

## NOTES ON THE PHUR-BU

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The Tibetan ritual object called *phur bu* or *phur pa*—a kind of dagger—has been the topic of some learned articles and a beautifully illustrated book. But so far I do not notice a satisfactory solution for the term *phur bu* itself. Let me consider the entry in a native Tibetan dictionary based on syllables, namely, Jampa Chogyal's *Dag yig ma nor lam bzaiñ* (Jayyed Press, Delhi, 1969), p. 301, *phur*: *lcags kyi phur bu / gza' phur bu / phye ma phur ma /*. He illustrates the Tibetan syllable *phur* by "iron *phur bu*" (i.e. the dagger), "planet *phur bu*" (i.e. the planet Jupiter), and "powder *phur ma*" (i.e. powder, possibly medicinal). Of course, the entries do not exhaust the possibilities. For example, the dagger form does not have to be made of iron. Now, it is known that the dagger *phur bu* regularly translates the Sanskrit *kīla* ('nail'), while the planet *phur bu* translates the proper name *Āṅgīrasa* (in the dictionary *Amarakoṣa* and its Tibetan translation, verse I, 91). The Vedic name *Āṅgīrasa* is a derivative word, 'descendent of *Āṅgīras*;' so this helps explain the *bu* of *phur bu*, because *bu* means 'son (of)'. Now Dowson (*A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, p. 16) points out the 'Aṅgī' (of *Āṅgīras*), possibly because it sounds like *Agni* (the Fire God), was associated with fire; this forces the *ras* to be construed as *rasa*, the juice or motive force, so what keeps the fire going. To see this as the reason for the Tibetan translation, we must go to the parallel Tibetan word *sbur*; so in the Sanskrit-Tibetan Buddhist dictionary *Mahāvīyutpatti* (Sakaki ed., no. 6703), the entry *S. paritta-sākalikāgniñ*; T. *sbur ma'i me chuñ nu* 'slow fire kept up by tiny pieces of wood'. Besides, Jampa Chogyal's dictionary, p. 324, gives for *sbur* the noun *sbur ma* for tiny creatures like ants, and also the fungus-dust afflicting fruit trees. There is no doubt that this *sbur ma* like *phur ma* means tiny things, particles, ants, etc., and that *phur* in the name of the planet Jupiter means the small pieces of fuel to keep a slow fire going, and that *bu* was added in the sense of 'son'. This shows that the *phur* in *phur bu* used for the dagger must be a different word, but a homonym of the *phur* that means particles. To determine the other *phur* that translates Sanskrit *kīla*, one should observe that nailing here means binding or tying down, as will be shown below. Hence, we go to the parallel Tibetan word *bur* (see Sarat Chandras Das' Tibetan dictionary, p. 874) which means 'bolt or fastening to a door.' This suggests that the correct form of the term is *phur pa* rather than *phur bu*, and that the switch to the *bu* syllable came through confusion with the name of the planet Jupiter. However, since the term *phur bu* is frequently used to

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translate *kīla*, we can say it has the correctness of usage.

An article by Meredith<sup>1</sup> on the Tibetan magic dagger introduces the reader to the theories of Siegbert Hummel, Giuseppe Tucci, and others; and has some photographs of the *phur bu* by courtesy of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. I suppose this author did not originate the association with an arrow, but this should be rejected, since the arrow symbolizes alien penetration or temptation (confer: Kāmadeva's flowery arrows); and in the Tibetan Wheel of Life, the seventh member, feelings (*vedanā*) (as the bondage of *karma*) is illustrated by an eye struck with an arrow. Besides, as will be shown below, the *phur bu* dagger represents a downward force, which is implied by the information which Meredith supplies from Hummel that Padmasambhava consecrated the ground of the Tibetan monastery Samye (Bsam-yas) "by stabbing a *phur bu* into the earth."

For the Indian Buddhist use of the term, with *phur bu* equivalent to *kīla*, I refer to Asaṅga's *Yogācārabhūmi* in the exegesis section called *Vastusamgrahaṇi* (Japanese photo. edition of Kanjur-Tanjur, Vol. 111, p. 131-4-4), in a discussion of 'bondage' (*bcīns*): "Here the bondage of *sugati-karma* (*karma* of good destiny) is like the post (*stambha*) of *sugati*; the bondage of *durgati-karma* (*karma* of bad destiny) is like the dagger (*kīla*) of *durgati*." [1] Notice that the movement to good destiny is upward, like a post; and that the movement to bad destiny is downward, like a dagger plunged into the ground. Of course, the early use of the term is quite independent of the later ritual *phur bu*, except for the 'downward' and the 'binding' connotations.

A useful article by Stein<sup>2</sup> mentions various tantric sources; but not the one I know about, in the Kriyā Tantra cycle of Vajrapāni, namely, the *Vajravidāraṇa-dhāraṇī* with a number of ritual commentaries in the Tanjur. I long ago translated the rather brief *Dhāraṇī* with the help of the commentary by Buddhaguhya (eighth century) called *Ratnābhāsvāra-nāma* in the Derge Kanjur-Tanjur versions.<sup>3</sup> The point is that there are four deities in Vajrapāni's immediate retinue, Vajrakīla, Vajradaṇḍa, Vajramudgara, and Vajracaṇḍa. The well-known formula *kīlikīlāya* is employed in the mantras of the first two, to wit, mantra of Vajrakīla: *curu curu caṇḍakīlikīlāya svāhā*; and mantra of Vajradaṇḍa: *trāsaya trāsaya vajrakīlikīlāya svāhā*. For translating these, one may notice that *kīlāya* would be taken in Classical Sanskrit as a dative, but may be taken in Middle Indic (cf. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar*, p. 52, para. 8.42) if the context demands it, as an instrumental. So construing these, we may translate Vajrakīla's mantra: "Steal (it), steal (it), with the furious *kīlikīla* (magic fetter), Svāhā." And Vajradaṇḍa's mantra: "Frighten (them), frighten (them), with the diamond *kīlikīla*, Svāhā." Later, for the four magical acts (for appeasing, prosperity, controlling, and overpowering), the *Dhāraṇī* gives Vajrakīla's prosperity *upahṛdaya*: *hulu hulu*; and Vajradaṇḍa's appeasing *upahṛdaya*: *tiṣṭha tiṣṭha vajra*. We note that in Sanskrit the word *hula* is a kind of dagger, so Vajrakīla's mantra for prosperity magic can be

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translated "Transfix (it), transfix (it)!" Also noting that *daṇḍa* is the retribution rod, Vajradaṇḍa's mantra for appeasing magic can be translated "Stand up, stand up, O Vajra!" Notice how this accords with the two movements mentioned by Asaṅga: prosperity magic is directed downward toward earth; appeasing the gods requires an upward movement. As to the expression *upahr̥daya*, this is a mantra that is next to the shortest length, the syllable, referred to as a *hr̥daya*.

Now the Buddhist master Asaṅga also has a long list of similes for 'insight' (*prajñā*, Tib. *śes rab*), wherein he mentions the "stake of insight" used against the four Māras, from the defilement kind, to the Son-of-the-Gods kind.<sup>4</sup> The Tibetan for 'stake' is *mtshon cha* (=Skt. *śastra*, 'dagger') in the text at Photo. ed of Tanjur, Vol. 111 p. 232-3-2,3. This shows that even at his early date (4th-5th A.D.) the notion was there, applied to the evil deity called Māra or his messengers, but not in his case using the term *kīla*. In tantric rituals this is part of the *maṇḍala* rite called "protecting and blessing the site;" it requires the hierophant to identify himself with a certain wrathful deity (*krodha*) and command the obstructing demons to depart; the remaining ones are nailed down with the magic nail (*kīla*).<sup>5</sup> "Nailing down" we have come to see, by suggestion of Asaṅga's writings, is associated with "binding." This is confirmed in the article by Bischoff and Hartman,<sup>6</sup> including in their translation of the Pelliot Ms, "as for the proper nature (*svabhāva*) of the Dagger, (visualize) the slip knot."

These considerations should serve a conclusion that the basic theories of this *phur bu* were developed in India, and came into Tibet by way of both non-tantric and tantric Buddhism, as was alluded to above. However, there is no doubt that the theory underwent a further and rich development in Tibet, starting with the ritual objects. The tradition says that Padmasambhava invented the *phur bu*. This means the *phur bu* or *phur pa* as an object of which we can now take photographs. When there are three faces on the *phur bu* they remind us of the *khaṭvaṅga*, Padmasambhava's magic wand. In contrast, the Tibetan *daṇḍa* (Tib. *dbyug pa* or *chad pa*), the retribution wand, is surmounted by a single (possibly grinning) face, the lower end possibly having a *vajra*.

Part of this Tibetan development was the association of the deity Hayagrīva, or Tamdin in Tibetan pronunciation, with the *phur bu*. Mahāyānists worshipped Hayagrīva ('horse-necked') about 500 A.D. This is a horse-headed form of Avalokiteśvara in which role he is called "best of all horses" (*paramāśva*). The word for horse (*āśva*) lends itself for (false) etymological connection with *aś-* 'to eat,' so Hayagrīva devours his enemies, the demons. In Tibet, the form with wings of the Garuḍa bird was popular among the Rñiñ-ma-pa; and the Fifth Dalai Lama, who combined Rñiñ-ma-pa with Gelugpa lineages, wrote treatises on the Yañ-gsañ (*atiguhya*) form of Hayagrīva, whose history is related in a gter-ma book said to have been discovered at the rock of Yer-pa in Lha-sa.<sup>7</sup>

Besides, the planet Jupiter deserves a comparison mention. His Sanskrit name is Br̥haspati (master of the ritual formulas), and in classical times he

was the “guru of the gods” while the planet Venus (Śukra) was guru of the Daityas, demonic enemies of the gods; cf. *Amarakoṣa* (Sanskrit-Tibetan edition, I, 91-92). Now, Hayagrīva is lord of spells (*vidyā-rāja*) and animator of the large three-edged dagger (*vajrakīla*) which nails down the demons. This is merely a surface similarity, but may help explain why the *phur bu* translation of Jupiter’s alternate name largely pushed out the more correct *phur pa* for *kīla*.

It should be mentioned that Hayagrīva is not the only deity identified with the *phur bu*. Stein’s article shows his considerable interest in the identification of Amṛtakunḍali with Vajrakīla in the *Guhyasamājantra* lineage of its Chap. 13 and 14, and the connection with the ten *krodha* deities, including Amṛtakunḍali;<sup>8</sup> and he has also gone into this matter in his Bonn lecture.<sup>9</sup> While I also treated the ten *krodha* of the *Guhyasamāja* in terms of their directions, position in the body, and the kinds of demons respectively destroyed by each, I did not go into the matter of the *phur bu*.<sup>10</sup> The tantric commentator Bhavyakīrti has much to say about this in the introductory section to his commentary on the *Pradīpodyotana*, itself a commentary on the *Guhyasamājantra* by the tantric Candrakīrti. Bhavyakīrti presumably refers to the section toward the end of *Guhyasamāja*, Chap. 14, by his remarks in Photo ed. of Kanjur-Tanjur, Vol. 61, p. 71. Here (p. 71-3-4) he says: “At the time of fastening (demons) with the magic dagger (*phur bu*), one should contemplate the ten fury deities (*krodha*) like Bhagavat Amṛtakunḍali, i.e. like the blue lotus, because Amṛtakunḍali is all the ritual acts (*karma*, i.e. for magical results).” [2] And he says (p. 71-4-2): “One should contemplate Vajrakīla as the nature (*svabhāva*) of the ten *krodha* kings.” [3] Again (p. 71-4-7): “When one restrains (them) with the *vajrakīla*, the bodies of the demons are said to be motionless.” [4] Since *maṇḍala* theory requires the *maṇḍala* in the mind to precede the outer *maṇḍala* made of powdered colors,<sup>11</sup> etc., it follows that the subjective *maṇḍala* ritual should be taken for granted to understand his remark (p. 71-5-6): “holding down with the magic dagger dispels all constructive thought.” [5] While explaining the mantras that precede *Guhyasamāja*, 14, k. 59, Bhavyakīrti says (p. 71-5-3) that *kīlaya*, (the first one) is the imperative “May (they) attain with the *kīla* at the crown of the head!” [6] He says (p. 71-5-4) that the next *kīlaya*, but in compound with *vajra*, is the vocative “O ten *krodha*.” [7] He says (p. 71-5-5) that the last *kīlaya*, also in compound with *vajra*, is the imperative “May they differentiate (i.e. body, speech, and mind).” [8] Soon this author says (p.71-5-8): “Besides, it is the precept called ‘nature of Hayagrīva.’” [9]

It remains to speak briefly about the book on the topic by Huntington.<sup>12</sup> This is invaluable for its wealth of illustrations. The discussion covers such scholarly sources as Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*. It was of course correct for the author to use generally the term *phur pa*, although admittedly the usual Tanjur passages containing the translation of *kīla* (dagger, nail) or *kīlana* (holding down with the dagger, nail) exhibit the

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form *phur bu*. Huntington's illustrations are a corrective for seeing a particular *phur bu* (or, *phur pa*) in a museum and thinking that now we know what it looks like, because he has a remarkable variety in his figures.<sup>13</sup> I suppose there is a danger of including too many different objects under the *phur pa* heading; but he of course knows that the *phur pa* is different from the *khaṭvāṅga*, the *danḍa*, and the sword (T. *ral gri*). I should prefer to conclude, on the basis of the findings in these notes, that the *phur pa* has a down-pointing three-edged blade and is necessarily down-pointing due to the orientation of the face or faces of a head on top.<sup>14</sup>

For the Rñiñ-ma-pa to have subjected this notion and its ritual implementation to such a flourishing native Tibetan development, suggests that we have in this *phur bu* one of those sensitive points of Indo-Tibetan religious practice and symbolism that warrants the scholarly treatment here and elsewhere.

## NOTES

1. Georgette Meredith, "The *Phurbu*: the Use and Symbolism of the Tibetan Magic Dagger," *History of Religions*, 6:3, Feb. 1967, pp. 236-253.
  2. R. A. Stein, "A propos des documents anciens relatifs au *phur-bu* (*kīla*)," *Proceedings of the Csoma de Kőrös Memorial Symposium*, held at Mátrafüred, Hungary 24-30 September 1976, ed. by Louis Ligeti (Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1978), pp. 427-444.
  3. So far I have not published my studies on this *Dhāraṇī*; however, I made a long note from the material for Ferdinand D. Lessing and Alex Wayman, *Mkhas grub rje's Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras* (The Hague, 1968), pp. 116-118, within which I gave Vajrakīla's individual *mantra*, repeated in the present paper.
  4. For Asaṅga's list, cf. A. Wayman, "Nescience and Insight according to Asaṅga's *Yogācārabhūmi*," in *Buddhist Studies in honor of Walpola Rahula* (Gordon Fraser, London, 1980), pp. 260-262.
  5. *Mkhas grub rje's Fundamentals*, p. 283.
  6. F. A. Bischoff & Charles Hartman, "Padmasambhava's invention of the *phur-bu*, Ms. Pelliot tibétain 44," in *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou* (Paris, 1971), pp. 11-28.
  7. Cf. *A Catalogue of the Tohoku University Collection of Tibetan Works on Buddhism*, published by The Seminary of Indology, Tohoku University, 1953, Nos. 5749-5754, in collected works of Ṅag-dbañ Blo-bzañ rgya-mtsho, Dalai-Lama V, Vol. Ga.
  8. Cf. Stein, "A propos. . ." p. 434.
  9. *L'Annuaire du Collège de France*, 78<sup>e</sup> année, Résumé des cours et travaux de de l'année scolaire 1977-1978, pp. 647-654.
  10. A. Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamājantra; the Arcane Lore of Forty Verses* (Delhi, 1977), pp. 243-4.
  11. A. Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras; Light on Indo-Tibetan*
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*Esotericism* (New York, 1973), p. 83, citing from the *Sarvarahasya-nāma-tantrarāja* the verse "Where the *maṇḍala* is explained is the sublime mental *maṇḍala*. The palace is knowledge (*jñāna*), erection of an edifice of consciousness."

12. John C. Huntington, *The Phur-pa, Tibetan Ritual Daggers* (Artibus Asiae Supplementum XXXIII, Ascona, Switzerland, 1975).
13. Huntington, *The Phur-pa*, shows many convincing examples of the *phur-pa*, some surmounted with a single face, some with multiple faces, some with upper torso of body, and some with whole body of deity on top. In some cases, there is a simple design without a deity face or faces. We find it held, e.g. in Fig. 6, *Phur-pa yab-yum*. An impressive depiction of the deity *Phur-pa* is in Fig. 70, "The tutelary of the *rNying-ma-pa*," also said to be *Padmasambhava* as "Fierce Guru with *Phur-pa*."
14. Hence, Huntington, *The Phur-pa*, Fig. 68, with the upward-pointing blade, is not a *phur pa*. Indeed, the author himself, p. 45, includes it with reservations, suggesting that it is a fake.

[1] དེ་ལ་བདེན་འགྲོ་བའི་ལས་ཀྱི་མི་བདེ་འགྲོ་ཀ་བ་དང་འདྲ་བ་ལ་

བཅིངས་སོ། ། རན་འགྲོ་བའི་ལས་ཀྱིས་མི་རན་འགྲོ་བྱུང་བྱུ་དང་འདྲ་བ་

ལ་བཅིངས་སོ། །

[2] བྱུང་བྱས་གང་བ་འདི་དུས་སུ་སྲོ་བོ་བཅུ་བཅོམ་ལྡན་འདས་

བདུད་རྩི་འབྱུལ་བ་དང་འདྲ་བ། ། ཞུ་བུ་ལ་སྲོ་བོ་ལྟ་བུ་བསམ་པར་

བྱ་ནི། ། བདུད་རྩི་འབྱུལ་བ་མི་ལས་ཐམས་ཅད་པ་ཡིན་པའི་བྱིས་རོ། །

[3] རྩི་རྩི་བྱུང་བྱུ་མི་སྲོ་བོ་ལྟ་བོ་བཅུ་འི་རང་བཞིན་དུ་བསམ་

བར་བྱོལ། །

[4] རྩེ་རྩེ་ལྷན་ལྷན་ངེས་བཏབ་ན། བཞུགས་ཀྱི་ལྷན་ལ་མི་

གཡོ་འགྲུར་ཞེས་སྣོན་བའ་ལ།

[5] རྩེ་བར་རྩེ་གས [sic, for རྩེ་ག] བ་ཐམས་ཅད་སེལ་

བ་མི་ལྷན་ལྷན་བཏབ་པ།

[6] ལྷི་ལ་ཡ་མི་རྩེ་ལྷན་ལྷན་ཐོབ་ཅིག་པོ།

[7] བཏོ་ལྷི་ལ་ཡ་མི་རྩེ་ལྷན་ལྷན་ཐོབ་ཅིག་པོ།

[8] བཏོ་ལྷི་ལ་ཡ་མི་རྩེ་ལྷན་ལྷན་ཐོབ་ཅིག་པོ།

[9] རེ་ཡང་རྩེ་མགྲིན་གྱི་རང་བཞིན་ཞེས་མན་ངག་ག།



