rgyal po which clearly seems to indicate the great Padmasambhava, and the marginal notes in the Dunhuang manuscript mention Padmasambhava in the terms we have described above, with Sāntarākṣita receiving a mention too, and although so very few Rnying ma tantras have their own word-by-word commentaries, nevertheless the later Rnying ma tradition seems to have substantially lost touch with the Thubs chugs commentary. None of the highly learned Rnying ma lamas and scholars we interviewed in Nepal had heard of the text before we showed it to them, and until the distribution of the Dunhuang text became more widespread, was as far as we know extant only in an unfortunately rather mutilated and truncated form within the Peking, Snar thang and Golden editions of the Bstan 'gyur.30 Sadly, in all three Bstan 'gyur versions alike, we find that the commentary lacks many pages of text (thus losing about thirty percent of the total work), and is seriously corrupt in parts. It also lacks the marginal notes, hence losing the explicit mentions of Padmasambhava and Sāntarākṣita, except in so far as the final verse of homage to Padma Rgyal...
1988


MAHÄYOGA RITUAL INTERESTS AT DUNHUANG: A TRANSLATION AND STUDY OF THE CODEX IOL TIB J 437/PELLIOI TIBÉTAIN 324

JACOB F. DALTON

The tantric śādhanas found among the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts may be divided into two types: on the one hand, those that are based on single tantras, bear titles, and are generally longer and more technically detailed; and on the other those that draw upon a range of tantric sources, generally lack titles, and are shorter and more thematic in focus. Certainly there are śādhanas that elucidate, and full somewhere between these two categories, yet the distinction remains a potentially useful one. In the first category (here termed “Category A”) may be included a number of śādhanas based on the Sarvattathāgata-sūtraśādhanopāyaḥ, the Gāyakṣamādhīra Tantra, and the Gāyakṣamādhīra:

Category A:
1. Sarvattathāgata-sūtraśādhanopāyaḥ and its variations;
   a. IOL Tib J 417/1 and
   b. IOL Tib J 448/1 and Pt.270
   c. IOL Tib J 551 and Pt.792
2. Skali khyed ces bya ba bya'srub pa'i thabs (*Bhūga-utpāda-jana-sādhana)
   a. IOL Tib J 331/2
   b. IOL Tib J 464/1
3. De khe na shad byang ba dam pa byam gi bya'srub thabs ([IOL Tib J 332/1)

1 Important examples include the two śādhanas focused on the Sākāyogottiri-paśūṭadūpātra, that is, IOL Tib J 439 & 712 and IOL Tib J 579. These works require further research, but both are quite technical and are based on a single tantra, ye lack titles and follow a generally more commentarial style (more so in the case of IOL Tib J 439/712, which incudes an analysis of the two syllables in deśi 'khor and is therefore almost certainly of Tibetan origin) than the works included in my first category. Similarly, the set of three Mahāyoga śādhanas found in IOL Tib J 551, 552, and 553 all concern the same yujrmpa ma'jog gi legs and describe the same ritual sequences, yet are written, to varying degrees, in commentarial styles.
2 Closest related to this list is the commentary on this śādhanas, found in IOL Tib J 447/1, and IOL Tib J 447/2 with Pt.300 which together represent a closely related śādhanas also based on bs STTS.