

# Patrons and Barbarians: The Righteous Dharma King and Ritual Warfare According to Tāranātha<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

**N**ow did Tibetan Buddhists conceive of the ideal ruler? Early Buddhist thought on this question fell into two camps, either that kingship is inherently karmically negative due to its violence, or that ideal kings are capable of ruling in accordance with the dharma.<sup>3</sup> In more recent times, debate has also raged between those who see Tibetan Buddhism as essentially pacifistic and those who emphasize Tibetans' involvement in warfare and power politics.<sup>4</sup> In order to examine what Tibetan Buddhists actually believed about the ethics of kingship, we must turn to sources written by Tibetan Buddhists. These sources include overtly political writings, such as the *nītiśāstra* literature of statecraft and ethics,<sup>5</sup> but also Tibetan historical writings, which have been overlooked as a source of political thought. The 1608 *History of Buddhism in India* (*Rgya gar chos 'byung*), written by the great Jonangpa scholar Tāranātha (1575–1634), is especially rich in political ideas. In this *chöchung* (*chos 'byung*), or dharma history, Tāranātha does

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Karl Debreczeny for suggesting this project and for organizing the Tibetan Buddhism and Political Power in the Courts of Asia conference at the Rubin Museum of Art, where I presented an earlier version of the paper, entitled “Mlecchas at the Gates: The Dharma King and his Enemies According to Tāranātha on April 6, 2019. Thanks also to Grey Tuttle, Bryan Cuevas, and others at the conference for their comments on my paper, and to Jean-Luc Achard of *RET* and the peer reviewers.

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 420–21.

<sup>4</sup> Elliot Sperling, “‘Orientalism’ and Aspects of Violence in the Tibetan Tradition,” ed. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther (Somerville: Wisdom, 2001), 317–30. Bryan Cuevas, “The Politics of Magical Warfare,” in *Faith and Empire*, ed. Karl Debreczeny (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2019), 171–89. Karl Debreczeny, “Faith and Empire: An Overview,” in *Faith and Empire*, 19–52.

<sup>5</sup> A recent study of this literature is José Cabezón’s translation of a *nītiśāstra* treatise by Mipham (Mi pham ‘jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho, 1846–1912): José Ignacio Cabezón and Mi pham, *The Just King: Mipham’s Treatise on Ethics for Kings* (Boulder: Snow Lion, 2017).

not focus on secular affairs but rather Buddhist masters and their lineages. Still, the deeds of kings are essential to his history of Buddhism, and he portrays them either as benevolent patrons of the dharma or as *mlecchas* (barbarians) who oppose the dharma and must be combatted with force. Despite relying on ancient Indian sources, Tāranātha also takes inspiration from the political situation of Tibet in his day, in which his own Jonangpa tradition was threatened by sectarian conflict with the Gelukpa tradition and allied Mongol armies. Beyond its historical content, Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India* is an invaluable source of Tibetan political thought, one that advocates that kings should support the dharma, by peaceful and violent means, against rival traditions and hostile powers.

This article first considers the historical context of Tāranātha's life. In particular, I examine the political situation of Tibet in Tāranātha's lifetime, paying special attention to the sectarian and regional conflicts and the involvement of Mongols, and Tāranātha's relationships with his patrons, the Tsangpa *desis* (*sde srid*).<sup>6</sup> Then I examine how the *History of Buddhism in India* expressed a vision of the ideal ruler. I consider especially how he portrayed the virtues of kings who supported Buddhism, as well as the vices of the dharma's opponents. I also explore Tāranātha's portrayal of *mlecchas* as enemies of Buddhism, their historical identity (Muslim, Mongol, or otherwise), and the means he deemed necessary to fight them. Finally, I analyze his work in the context of early seventeenth century Tibet, making the case that this work reflects Tāranātha's concerns over the fate of the dharma in the hands of warring rulers, emphasizing the importance of patrons, the threat of *mlecchas* and sectarianism, and the use of physical and ritual violence in response. Finally, I consider the implications of using historical writings as a source for Tibetan political ethics.

### *The life of Tāranātha*

Tāranātha was one of the greatest Tibetan scholars of his era, best known for his unique connections to India as well as his efforts to revive the controversial Jonangpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which would later be deemed heterodox under the Gelukpa rule of the Dalai Lamas. Tāranātha was born in 1575 in Tsang, in the town of Dreng or Drang ('Breng/'Brang), home to the Ra (Rwa) clan.<sup>7</sup> His lineage

<sup>6</sup> Another common title for the ruler of Tsang was *depa* (*sde pa*).

<sup>7</sup> Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 2:675. Tāranātha, *TA ra nA tha'i rang nyid kyi rnam thar nges par brjod pa 'i deb gter shin tu zhib mo ma bcos lhug pa'i rtogs brjod*, Gsung 'bum (Dpe bsdur ma) (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2008), 1:12, <https://www.tbrc.org/#!rid=W1PD45495>.

descended from Ra Lotsawa Dorjé Drak (Rwa lo tsA ba rdo rje grags, 1016–1128), a disciple of the renowned translator Atiśa (982–1055), and the family included scholars and patrons of other Buddhist traditions. The Ra clan also became a powerful aristocratic family in Tsang.<sup>8</sup> At a young age, Tāranātha was brought to the Jonangpa monastery Chölung Jangtsé and recognized as an incarnation of the Jonangpa master Kunga Drölchok (Kun dga' grol mchog, 1507–1566). From the disciples of Kunga Drölchok and others, he received a complete set of philosophical teachings and initiations important to the Jonangpa tradition, including Six-Branch Yoga, Mahāmudrā, Lamdré, and Kālacakra. He also received teachings from the Indian yogi Buddhaguptanātha and others.<sup>9</sup> His relationships with and visions of Indian yogis were formative to his identity and influenced his scholarship.<sup>10</sup>

After Tāranātha was enthroned as the lineage holder at Jonang Monastery in 1588, he embarked on a project of reviving the Jonangpa tradition. In particular, he wanted to revive the philosophy of its founder Dolpopa Sherab Gyeltsen (Dol po pa Shes rab Rgyal mtshan, 1292–1361) and his controversial *shentong* (*gzhan stong*) view of emptiness, which Tāranātha considered essential for tantric practices. He also had the great stupa of Jonang Monastery restored.<sup>11</sup> The ruler of Tsang, the *desi*, patronized him extensively and gave him land to build a new monastery (completed in 1628) that served as headquarters for the Jonangpa tradition, known as Takten Damchö Ling (Rtag brtan dam chos gling). Tāranātha was renowned for Indological scholarship on Sanskrit and historical works such as the 1617 *Life of the Buddha*.<sup>12</sup> His most important works, by his own account, were histories and exegeses of tantra systems like Kālacakra and systematizations of the *shentong* philosophy.<sup>13</sup> All in all, he was a very learned man, especially

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<sup>8</sup> David Templeman, “A World Upside Down: Religious Prelates and Secular Rulers in Seventeenth-Century Tsang,” in *The Tenth Karma and Tibet’s Turbulent Seventeenth Century*, ed. Karl Debreczeny and Gray Tuttle (Chicago: Serindia, 2016), 19. Tāranātha, *Tāranātha rnam thar*, 2008, 1:11–15.

<sup>9</sup> Cyrus Stearns, “Tāranātha,” *The Treasury of Lives*, 2008, <http://treasuryof-lives.org/biographies/view/Taranata/2712>. Sherab Drime, “Buddhagupta-Natha,” *The Treasury of Lives*, accessed October 7, 2019, <http://treasuryof-lives.org/biographies/view/Buddhagupta-natha/6412>.

<sup>10</sup> Tāranātha, *Tāranātha rnam thar*, 2008, 1:133, 227–28.

<sup>11</sup> Stearns, “Tāranātha.”

<sup>12</sup> Templeman, “A World Upside Down,” 21, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, “Supplementary Notes,” in *History of Buddhism in India*, by Tāranātha, ed. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, 1990 reprint (Simla, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), xiv.

when it came to Indian Buddhism and Sanskrit. Before Tāranātha died, he prophesied future troubles for the Jonangpa tradition.<sup>14</sup>

*Tāranātha and the U-Tsang war*

Tāranātha was no ivory tower scholar, but intimately involved in the Tibetan political struggles of his era. The background to these struggles involved regional and sectarian rivalries, and the increasing involvement of Mongolians in Tibetan affairs. The *desis* of Tsang had established themselves as the dominant power in Tibet after 1565, following their defeat of the Rinpungpa.<sup>15</sup> Unlike other Tibetan rulers, the Tsangpas were not lineage holders of a religious tradition, or reincarnating *triilkus* (*sprul sku*), and did not claim descent from a prominent imperial-era lineage. They compensated for their lack of traditional legitimation by trying to revive the glories of the old Tibetan Empire.<sup>16</sup> They were generous patrons of a wide range of schools, including Karma Kagyu, Nyingma and Tāranātha's Jonang.<sup>17</sup> The Gelukpa tradition was initially supportive of the Tsangpa regime, but grew suspicious of their power and sought out Mongol allies.<sup>18</sup> According to Elliot Sperling, "The religious authority of the Gelukpa was a source of strength in itself and the school, though subject to severe harassment, could not be dealt with by the rulers of Tsang in a simple, peremptory manner."<sup>19</sup>

The power of the Mongols was reviving in the late sixteenth century, after a long period of retreat following the fall of the Yuan dynasty.<sup>20</sup> In 1577 the Third Dalai Lama made his famous visit to Altan Khan of the Tümed Mongols, who gave him the title of "Dalai Lama" in exchange for initiation into tantric rites and recognition as an incarnation of Qubilai Khan. Both parties desired to restore the relationship between Sakya lama Chögyel Phakpa and Qubilai Khan formed in

<sup>14</sup> Sanggye Gyatso should not be confused with the regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Stearns, "Tāranātha."

<sup>15</sup> W. D. Shakabpa, *One Hundred Thousand Moons: An Advanced Political History of Tibet*, trans. Derek Maher (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 281.

<sup>16</sup> Templeman, "A World Upside Down," 14–15. Samten G. Karmay, "The Fifth Dalai Lama and His Reunification of Tibet," in *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Françoise Pommaret (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 66.

<sup>17</sup> David Templeman, "The Seventeenth-Century Tsang Rulers and Their Strategies of Legitimation," in *The Tenth Karmapa*, 30.

<sup>18</sup> James Gentry, "Representations of Efficacy: The Ritual Expulsion of Mongol Armies in the Consolidation and Expansion of the Tsang (Gtsang) Dynasty," in *Tibetan Ritual*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 147.

<sup>19</sup> Elliot Sperling, "Tibet's Foreign Relations and the Fifth Dalai Lama," in *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century*, 122.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

1251, in which the Mongol emperor had installed the Sakya hierarchs as vassal rulers of Tibet.<sup>21</sup> Many Mongols allied to Altan Khan converted to Geluk in the years following this meeting.<sup>22</sup> Various factions of Mongols began invading Tibet, initially plundering on their own behalf.<sup>23</sup> But soon they became involved in Tibetan factional politics. The Fourth Dalai Lama was recognized in Mongolia, within Altan Khan's family, in 1592.<sup>24</sup> This ultimately had the effect of solidifying the Geluk-Mongol alliance. The rulers of Tsang sought ritual assistance from the so-called Mongol-repellers, tantric masters who sought to repel the Mongols with their rituals. Shortly after his succession to the throne, *desi* Karma Tensung Wangpo (Kar ma Bstan srung Dbang po, reigned 1599–1611) met Sokdokpa and instituted annual rites for Mongol repelling.<sup>25</sup> Tāranātha's predecessor Kunga Drölchok also performed Mongol-repelling rituals for the *desis*.<sup>26</sup> From 1595 on, Tāranātha himself performed many rituals for the *desis*, blessing them and their shrines and counteracting black magic.<sup>27</sup>

In 1599, the Fourth Dalai Lama set out for central Tibet, accompanied by Mongol soldiers, leading to military conflicts that took place from 1603 to 1621 between Tsangpa and Gelukpa forces in the U region.<sup>28</sup> The official recognition of the Fourth Dalai Lama in 1603 was a moment of triumph for the Geluk, but despair for Tsang and their allies.<sup>29</sup> One reason for discontent was that the Mongolian Dalai Lama was recognized over a rival candidate from the Drigung Kagyu tradition, an ally of Tsang.<sup>30</sup> Tāranātha, in his autobiography, blames the wars on Gelukpa-Kagyupa sectarianism, as well as the presence of Mongol troops.<sup>31</sup> Tsang launched an invasion of U and Lhasa in 1603 and in response the Mongols occupied Lhasa to defend Geluk.<sup>32</sup> Both

<sup>21</sup> Shakabpa, *Advanced Political History*, 299–300. Debreczeny, "Faith and Empire: An Overview," 42.

<sup>22</sup> Zahiruddin Ahmad, *Sino-Tibetan Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1970), 99.

<sup>23</sup> Gentry, "Representations of Efficacy," 141. James Duncan Gentry, *Power Objects in Tibetan Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 111.

<sup>24</sup> Shakabpa, *Advanced Political History*, 305. Karmay, "The Fifth Dalai Lama," 66.

<sup>25</sup> Gentry, "Representations of Efficacy," 148–50.

<sup>26</sup> Templeman, "A World Upside Down," 17. Templeman, "Seventeenth-Century Tsang," 38.

<sup>27</sup> Templeman, "A World Upside Down," 21–23.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>29</sup> Olaf Czaja, *Medieval Rule in Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013), 303–4. Gentry, *Power Objects*, 126.

<sup>30</sup> Sørensen and Hazod, 536.

<sup>31</sup> Tāranātha, *Tāranātha rnam thar*, 2008, 1:233, 235.

<sup>32</sup> W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 98–99. Templeman, "A World Upside Down," 24.

sides turned to wrathful tantric rituals to win victory in battle, including the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama on the side of Geluk, and Sokdokpa and Tāranātha on the side of Tsang.<sup>33</sup> The Tsangpa forces were initially victorious and expelled the Mongols from Lhasa.<sup>34</sup>

In 1604, while fighting raged in the Jang region north of Lhasa, Tāranātha experienced prophetic visions and performed rituals for the success of Tsang. As he traveled toward the fighting and visited different monasteries, visions of Dolpopa and Green Tara assured him of the future of the Jonang tradition and of Tsang victory.<sup>35</sup> He went to Phenyul to bless the Tsangpa armies before their battle and held audiences with the *desi* Karma Tensung Wangpo.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, the armies of Tsang won a victory over U and the allied Mongols.<sup>37</sup> Tāranātha's biography naturally credits Tāranātha's ritual efforts, although others had done similar rituals: "it was said not just once that the army depended on you for their victory."<sup>38</sup> For the remainder of the war, he frequently performed rituals against Mongols and for the victory of Tsang.<sup>39</sup> This war was still ongoing in 1608 when the time Tāranātha wrote *History of Indian Buddhism*, at a time when Tsang had reached the height of its power, and one of their allies built a palace on the Potala.<sup>40</sup>

Phuntsok Namgyel became *desi* of Tsang in 1611 and renewed the war with U, encouraged by Tāranātha's own *protégé* Rabjampa.<sup>41</sup> Tāranātha tried to discourage him from invading Bhutan, but made no effort to stop the war with U.<sup>42</sup> The war ended in 1621 and Tsang and U remained at peace during Tāranātha's lifetime. Nevertheless, Jesuits who visited later in the century noted ongoing sectarianism, and the Fifth Dalai Lama described Jonang as an ally of Tsang prior to his

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<sup>33</sup> Cuevas, "The Politics of Magical Warfare," 180. Shakabpa, *Advanced Political History*, 314.

<sup>34</sup> Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 100–101.

<sup>35</sup> Based on this vision, he also received insight into *shentong* philosophy and wrote the *Ornament of the Shentong Middle Way* (Gzhan stong dbu ma'i rgyan). Stearns, "Tāranātha." Templeman, "A World Upside Down." Tāranātha, *Tāranātha rnam thar*, 2008, 1:234.

<sup>36</sup> Tāranātha, *Tāranātha rnam thar*, 2008, 1:235.

<sup>37</sup> Shakabpa, *Advanced Political History*, 312. Sørensen and Hazod, 536.

<sup>38</sup> Tāranātha, *Tāranātha rnam thar*, 2008, 1:236. Others took credit, including Sokdokpa. Gentry, *Power Objects*, 127. Gentry, "Representations of Efficacy," 151.

<sup>39</sup> Templeman, "Seventeenth-Century Tsang," 42–43.

<sup>40</sup> Sørensen and Hazod, 537.

<sup>41</sup> Czaja, *Medieval Rule in Tibet*, 309–10. Shakabpa, *Advanced Political History*, 283–315.

<sup>42</sup> Shakabpa, *Advanced Political History*, 283–84. Sørensen and Hazod, 537.

conquest of Tibet in 1642.<sup>43</sup> Tāranātha's ritual activities on behalf of Tsang were one reason for the enduring enmity of Geluk toward Jonang, leading eventually to the Dalai Lama's suppression of Jonang in central Tibet.<sup>44</sup>

*Tāranātha and the legitimacy of violence in Buddhism*

According to David Templeman, "Tibetan prelates have often allowed themselves to be drawn into their patron's webs of deceit and have lent their authority to suspect practices such as those of the legitimation of their rule," as shown by Tāranātha's support for military campaigns.<sup>45</sup> Although Templeman sees Tāranātha's actions as inconsistent with Buddhism, Tāranātha likely saw the political and military success of his patron as essential to the survival of Jonang. The modern image of an apolitical, nonviolent Buddhism has been disputed by other scholars as a product of Orientalism. Karl Debreczeny describes Tibetan Buddhism as a religion intrinsically tied to politics and power, characterized by "the force of religion to claim political power, both symbolically as a path to legitimation, in the form of sacral kingship, and literally as a tantric ritual technology to physical power, in the form of magic." Buddhism appealed to rulers because it promoted an ideal of a universal rule in the name of the dharma, as well as esoteric rituals that served as means to power.<sup>46</sup> According to Sperling, it would be anachronistic to see Tibetan rulers of the past as following Gandhian *ahimsa*, and historical Tibetan rulers were quite willing to resort to violence in many circumstances. Rulers including the Fifth and Thirteenth Dalai Lamas believed that protecting the dharma justified wrathful tantric rituals and military campaigns.<sup>47</sup> Tāranātha had similar views about violence, expressed in his biography as well as the *History of Buddhism in India*.

This is not to say that Buddhism never recognized the moral undesirability of violence. Early Buddhist texts describe a contradiction between political rule and the ideal of world renunciation. Despite the ubiquity of violence and coercion in society, according to Steven Collins, some Buddhist texts did express an ideal of peaceful existence without force.<sup>48</sup> Two modes of political ethics can be found in early

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<sup>43</sup> Nancy Moore Gattelman, "Karma-Bstan-Skyong and the Jesuits," in *Reflections on Tibetan Culture*, ed. Lawrence Epstein and Richard F. Sherburne (Lewiston, NY, 1990), 273–76.

<sup>44</sup> Debreczeny, "Faith and Empire: An Overview," 47.

<sup>45</sup> Templeman, "Seventeenth-Century Tsang," 44.

<sup>46</sup> Debreczeny, "Faith and Empire: An Overview," 19. Sperling, "Orientalism," 319.

<sup>47</sup> Sperling, "Orientalism," 320, 324.

<sup>48</sup> Collins, 417.

Buddhism. One mode justified violence on the grounds of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”<sup>49</sup> The other mode asserts that all violence is karmically negative and that kings will therefore inevitably go to hell. There were attempts to reconcile the two modes with an ideal of nonviolent kingship (like Aśoka after his conversion) but it was one impossible in the real world.<sup>50</sup>

Tāranātha took the position that violence is justified on behalf of a Buddhist state, including the use of wrathful tantric rituals. In his autobiography, he frequently praises such rituals to repel *mleccha* armies and evil spirits.<sup>51</sup> He engages in a lengthy defense of the legitimacy of rituals of “direct action” (*mngon spyod kyi las*), in response to gossip that criticized him for performing them.<sup>52</sup> Tāranātha quotes a number of tantras that affirm the legitimacy of wrathful rituals (including *Hevajra* and *Guhyasamāja*).<sup>53</sup> He also appeals to the idea of “ten fields of liberation” (*bsgral ba'i zhing bcu*), or people who can justly be killed by these rites for the greater good. These include teachers and students who undermine the Buddha's teaching; those who insult the Three Jewels; those who harm patrons, lamas, or *ācāryas* (spiritual masters); and breakers of spiritual vows. Tāranātha states that “emptiness is refuted without compassion,” which indicates that wrathful actions should be done for the sake of saving sentient beings, and “never for one's own sake.”<sup>54</sup> However, he also argues that if it is wrong to perform wrathful rituals, then Buddhists would have to renounce accepted rituals like pinning down spirits with the *kila*, throwing *torma* effigies, even performing divination.<sup>55</sup> Tāranātha clearly approved of the use of wrathful rituals in war.

### *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*

In the midst of the U-Tsang conflicts, Tāranātha wrote his *History of Buddhism in India* in 1608. Unlike the *Life of the Buddha*, he did not dedicate it to a patron, but wrote it based on his own personal interest.<sup>56</sup> In the dedication, he explains that the intent of his work is to correct

<sup>49</sup> At the extreme, it could justify wars of aggression; the Sri Lankan epic *Mahāvamsa*, states that a king who bloodily conquered Sri Lanka only killed one and a half human beings (a monk and a novice); others slain do not count because they refused to go for refuge to Buddhism. Collins, 416–20.

<sup>50</sup> Collins, 421–22.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Tāranātha, *Tāranātha rnam thar*, 2008, 1:120.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:202–7.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:202–4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:206.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:207.

<sup>56</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 5, 351–52.



Tibetan scholars' mistaken ideas about India and the origins of the Buddhist dharma:

Here [in Tibet], even the scholars who write records and histories, when they take to discussing India, even if they make their best efforts, demonstrate the very cause of their poverty, like poor people selling merchandise. Since some scholars, when setting forth the origin of the dharma, are seen to make many mistakes, for the sake of others' benefit, I will write briefly an account that removes these mistakes.<sup>57</sup>

In the ending colophon, he additionally explains that he seeks to instill devotion for the dharma and those who worked on its behalf.<sup>58</sup> The work falls into the category of *chöchung*, a genre that arose out of the revival of Buddhism in Tibet, according to Leonard van der Kuijp because "it is possible that with the proliferation of various doctrinal cycles a need was felt to place these in historical perspective and thereby legitimate them."<sup>59</sup> Tāranātha's own understanding of the *History* was that it is inherently auspicious as the story of the Dharma, and that it "led to the fulfillment of all desires."<sup>60</sup> However, Tāranātha did not consider it his most important work, and it is never mentioned in his autobiography, unlike his philosophical and tantric works.<sup>61</sup>

The *History* was originally published by Jonang Monastery, but inside central Tibet, the printing blocks were destroyed after the Fifth Dalai Lama took power in 1642. Some copies survived elsewhere, kept by Tāranātha's recognized incarnations in Mongolia.<sup>62</sup> The first translations by Westerners were published by the German Anton Schiefner and the Russian Vasily Pavlovich Vasil'ev in 1869.<sup>63</sup> Tāranātha's incarnation in Mongolia explained to them the importance of the text.<sup>64</sup> The *History* became well known to modern scholars as a valuable source

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 5. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rig Dpe skrun khang, 1994), 3, <https://www.tbrc.org/#!rid=W12434>.

<sup>58</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 351. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 268–69.

<sup>59</sup> Leonard van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Belles-Lettres: The Influence of Daṇḍin and Kṣemendra," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger Jackson (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1995), 46.

<sup>60</sup> Chattopadhyaya, "Supplementary Notes," xxiii.

<sup>61</sup> Samdhong Rinpoche, "Foreword," in *History of Buddhism in India*, xiv.

<sup>62</sup> Chattopadhyaya, "Supplementary Notes," xxiv.

<sup>63</sup> Chattopadhyaya, "Supplementary Notes," xxv.

<sup>64</sup> V. P. Vasil'ev, "Introduction to the Russian Translation of Tāranātha's History of Buddhism," in *History of Buddhism in India*, 468–70.

on the history of Buddhism and of India, containing political history and folktales not known elsewhere.<sup>65</sup>

Tāranātha uses a wide range of Indian Buddhist sources in his *History*, including some that are only known through his history. For the early genealogies of rulers before Buddha, they include the *Vinaya* and biographies of the Buddha like *Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra* and the *Lalitavistara*. He finds that non-Buddhist texts (such as the epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*) contain some historical information, but he largely ignores them because “they are mixed up with all kinds of falsehoods and have no connection with the history of the true dharma.”<sup>66</sup> For later history, he relies on accounts from pandits in India and medieval Indian historical writings.<sup>67</sup> His access to such oral and written sources, combined with his Sanskrit learning, is one of the unique features of his work.<sup>68</sup> These sources include verse works such as the *Buddhapurāṇa* of Indradatta, the writings of Kṣemendrabhadra and Bhaṭṭaḥaṭṭi on royal and religious lineages, and Manomati’s *Garland of Flowers* (*Me tog phreng ba*) on the South Indian kings.<sup>69</sup>

How is Tāranātha to be characterized as a historian? Vasil’ev describes the *History* that he translated as something of a disappointment; “not a faithful exposition of something unknown” but a guide to future research, one that might help with some of the scholarly questions of his day, like the dating of the Buddha’s life.<sup>70</sup> (Samdhong Rinpoche echoes this assessment: “I entirely agree with V.P. Vasil’ev that the history of Tāranātha is not history as such but history in the sense of a document that calls for further research in history.”<sup>71</sup>) Vasil’ev also characterizes Tāranātha’s work as inaccurate due to “the general character of the peoples of the East...who believe in everything miraculous.”<sup>72</sup> and criticizes him (and other Tibetans) for “carrying everything back to antiquity,” for instance attributing tantric practices to Nāgārjuna. However, Vasil’ev still recognizes that Tāranātha uses critical historical methods, dating figures by references to them in

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<sup>65</sup> Samdhong Rinpoche, “Foreword,” xiv. Chattopadhyaya, “Supplementary Notes,” xxvii.

<sup>66</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 19. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos ’byung*, 8.

<sup>67</sup> Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos ’byung*, 267–68.

<sup>68</sup> Samdhong Rinpoche, “Foreword,” xii–xiii.

<sup>69</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 350–51. Dan Martin, “Tibetan Histories: Addenda & Corrigenda,” 2014, 69–70, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/yfgql972ocunuuj2/Tibetan%20Histories%20Addenda.doc>. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos ’byung*, 267–68.

<sup>70</sup> Vasil’ev, “Introduction,” 453–56.

<sup>71</sup> Samdhong Rinpoche, “Foreword,” xii.

<sup>72</sup> Vasil’ev, “Introduction,” 456.

other works.<sup>73</sup> This positive judgment of Tāranātha been echoed more recently by Templeman who notes the judgments he makes between conflicting sources.<sup>74</sup> Although legends and miracles do appear in the *History*, Tāranātha confines the work to the conventional level (as opposed to the level of tantric pure vision), giving it a character more similar to modern secular history.<sup>75</sup>

In attempting to relate the *History of Buddhism in India* to Tāranātha's milieu and his own ideas, it is important to raise the question, does he do more than passively reproduce his sources? Western scholars from Victorian times to the present have criticized Tibetan historians for their "cut and paste method." Noting the stylistic differences between Tāranātha's sources, Vasil'ev states that "the Eastern writers never try to pass on anything read by them in their own words; the earliest text, as originally written, is reproduced in toto from one work to another."<sup>76</sup> Tāranātha's historical writings themselves have been copied in this way.<sup>77</sup> His nineteenth-century Orientalism is evident, as more recent scholars including Van der Kuijp have also noted that Tibetan histories interpolate others' work and do not clearly mark quoted passages.<sup>78</sup> Per Sørensen criticizes Tibetan historiography thus: "The cases of plagiarism with page-long quotations, most often uncritically and haphazardly rephrased, are well-nigh legion. Nor is a critical attitude a dominant feature among Tibetan monk-historians."<sup>79</sup> But this fails to give Tāranātha his due. Even if Tāranātha reproduces some Indian sources without much editing, Tāranātha (like all historians) still must contribute his own interpretations in order to coherently narrate the history of Indian Buddhism. In order to do this, he has to reconcile a variety of sources, told from different perspectives in different eras. They are especially diverse in the case of the Aśoka narrative.<sup>80</sup> In dealing with the early vinaya councils, Tāranātha likewise faces the problem of conflicting authorities, and he interprets them in a manner consistent with his own tradition's interpretation of the transmission of

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<sup>73</sup> Vasil'ev, "Introduction," 457–59.

<sup>74</sup> David Templeman, "Taranatha the Historian," *The Tibet Journal* 6, no. 2 (1981): 42–43.

<sup>75</sup> Samdhong Rinpoche, "Foreword," xiii. Chattopadhyaya, "Supplementary Notes," xxvii.

<sup>76</sup> Vasil'ev, "Introduction," 456.

<sup>77</sup> Templeman, "Taranatha the Historian," 42.

<sup>78</sup> van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Belles-Lettres: The Influence of Daṇḍin and Kṣemendra," 49.

<sup>79</sup> Per K. Sørensen, *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies: Tibetan Buddhist Historiography* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1994), 12. Sørensen notes some exceptions among Tibetan historians, but does not mention Tāranātha.

<sup>80</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 362–63.

vinaya into Tibet.<sup>81</sup> In the case of later Indian Buddhism, there is much less of a traditional narrative to draw upon, so Tāranātha needs to do more original work to piece together the later Indian sources. In constructing the overall historical narrative, choosing what to emphasize, and offering assessments, Tāranātha's own concerns enter into the *History of Buddhism in India*.

#### *Tāranātha and Indian Pandits*

A major influence on Tāranātha's historical writings was the Indian travelers he encountered, who made him more cognizant of the current situation of Indian Buddhism. In the early seventeenth century, links between Tibet and India had diminished, due to the near disappearance of Buddhism in India, but they had by no means closed. Bengali writings confirm that there were still Buddhist communities in India in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, long after the destruction of Nālandā.<sup>82</sup> A few Indian pilgrims, mostly Hindu, came through Lhasa en route to pilgrimage sites like Mount Kailash.<sup>83</sup> Tāranātha's connections to India were formative to his identity. His *Secret Biography* states that he learned Indian languages as a young child without a teacher, and two Indian yogis in a dream gave him the Sanskrit name Tāranātha.<sup>84</sup> Many other contacts with and visions of Indian yogis are detailed in his biography; one great Kashmiri pandit appeared in a dream to warn of the coming war.<sup>85</sup> Tibetans often looked to Indians as authenticators of Tibetan Buddhist lineages, and few Tibetans looked to India more than Tāranātha.<sup>86</sup> Templeman has even suggested that the *History of Buddhism in India* was less about Buddhist doctrine than Tāranātha's idealized vision of India.<sup>87</sup>

Tāranātha was unique among Tibetan scholars for his scholarly conversations with Indian pandits, whose knowledge he valued regardless of whether or not they were Buddhist.<sup>88</sup> Among the pandits he met were Purṇānanda and Pryāmānanda, who "held Buddhist tenets, but also were greatly devoted to practicing their ancestors' religions traditions, and honored one or two *tīrthika* [non-Buddhist] gods;

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 370–72.

<sup>82</sup> Giuseppe Tucci, "The Sea and Land Travels of a Buddhist Sadhu in the Sixteenth Century," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (December 1931): 683–84.

<sup>83</sup> Templeman, "A World Upside Down," 24–25.

<sup>84</sup> Samdhong Rinpoche, "Foreword," xiii.

<sup>85</sup> Tāranātha, *Tāranātha rnam thar*, 2008, 1:227–28.

<sup>86</sup> James Burnell Robinson, "The Lives of Indian Buddhist Saints," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, 57.

<sup>87</sup> Templeman, "Taranatha the Historian," 44.

<sup>88</sup> Templeman, "A World Upside Down," 24–25.

therefore [Tāranātha] did not receive teachings or empowerments from them." Tāranātha was willing to learn Sanskrit grammar and read with them the *Rāmāyāna* and *Mahābhārata*, but he resisted their calls to worship the gods of the epics like Hanuman.<sup>89</sup> What remained of Indian Buddhism was losing its distinctiveness within broader South Asian religious currents. Nevertheless, Tāranātha met real practitioners of tantric Buddhism including his guru Buddhaguptanātha, the subject of a biography he wrote.<sup>90</sup> Buddhaguptanātha was from the nonmonastic Nāthapanthi school, a tradition that originally had a connection to Buddhism, and his practices were quite close to Śaiva tantric practices.<sup>91</sup> Tāranātha also corresponded with such figures as the Buddhist yogi Changaśrī from South India who followed the Mahāyāna, and king Balabhadra of the kingdom of Badua in the Vindhya hills (in modern-day Madhya Pradesh), who desired to revive tantric Buddhism.<sup>92</sup> Tucci speculates that these yogis may have influenced him to espouse a monistic philosophical view, closer to Hinduism than Buddhism.<sup>93</sup> As explained above, Tāranātha also relied on conversations with pandits, and the Indian sources to which they introduced him, in writing the *History of Indian Buddhism*. Tāranātha's contacts with Indian religious practitioners were an additional influence on his understanding of politics, giving him a more international perspective on how the fate of Buddhism was intertwined with rulers and armies.

<sup>89</sup> Tāranātha, *Tāranātha rnam thar*, 2008, 1:133. Van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Belles-Lettres: The Influence of Dañḍin and Kṣemendra," 399, 405n3. Samdhong Rinpoche, "Foreword," xiii.

<sup>90</sup> Tāranātha, *Grub chen buddha gupta'i rnam thar rje btsun nyid kyi zhal lung las gzhan du rang rtog gi dri mas ma sbags pa'i yi ge yang dag pa*, vol. 34, Gsung 'bum (Dpe bsdur ma) (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2008).

<sup>91</sup> Drime, "Buddhagupta-Natha." Tucci, "Buddhist Sadhu," 686. Drime compares the nonmonastic nature of the tradition to the Newar Buddhism of the Kathmandu Valley, whose practices often resemble Hinduism. Founded by Gorakṣa Gorakhnātha, the Nāthapanthis and their practice of *haṭhayaoga* were an important influence on modern yoga. Tucci, 685–88. See also David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Modern India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>92</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, xii–xiv.

<sup>93</sup> Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1949), 91. However, the *shentong* view of emptiness was originally propounded by Dolpopa in the fourteenth century and critiqued by Khedrupjé in the *Stong thun chen mo* (1420s) well before Tāranātha. Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang po and José Ignacio Cabezón, *A Dose of Emptiness: An Annotated Translation of the STong Thun Chen Mo of MKhas-Grub DGe-Legs-Dpal-Bzang* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 6, 48–49.

*Kings in the History of Indian Buddhism*

Although the subject of *History of Buddhism in India* is the dharma rather than politics, the structure of the work expresses the centrality of kings to the history of Buddhism.<sup>94</sup> Tāranātha's table of contents outlines the royal genealogies around which the work is organized: four descendants of Ajātaśatru, four descendants of Aśoka, nineteen members of the "Candra dynasty", fourteen Pālas, and so forth.<sup>95</sup> He lists *ācāryas*, *arhats*, Mahāyāna saints and finally tantric teachers only after the kings.<sup>96</sup> The majority of chapters are organized based on the reigns of kings. Even though Tāranātha explains that "I will only tell the story of deeds performed for the dharma," and that he has no interest in the genealogies of non-Buddhist kings "because they have no connection with the history of the true dharma" this does not mean he ignores politics entirely.<sup>97</sup> Clearly, he considers political patrons important to the spread of the dharma. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya criticizes him for praising them excessively; in Chattopadhyaya's view, Buddhism declined when the elite focused on patrons rather than ordinary people.<sup>98</sup> Of course, Tāranātha saw the importance of patrons to Buddhism in a different light. His attitude toward rulers is revealed in tropes that recur throughout the *History*. The best kings are those who pay due respect to monks, build shrines and monasteries, convert their kingdoms to Buddhism, allowed the teachings of great masters to flourish, and help resolve disputes within the sangha. Secondarily, they are may be generous to their subjects. It is justifiable, in Tāranātha's view, for them to resort to violence on the battlefield or in ritual against the enemies of Buddhism.

Kingship is not always portrayed in a good light, as Tāranātha recognizes that kings can be arbitrary and cruel. As Buddhists have long recognized, being a ruler contrasts with the ideal life of a spiritual master. But his harshest blame is reserved for kings who attack the dharma. The worst offenders are *tīrthikas* (adherents of other South Asian religions, usually Hindu) and *mlecchas* ("barbarians," generally equated with Muslims), although inter-Buddhist sectarianism is also a problem. Much of Tāranātha's *History* depicts a centuries-long struggle between the Buddhist dharma and what he sees as false dharmas, fought by kings, armies, and black magic.

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<sup>94</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 6–19.

<sup>95</sup> Of course, the chronology does not match modern historiography except very approximately; Tāranātha does not clearly distinguish the Maurya and Gupta dynasties, mythical kings are included, and so forth.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–19.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>98</sup> Chattopadhyaya, "Supplementary Notes."

*The virtuous dharma king*

In the story of king Gopāla, the founder of the Pāla dynasty, Tāranātha portrays kingship as necessary to avoid anarchy. Early in his life, Gopāla had been blessed by a Buddhist monk to obtain a kingdom and became a *siddha*.<sup>99</sup> At a certain time in Bengal, “since many years had gone by without a king, the people were unhappy and suffering. So all the chiefs gathered together, discussed, and appointed a king in order to be protected by the law of the land.”<sup>100</sup> However, a *nāginī* terrorized the kingdom, killing a king every night as he was appointed daily, until Gopāla killed her by invoking his tutelary deity. Gopāla obtained the throne permanently, then became a major conqueror and spread Pāla rule widely, creating an empire that supported Buddhism.<sup>101</sup> This story demonstrates Tāranātha believed a Buddhist ruling power, is necessary to establish a minimum of order and create conditions conducive to the spread of Buddhism.

To Tāranātha, a great dharma king is one who pays respect to monks, supports the teaching of the great philosophers and teachers, and patronizes the sangha by building temples and monasteries, enshrining relics, and so forth. Ajātaśatru, the king of Magadha after the Buddha’s death, fulfilled this ideal by “for five years, mak[ing] offerings bestowing all kinds of goods on five thousand arhats.”<sup>102</sup> A similar description applies to many Buddhist king after him. Such generosity was commonplace until Buddhism’s final decline in India, so that routine patronage was not enough to be a great dharma king. Of the late Pāla dynasty, prior to the Muslim conquest, Tāranātha says “during the reign of these three kings, the dharma was looked after as in previous times, but they are not counted in the ranks of the Seven [great Pāla kings] because they didn’t do anything especially wonderful.”<sup>103</sup>

More important than patronage is conversion, when the ruler is persuaded and persuades others in turn to support Buddhism over rival religions. In Tāranātha’s account, the dharma makes little impact on a region unless the king converts and puts the state’s resources at the religion’s disposal. The most famous convert Aśoka fulfills the Buddha’s prophecy, “you shall cover the earth with stupas which are empowered with the essence of the relics of the Tathāgata,” and thus propagates the dharma throughout Asia.<sup>104</sup> Tāranātha’s narratives of

<sup>99</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 257.

<sup>100</sup> Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 246.

<sup>101</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 257–58. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 247.

<sup>102</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 22. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 10–11.

<sup>103</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 312. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 310.

<sup>104</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 60–63. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 46.

outlying regions repeat a similar story: Buddhist monks go to a certain place, for instance Sri Lanka,<sup>105</sup> South India<sup>106</sup>, even Tibet<sup>107</sup> and convert the king, who thereafter establishes the dharma through his patronage of the sangha. Tibet even makes an appearance in a conversion narrative, when Tri Songdetsen invites Buddhaghya to preach tantric texts.

Even when Tāranātha shifts his focus to Buddhist scholars, kings are key to promoting their teachings. To name two: Dignāga, though living as a forest ascetic, spread Buddhism greatly in South India by converting kings and ministers who knew of his reputation,<sup>108</sup> and Śāntideva served as the adviser to king Pañcasimha, encouraging him “to rule the kingdom according to the dharma.”<sup>109</sup> Buddhist masters often engaged in debates with non-Buddhists before kings and their victories converted kingdoms. Nālandā monastery and the ruler Pradyota sponsored a debate between the famous Hindu philosopher Śaṅkarācārya and Dharmakīrti, and Śaṅkarācārya lost decisively (needless to say, Tāranātha’s sources have a pro-Buddhist bias). He was said to have drowned himself in the Gaṅgā, after which Dharmakīrti won numerous converts.<sup>110</sup> Organized magical contests with non-Buddhists similarly inspired conversions, like one in which *tīrthikas* painted colored mandalas in the sky and Śāntideva destroyed them.<sup>111</sup> The transmission of teachings like Mahāyāna and tantra are an exception to the pattern of royal conversion, as they initially remained hidden from the public according to traditional Buddhist narratives. But even then, Tāranātha sees royal sponsorship as necessary for the spread of the teaching, as when a king built five hundred temples for the five hundred preachers of Mahāyāna.<sup>112</sup> The later spread of tantra also depended on kings, as when Bālasundara sent scholars to revive the teachings of tantra, including the Kālacakra.<sup>113</sup> Royal assistance is necessary to disseminate such teachings beyond a handful of secret initiates.

Good kings also employ Buddhist masters to perform magical and tantric practices for protection of the state and the dharma. One lay tantric adept offered his services to a king Śubhāsāra to overcome famine and disease and achieve prosperity.<sup>114</sup> But the most common

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<sup>105</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 334.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>107</sup> This is one of Tibet’s few appearances in Tāranātha’s history. *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 184–85.

<sup>109</sup> Tāranātha *History of Buddhism in India*, 216. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 202.

<sup>110</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 232–33.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 219–20.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 97–98.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.



benefit is military success. Tāranātha portrays a “who’s who” of famous Buddhist philosophers as using tantric or magical means against invading armies, often followers of the *mleccha* religion.<sup>115</sup>

As [Asaṅga] was preaching dharma, the Garlok army arrived. Having instructed those who were hearing the dharma to generate forbearance, all of them remained in meditation. All the arrows they shot turned to dust. The head of the Garloks struck the teacher [Asaṅga] with a sword but did not harm him, and the sword itself broke into eight pieces.<sup>116</sup>

Candrakīrti likewise “did extraordinary deeds like turning back the *turuṣka* [‘Turk’] armies while riding on a stone lion.”<sup>117</sup> At a time when Vikramaśīla monastery was in serious peril from invading *turuṣkas*, according to Tāranātha, Kamalarakṣita used magical methods against them. As he led a group of yogis to perform a *gaṇacakra* ceremony, they were attacked by an army led by a *turuṣka* king, who tried to rob the ritual materials. Kamalarakṣita responded:

The teacher [Kamalarakṣita] was angry and threw the vase which was full of tantrically blessed water. Immediately very high winds arose and men in black brandishing knives were seen coming from the wind and attacking the *turuṣkas*. The minister himself spewed forth blood and died and the others acquired various diseases.<sup>118</sup>

Tāranātha clearly saw the use of wrathful rituals as justified against the opponents of Buddhism, and the same was true of physical violence. Śrīharṣa (Harsha, who ruled from 606 to 647 in northern India and defeated the Huns),<sup>119</sup> is considered by Tāranātha to be “a king without rival” for his determination to destroy the *mleccha* religion:

In some of the districts outside Multana, he built a wooden house as a *masita* [perhaps meaning madrassa], that is a great congregation of the *mlecchas*. For many months, he gave them all necessities. He also collected all the books of their tradition, then burned them all in a fire. 1012 followers of the *mleccha* doctrine were burned....because of such

<sup>115</sup> The identity of such groups as *turuṣkas* and Garloks will be discussed below, as Tāranātha uses a number of terms for Muslim peoples.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 165. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 148.

<sup>117</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 199. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 184.

<sup>118</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 328. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 314.

<sup>119</sup> Xuanzang and others record that Harsha was a devout Buddhist, and frequently conflicted with other Indian religions (although references to Islam are clearly anachronistic). John Keay, *India: A History* (London, 2000), 160–67.

destruction by that king, the activity of the religion of the Persians (*stag gzig*) and *sokpos* (*sog po*)<sup>120</sup> diminished for a hundred years.<sup>121</sup>

Tāranātha acknowledges this act of murder to be karmically negative act, but one Śrīharṣa could atone for by building Buddhist monasteries around his kingdom.<sup>122</sup>

*The dark side of political rule*

At times, Tāranātha portrays kingship as an obstacle to the ascetic life. Śāntideva was intended to inherit his father's throne, but he received a vision in a dream: "Mañjuśrī was sitting on the throne of the ruler and said 'Oh son! This is my seat. I am your spiritual friend [*dge ba'i bshes gnyen*]. It would be highly improper for us to sit on the same seat."<sup>123</sup> In another vision, Tārā poured hot water over him, saying: "A kingdom is an unbearable hot spring of hell. I consecrate you with this [hot water]."<sup>124</sup> Śāntideva ran away, took Buddhist teachings from a forest yogi, and eventually became the advisor of a king, but this career also became unsuitable:

Because of his advice to rule the kingdom according to the dharma, the other ministers were jealous. They said, 'This one is deceitful toward the king. He has no more than a wooden sword.' The king said, 'All the ministers must show their swords.'... [Śāntideva spoke] 'If you say so, I will show it.' The left eye of the king was blinded by the sword's light. Then [Śāntideva] was known to have attained *siddhi*. After he instructed [the king] in the twenty grounds of the Buddhist dharma, by which to rule according to dharma, he departed for the central country [Magadha].<sup>125</sup>

He stayed out of politics from then on and lived the life of an ascetic teacher. This story falls into a long tradition in Buddhism of critiquing kingship as contrary to religious practice, as it entails negative intentions and actions like violence and greed for power.

A number of kings in the *History* exemplify the evils that rulers are capable of. Tāranātha portrays Aśoka, prior to his conversion to Buddhism, as a surprising exemplar of cruel kingship. Besides his famously bloody wars of conquest, he engaged in animal sacrifice and

<sup>120</sup> For more on the identity of these peoples, see below. *Sokpo* does not mean Mongolians, but a central Asian group.

<sup>121</sup> Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 161–62.

<sup>122</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 178–79.

<sup>123</sup> Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 201.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 215.

<sup>125</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 216. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 202.

even human sacrifice. He constructed a torture chamber known as Aśoka's Hell where he killed people for the sheer pleasure of it.<sup>126</sup> He attempted to kill an arhat (among the worst Buddhist sins), but miraculously failed to draw a drop of blood.<sup>127</sup> It was at that point that he realized the power of the Buddhist dharma and repented. These stories became part of the standard Aśoka narrative in Indian Buddhism (found in texts like the *Divyāvadāna* and *Aśokāvadāna*), intended to demonstrate the power of the dharma when he eventually converted.<sup>128</sup> Many other kings, invariably non-Buddhists, are noted by Tāranātha for their violence and cruelty. King Saraṇa is typical as one whose devotion to "false views" led him to attempt a human sacrifice of 108 men in fire, thwarted by a Buddhist's prayers to Tārā.<sup>129</sup> Tāranātha depicts non-Buddhist forms of tantra and magic, as having powers similar to Buddhist tantra, while used for evil:

The Brahmin master Canaka<sup>130</sup> meditated and gazed on the faces of Mahākāla and Yamantaka, and the force of his spells became very great. He killed the kings and ministers of about 16 large cities through wrathful action [*mngon spyod kyi las*]. Meanwhile, the king with his army conquered up to the eastern and western ocean.<sup>131</sup>

As a result of evil actions like this, also including rendering people insane, and other acts of murder and torture, he was eventually reborn in hell.<sup>132</sup> The founding of the barbarian *mleccha* religion also involves the use of magic to ill ends.<sup>133</sup>

*Mlecchas at the gates: narratives of barbarian invaders*

Kings and armies who follow the *mleccha* dharma are one of the greatest threats to Buddhism, according to Tāranātha. In describing them, Tāranātha uses semantically overlapping terminology that lumps many groups together as stereotypical enemies of Buddhism. In addition to *mleccha*, he also uses such terms as *turuṣka*, Turk; *tazik* (*stag gzig*),

<sup>126</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 53–56.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–56.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 53n21.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>130</sup> This may be a reference to Cāṇakya, the purported author of the *Arthaśāstra*, whose legendarily Machiavellian advice helped Chandragupta Maurya rise to establish the Maurya empire. This event takes place in the narrative long after the Maurya dynasty, but Tāranātha's chronology is often confused in any case. L. N Rangarajan, "Introduction," in *The Arthashastra* (Gurgaon: Penguin Books, 1987), 6–8.

<sup>131</sup> Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 115.

<sup>132</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 130.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

Persian; and even *sokpo* (*sog po*), which does not refer to Mongolians but central Asian nomads.<sup>134</sup> These words allude to the Persian and Turkic origin of the Muslim conquerors of India, and also to earlier central Asian invaders (Sogdians, Huns, and so on).

*Mleccha* — Tāranātha uses the Sanskrit term *mleccha* (*kla klo* in Tibetan) to refer to barbarians and their foreign religion.<sup>135</sup> The term *mleccha* should not be seen as synonymous with Muslims, although Tibetans and Indians most often associated the term with the Muslim conquerors. In Tuken Losang Chökyi Nyima's *Grubtha* (*Grub mtha'*), a systematic survey of religious tenets, *mlecchas* are described as people who reject the dharma completely.<sup>136</sup> Modern Tibetan dictionaries also define *kla klo* not as Muslim, but more generally as cruel people who do not follow morality, and reject Buddhist doctrines like rebirth and karma.<sup>137</sup> *Mleccha* in Sanskrit came to be a generic term for Arabs or Muslims.<sup>138</sup> In his other writings, Tāranātha uses the word *mleccha* in association with Muslims; in the biography of Buddhagupta he describes the yogi's travels in the "land of *mlecchas*" to Ghazni in Uddiyana (modern-day Afghanistan).<sup>139</sup>

Tāranātha's use of the term *mleccha* resonates with the apocalyptic narrative found in the *Kālacakratantra*, a text that is not extensively discussed in *History of Buddhism in India* but is a focus of Tāranātha's other scholarship. This narrative is centered on a final battle between the *cakravartin* hero and *mlecchas*, analogized to an inner battle between virtue and vice.<sup>140</sup> The *mlecchas* wear white robes, kill animals and eat meat, and have a dharma of violence as contrasted with Buddhist non-violence.<sup>141</sup> They are Persian in origin, and their characteristic belief is that there is a creator god Rahman (a name for God in Islam), who determines one's fate in the afterlife.<sup>142</sup> The climax of the *Kālacakra* narrative occurs when the ideal Buddhist kingdom of Shambhala defeats

<sup>134</sup> L. A. Waddell, "A 16th Century Account of Indian Buddhist Shrines by an Indian Buddhist Yogi, Translated from the Tibetan," *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1893.

<sup>135</sup> Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 179, 208.

<sup>136</sup> José Ignacio Cabezón, "Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere," in *Islam in Tibet: Tibetan Caravans*, ed. Abdul Wahid Radhu (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1997), 19.

<sup>137</sup> Blo bzang 'phrin las, ed., "Kla klo," in *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002); Zhang Yisun, ed., "Kla klo," in *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Beijing: Mi rig dpe skrun khang, 1985).

<sup>138</sup> Pushpa Prasad, "The Turuška or Turks in Late Ancient Indian Documents," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 55 (1994): 173.

<sup>139</sup> Tucci, "Buddhist Sadhu," 688.

<sup>140</sup> Vesna A. Wallace, *The Kālacakratantra: The Chapter on the Individual* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 59–61.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 147–48.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

*mlecchas* in an apocalyptic battle. According to Johann Elverskog, the text “claims that Muslims [i.e. *mlecchas*] will threaten the Dharma, so that the final eschatological battle will be between the twenty-fifth and final ruler of Shambhala, Kulika Rudra Cakrin, who will ride forth with his Buddhist army and annihilate the Muslims and usher in a new golden age of the Dharma.”<sup>143</sup> The myth of Shambhala has been repeatedly appropriated in different challenging circumstances in Buddhist history. The tantric Buddhist communities that originally composed the text, in Kashmir or northern Pakistan around 1000 CE, were threatened by the advance of Muslim. But in more recent times, the *mlecchas* have been associated with the British, Russians, even Chinese Communists and Nazis.<sup>144</sup> Looking at India where Islam was in ascendancy and only a few remnants of the dharma remained, Tāranātha may have seen echoes of the near victory of the *mlecchas* before Kulika Rudra Cakrin’s triumph.<sup>145</sup> Accordingly, his *History* promotes a still-popular narrative that blames Muslims for the demise of Buddhism.<sup>146</sup>

*Turuṣka* in the Tibetan text of the *History* is a straightforward transliteration of the Sanskrit, meaning “Turk.”<sup>147</sup> It is used more or less interchangeably with *tazik*, often anachronistically for earlier central Asian conquerors.<sup>148</sup> In Islamic literature, the term Turk was usually associated with nomadic peoples in contrast with “Tajik” (Persian) sedentary farmers; neither term was a strict ethnic name at first.<sup>149</sup> The name Turk (*turuṣka*) does not appear in Sanskrit until the ninth century, and eventually came to be a generic term for Muslims in Sanskrit, due to the Turkish origins of Muslim rulers like the Delhi sultans.<sup>150</sup> Later on, based on the anti-Muslim prophecies of the *Kālacakratantra*, Mongolian Buddhists described Turks as “a people without the pure majestic dharma,” demonstrating an enduring association between them and *mlecchas*.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Johan Elverskog, “Maitreya, Shambhala, and the End of Buddhist Empire,” in *Faith and Empire*, 213–27.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>145</sup> Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, “Islam and Tibet: Cultural Interactions - An Introduction,” in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, ed. Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2011), 13.

<sup>146</sup> Johan Elverskog, “Ritual Theory across the Buddhist-Muslim Divide in Late Imperial China,” in *Islam and Tibet*, 294.

<sup>147</sup> Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 184.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>149</sup> Joo-yup Lee, “The Historical Meaning of the Term Turk and the Nature of the Turkic Identity of the Chinggisid and Timurid Elites in Post-Mongol Central Asia,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 19, no. 1 (2016): 101–32.

<sup>150</sup> Prasad, “The Turuṣka or Turks in Late Ancient Indian Documents,” 171.

<sup>151</sup> Elverskog, “Ritual Theory,” 299.

*Garlok* (*gar log*) ordinarily refers to a subgroup of Turks who clashed with Tibetans in the post-imperial period, although Tāranātha uses the word to denote a group supposedly fought by Asaṅga, much earlier in Tibetan history.<sup>152</sup> Tibetan encyclopedias say that the Garloks were Turkic and come from *khache* (which specifically means Kashmir, but is often a generic term for a Muslim country). According to Karl Ryavec, the Garloks are the Qarakhanid Turks who converted to Islam in 934.<sup>153</sup> Their king fought against the Gugé kingdom in the time of Atiśa and killed Lha Lama Yeshé Ö (947–1024). Dungkar Losang Trinley speculates that the name is a corruption of “caliph,” although this does not appear to be a widespread interpretation.<sup>154</sup> In this case, it appears still more strongly that Tāranātha is subconsciously projecting back a more recent, history of Tibetan-Muslim conflict onto the Indian past.

*Tazik* (*stag gzig*), according to Tibetan dictionaries refers to Iran/Persia, or sometimes Afghanistan, and their inhabitants, and Tāranātha uses it more or less interchangeably with *turuška*.<sup>155</sup> According to the *Encyclopedia Iranica*, the Turkish term *tazik* or *tajik* originally referred to Arabs in the ninth century, and specifically to a group that played a major role in the early Muslim conquests. Adopted into Sanskrit and other languages, the term was later extended to Persians in the eleventh century (without always clearly distinguishing them from other groups), and eventually came to refer to the culturally Persian group known today as Tajiks.<sup>156</sup> The Turks, for their part, used *tajik* as a generic term for Muslims, as the first Muslims they encountered were Iranians.<sup>157</sup> Tibetans used the term *tazik* from the time they occupied Dunhuang (late eighth to early ninth century), referring generically to Arabs or Muslims as a group.<sup>158</sup> As a word for a country, *tazik* was first used by Tibetans for the Abbasid empire (750–1258), which made incursions from Persia into the northern subcontinent.<sup>159</sup> In

<sup>152</sup> Whether Tāranātha intended to refer to a specific Turkic group is unclear. In a note, Chattopadhyaya explains this is a usual Tibetan translation for *turuška*. Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 165.

<sup>153</sup> Karl Ernest Ryavec, *A Historical Atlas of Tibet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 81.

<sup>154</sup> Pema Dorjé, “Gar log,” in *Dag yig gsar bsgrigs* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2003).

<sup>155</sup> Zhang Yisun, ed., “Ta zig,” in *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*; Blo bzang ‘phrin las, “Stag gzig,” in *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*.

<sup>156</sup> John Perry, “Tajik,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2009, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/tajik-i-the-ethnonym-origins-and-application>.

<sup>157</sup> Wallace, *Kālacakratanta*, 225n50.

<sup>158</sup> Yoeli-Tlalim, “Introduction,” 1–3.

<sup>159</sup> Dan Martin, “Greek and Islamic Medicines’ Historical Contact with Tibet,” in *Islam and Tibet*, 126.

Tāranātha's usage, and presumably that of his Indian sources, it is just another term for *mlecchas*, and he makes no attempt to really distinguish them from Turks, or other groups.

*Sokpo* (*sog po*) ordinarily refers to Mongolians, but Tāranātha describes the *mleccha* religion as "religion of the *taziks* and *sokpos*," reflecting an older usage of *sokpo*<sup>160</sup> Chattopadhyaya translates *sokpo* as *turuṣka* and interprets it as a reference to Sakas, Śakeras, or Sogdians, the Iranian peoples who resided in Central Asia (modern day Uzbekistan) prior to the Turks.<sup>161</sup> According to Gentry, the term *sokpo* originally referred to Sogdians; according to the *Tsikdzö Chenmo*, it also once referred to Iran and Turkestan. The term became associated with Mongols when they rose to power in the thirteenth century.<sup>162</sup> Although the Mongols encountered by Tibetans were not Muslims, they were often described by Tibetans as *mlecchas*.<sup>163</sup> It is not clear how conscious Tāranātha was of the overlapping meanings of *sokpo*, but it is clear that he considered invading Mongols a threat to the true dharma, like the *mlecchas* of old, and an equally legitimate target for wrathful tantric rituals.

The rise of the *mleccha* religion and the military campaigns of its followers are portrayed by Tāranātha as destructive to Buddhism over the course of its history, although it is difficult to make sense of the chronology from the point of view of modern historiography. Tāranātha alludes to Islam in his account of the origins of the *mleccha* religion, while placing it long before Islam arose or came to India, and lumps Muslims together with from nomadic groups who followed other religions. This is reminiscent of how European missionaries, when they first encountered Buddhism, did not distinguish it from other forms of "idolatry."<sup>164</sup> He depicts the *mleccha* religion as an evil inversion of the dharma, created by turncoat Buddhists and the wiles of Māra:

There was once one named Shönnu Dé [Gzhon nu'i sde], who was very learned and understood the sutras, but lacked faith. He broke the precepts and was expelled from the sangha, so he was very angry. It is said that he created a religion able to compete with the Buddha's teaching. He went beyond Tokhara [Afghanistan] to the country of

<sup>160</sup> Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 168.

<sup>161</sup> In this case, the translation is "Turuṣka", the only place where that term does not represent the Sanskrit word. Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 208.

<sup>162</sup> Gentry, "Representations of Efficacy," 155n7; Zhang Yisun, ed., "Sog po," in *Bod rgya tshig mādzod chen mo*.

<sup>163</sup> An example can be found in the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Ahmad, *Sino-Tibetan Relations*, 98–99.

<sup>164</sup> See Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Śulika.<sup>165</sup> He took the name of Māmathar [i.e., Muhammad] and changed his dress, then composed the *mleccha* dharma which preaches that doing harm is the dharma. He hid it in the place of the great demon of the lineage of *asuras*, Biślimilil [i.e. *bismillah*, the Arabic blessing “in the name of God”]. He was blessed by Māra and obtained many knowledge mantras for victory in battle and so forth.<sup>166</sup>

Another man named Baikhampa<sup>167</sup> then became Māmathar’s disciple under the guidance of Māra:

Having gone to the city of Mecca [*ma kha*], and the surrounding areas, he taught the false dharma to the brahmans and *kṣatriyas*, and because of this, the royal lineages of Saida and Turuṣka arose.<sup>168</sup>

Māmathar is a common Sanskrit rendering of Mohammad, while the name Baikhampa comes from the Persian word *paygambar*, which means “Prophet.”<sup>169</sup> Tāranātha places this narrative within the chapter on Nāgārjuna (according to modern historians, thought to have lived in the second or third century CE), so that the *mleccha* challenge appears early in his history of Buddhism.

Soon after the creation of the *mleccha* dharma, the *taziks* and *turuṣkas* caused much destruction in Magadha including Nālandā Monastery, although this was quickly reversed by the Buddhists.<sup>170</sup> Around the time of Aśaṅga (fourth century), king Śrīharsa (who actually lived later, in the seventh century) murdered the *mleccha* teachers in Multan, causing their influence to decline.<sup>171</sup> But they had returned by the time of Candrakīrti (seventh century), posing an aggressive threat that required magical means of defense in response.<sup>172</sup> While these episodes predate Islam, perhaps Tāranātha or his sources have in mind Central Asian conquerors like the Sakas, Indo-Scythians, or Huns. They may

<sup>165</sup> The location of Śulika is unclear.

<sup>166</sup> Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 103–4. Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 117–18.

<sup>167</sup> This name comes from the Persian word *paygambar*, which means “Prophet.” Yoeli-Tlalim, “Introduction,” 14.

<sup>168</sup> Saida is perhaps *Sa'id* (a common Arabic name) or *Sayyid* (descendants of Muhammad). Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 118. Tāranātha, *Rgya Gar Chos 'byung*, 105.

<sup>169</sup> Yoeli-Tlalim, “Introduction,” 14.

<sup>170</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 137–38. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 120–21. Vasi'lev dates these invasions to the time of the Indo-Scythians, in the the 1st or 2nd centuries CE; this date roughly fits Tāranātha’s chronology, though Nālanda’s supposed existence is anachronistic.

<sup>171</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 178.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 178–229.



also have in mind the initial appearance of Muslims in the northwest of the continent, placing it earlier than it actually occurred in history.

Throughout the Pāla era (eighth to twelfth century), Tāranātha portrays Bengal as being frequently assailed by *turuṣkas*, placing the arrival of Muslims several centuries before it actually occurred.<sup>173</sup> His account of the defeat of Buddhists at the end of the dynasty more closely corresponds to events recognized by modern history.<sup>174</sup> The final collapse of royally sponsored Buddhism took place as the *turuṣkas* “subjugated all the country of Magadha, killed many monks at Odantapuri monastery, destroyed it and Vikramaśilā, and constructed a *tazik* fortress in the remains of Odantapuri.”<sup>175</sup> Nālandā continued with a small number of followers, under the last remnants of Buddhist royal patronage, but Buddhist kings in India had lost power for good to *mlecchas* and *tīrthikas*, and at this time Tāranātha’s narrative ends.<sup>176</sup>

The ultimate effect of *mleccha* invasion, according to Tāranātha, is that it eliminates the conditions under which Buddhism thrives and spreads, by cutting off its patronage. Despite the imprecise chronology and terminology, the exact identity of the invaders or of the *mleccha dharma* does not matter to Tāranātha’s narrative: they were foreign, and they were seen as hostile to Buddhism. The ideal Buddhist king, like Kulika Rudra Cakrin in the *Kālacakrantra*, is one who can meet the threat of Buddhism being besieged by barbarian invaders and their alien religion.

*Other threats to Buddhism: Tīrthikas and internal dissension*

Although Tāranātha encourages the enduringly popular narrative that Muslims were responsible for Buddhism’s decline in India, Tāranātha does not make Muslims the exclusive scapegoat. *Tīrthikas* rulers too (mainly Hindus) are depicted as persecutors of the dharma at times, conducting actions contrary to dharma like animal and human sacrifice.<sup>177</sup> At the same time that the *mleccha* dharma was first becoming a threat to Buddhism, *tīrthikas* under King Puṣyamitra invaded Buddhist lands and destroyed monasteries.<sup>178</sup> *Tīrthikas* and brahmins were taking over by at the end of the Pāla dynasty, and Buddhists changed their loyalties: “at that time the yogis who were followers of Gorakṣa

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 295, 304, 443–44.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 318–19.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 319; Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 307. According to modern historians, the general Bakhtiyar Kilji of the Delhi Sultan Qutb al-Din Aibak led this invasion, which took place shortly after 1200. Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 442.

<sup>176</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 320.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 121.

were for the most part very foolish, and for the sake of the riches from the *tīrthika* kings, became the followers of Īśvara [or Śiva], and said 'we have no quarrel with the *turuṣkas* anymore'<sup>179</sup> Tāranātha does not portray Hindus as "the Other" to the same degree as Muslims, and sometimes they were converted through debate or magical competition, as described above. But Tāranātha still portrays *tīrthika* rulers as dangerous enemies of Buddhism who can lure Buddhists astray from the true dharma, if Buddhists succumb to their own weakness.

Buddhists are also threatened by their own internal dissension, according to Tāranātha, and good Buddhist rulers resolve these disputes. This was especially true in Buddhism's early days, marked by internal conflicts among patrons and the monasteries. Ajātaśātru divided Ānanda's relics to avoid conflict between warring groups (the Licchavis and the state of Maḡadha), as the Buddha had done with his own relics when he died.<sup>180</sup> Tāranātha also relates the stories of the sangha councils, sponsored by kings to resolve schisms. These arose from monks disputing the vinaya rules, as with the disputed Ten Prohibitions that led to king Nandin's Second Council,<sup>181</sup> or from the divisive doctrines of teachers such as Bhadra and Mahādeva which led to Kaniṣka's Third Council.<sup>182</sup> He sees far reaching consequences for Buddhism beyond schism:

Up until Mahādeva and Bhadra, there were a great many who obtained spiritual fruits. After those two disturbed the teaching, and controversies arose, the monks no longer made effort in yoga but focused exclusively on debate. As a result, far fewer obtained spiritual fruits.<sup>183</sup>

Tāranātha does not strongly emphasize sectarian conflict, however. The Śrāvakas and Mahāyāna monks sometimes disagreed, with the Śrāvakas slandering the Mahāyāna,<sup>184</sup> but these disputes rarely entered into state or monastic politics. Tāranātha also portrays the weakening of the dharma over time as due to Buddhist apathy as much as anything, driven by the lure of "false views" or wealth (as with the followers of Gorakṣa described above). One sign of this weakening was king Gopāla's construction of a hybrid Buddhist-Hindu temple in the ninth century, a concession to his non-Buddhist ministers. This indicated a

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 24–25.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 94, 373.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 94. Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 80.

<sup>184</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 99.

gradual adulteration of Buddhism in Tāranātha's eyes.<sup>185</sup> Later in the Pāla era the kings only gave Buddhism perfunctory patronage, and scholars attained little influence, indicating a decline in Buddhist morale.<sup>186</sup> Good kings have the task of maintaining the morale of themselves and their subjects, so that they continue to support the dharma with enthusiasm, a duty which requires overcoming sectarian disputes.

*A commentary on Tāranātha's time?*

Can *History of Buddhism in India* be read as a commentary on Tāranātha's own time, relevant beyond ancient India to how seventeenth century Tibetan Buddhists perceived the ideal ruler and the just use of force against enemies? Or was Tāranātha a scholar thoroughly immersed in the world of ancient Sanskrit texts and unconcerned with the affairs of his own time?<sup>187</sup> At first glance, the *History* has little to do with Tibet, and depends heavily on earlier Indian sources that may have agendas very different from Tāranātha. But given Tāranātha's original work in piecing together a narrative, his contact with Indian travelers to Tibet, and the rituals he performed for the Tsang rulers, one would expect an implicit concern for his own time. His portrayal of the fate of the dharma and Buddhist kings in ancient India would have resonated with Tibetans in the turmoil of the seventeenth century. Tibetans would have been as concerned as Indians that *mleccha* invaders and internal strife could lead to the decline of the dharma, and equally interested in how Buddhists might guard against these dangers.

Buddhist India, once a strong influence on Tibetan Buddhism, had largely faded from Tibetan consciousness by the seventeenth century, but it was very much alive to Tāranātha. Because of his Sanskrit scholarship, and contacts with Indian yogis and even kings, he had a stronger consciousness of ancient and contemporary India. He would have seen a stark disparity between Buddhism flourishing under the devout patronage of Buddhist kings, and the fate of the dharma under Muslim and Hindu rulers, who were indifferent to or persecuted Buddhism. Additionally, he saw that Buddhist practitioners were more interested in Hindu deities than practices he recognized as Buddhist. Likely influenced by his Indian sources, the *History of Buddhism in India*

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>187</sup> Ronald Davidson describes the Italian Renaissance classicist Petrarch as such a figure who rejected the values of his own society, so it is possible to imagine Tāranātha as a similarly antiquarian Sanskrit classicist. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 17.

further an anti-Muslim narrative by portraying Muslims as *mlecchas*, enemies of the dharma, who were to blame for its final destruction in India, and advocating that Buddhist kings and spiritual adepts have a duty to combat them by ritual and physical means. On the other hand, interactions between Tibetans and Muslims in Tāranātha's day were limited and politically insignificant; even Buddhaguptanātha was little concerned with persecution by Muslims.<sup>188</sup> The Kālacakra myth was frequently reappropriated with the *mlecchas* standing in for current enemies, and Tāranātha would likely have seen the Mongols and Geluks playing the role of enemies of the dharma. He was concerned that Buddhism (and his Jonangpa tradition in particular) might meet a similar fate in Tibet due to foreign threats or internal dissension and believed rulers and adepts should meet this threat aggressively, as also evidenced by his defense of wrathful ritual in his biography.

How would the war between Gelukpa forces and Tsang have influenced Tāranātha? He does not portray inter-Buddhism sectarianism as a factor in wars between Indian kings, and Indian Buddhism was not institutionally divided like in Tibet. However, his narrative in *History of Buddhism in India* does observe that Buddhist sectarianism sometimes weakened the dharma in India, with conflicts over relics, vinaya observance and the validity of the Mahāyāna. From his biography, we know that Tāranātha understood the U-Tsang conflict as being motivated by Gelukpa sectarianism, so it was clearly a live concern for him (needless to say, he did not blame his own side). His commentary that schisms caused Buddhists to "became more keen on debate than meditation"<sup>189</sup> could be read as subtle criticism of the Geluk, who were commonly stereotyped as emphasizing dialectics over practice.<sup>190</sup> His own Jonangpa tradition benefitted greatly from the patronage of the Tsangpa *desis*, who exemplified non-sectarianism by supporting most of the Buddhist traditions under their rule (other than Geluk). He had good reason to fear that Gelukpa victory in the war would jeopardize this patronage and lead to persecution. Tāranātha may not have foreseen the Fifth Dalai Lama's anti-Jonang policies, but there had been a history of sectarian conflict between the Gelukpa and Jonangpa schools, especially involving debates over their philosophical views.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Tucci, "Buddhist Sadhu."

<sup>189</sup> Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, 94.

<sup>190</sup> For an example of philosophical polemics between Geluk and other traditions, see Khedrupjé's defense of the importance of understanding emptiness intellectually prior to engaging in meditation; he claims that other traditions practice a kind of "meditation on nothing," lacking a true understanding of emptiness. Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang po and Cabezón, 112–17.

<sup>191</sup> For example, Khedrupjé sharply denounces Dolpopa's *shentong* view of emptiness as a misunderstanding of the concept. *Ibid.*, 48–49.

Within Tāranātha's *History*, the warnings against sectarianism, praise of royal patrons of Buddhism and argument for a strong ruler to prevent anarchy were all relevant to his contemporary situation. His dependence on loyal patrons may also underlie his selection of narratives in which good Buddhist rulers were lured away from the true dharma by greed and turned to other traditions such as Hinduism.

Mongol intervention in Tibetan affairs was a major threat in Tāranātha's lifetime, especially during the U-Tsang war. Accordingly, Tāranātha's emphasis on the threat of *mlecchas* in the *History of Buddhism in India* indicates that he saw external military intervention as a dire threat to Buddhism, which rulers must combat through wrathful ritual and warfare. The periodic interventions of Mongols had long been resented by Tibetans, especially when they had boosted certain Buddhist traditions at the expense of others. In Tāranātha's time, as the Mongols' political fortunes and patronage of Buddhism revived, they also renewed their feared presence on Tibetan soil, again with sectarian consequences because of their support of the Gelukpa tradition. Consequently, Tibetan rulers and tantric adepts, including Tāranātha himself, turned to the tradition of "Mongol-repelling" via wrathful tantric rituals.<sup>192</sup> It is particularly significant, for this reason, that Tāranātha emphasizes the ability of past Indian tantric masters to repel *mleccha* armies by ritual means. As a scholar of the *Kālacakratantra*, he was well acquainted with the narrative of Shambhala and its prophecies that the *mlecchas* would nearly destroy the dharma and be defeated by a righteous Buddhist king.

The Mongols might appear to be unlikely *mlecchas*, given that they followed Tibetan Buddhism. But like *mlecchas*, they were foreign, occasionally destructive of villages and monasteries, and a threat to the "true dharma" of their sectarian opponents. The Tibetan name for the Mongols, *sokpo*, bears a history of Tibetan encounters with other non-Buddhist "barbarians" such as the Sogdians and Muslims of central Asia. The history of many other ethnonyms (*turuṣka*, *tazik*, *mleccha*) shows that Indians and Tibetans made few hard distinctions, ethnic or religious, between invading foreign groups. Tāranātha saw the Mongolians as a legitimate target of violent rituals to repel them, and as an equally legitimate target of military force in order to defend the dharma.

If Tibetan rulers lived up to Tāranātha's ideals of kingship in *History of Buddhism in India*, it would be beneficial to himself and his Jonangpa tradition. Strong rulers are first of all preferable to anarchy and strife; they refrain from oppression, and also are generous to the people.

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<sup>192</sup> Templeman, "A World Upside Down," 22. Cuevas, "The Politics of Magical Warfare," 175–80.

According to Tāranātha, Buddhism flourishes best under a true dharma king dedicated to patronage of the dharma and the defeat of its adversaries. Chattopadhyaya correctly noted his focus on political patrons, but Tāranātha would not have agreed with Chattopadhyaya's modern, populist view that this emphasis would alienate ordinary people. Tāranātha's ideal dharma ruler gives monks and monasteries lavish patronage, and pays special attention to individual scholars, hosting them in debates and facilitating their preaching. He encourages Buddhists to remain enthusiastically loyal to the dharma and resolves sectarian disputes. No large monastery in Tāranātha's time could have existed without the financial support of a powerful ruler or defense from marauding armies. Tāranātha's narrative does not emphasize ancestry or divine incarnation as means of royal legitimacy, beyond patronage of the sangha and support of Buddhist scholars. Tāranātha's own patrons, the Tsangpa *desis*, struggled to demonstrate their legitimacy, lacking strong ties to a religious tradition or lines of descent to Tibet's original emperors, but would have fulfilled the ideal of a patron and defender of the dharma.<sup>193</sup> The fate of the Jonang tradition, and Tāranātha's own scholarship, depended on Tsang's continued patronage and their defense against the growing "mleccha" threat of the Mongolian allies of the Gelukpa tradition.

### Conclusion

This study of Tāranātha's thought on kingship and violence is just a starting point for future research, as it focuses on *History of Buddhism in India*. The *History* admittedly has some limitations as a source for Tāranātha's contemporary thinking, as Tāranātha does not explicitly discuss sixteenth-century Tibet or even contemporary India. Much of the *History of Buddhism in India* is drawn from Indian sources, not always with extensive editing on Tāranātha's part, so it is possible that some material does not reflect his own point of view. Inferences about the influence of contemporary politics on Tāranātha are necessarily based on circumstantial evidence (that said, such influence is not necessarily conscious on Tāranātha's part).

The relationship between Buddhism and politics was quite different in India and Tibet, which qualifies the degree to which the *History of Buddhism in India* shows Tāranātha's views on political ethics (especially as they apply to Tibet). These differences include the sectarian structure of Buddhism, as Indian Buddhism was not institutionally divided into rival doctrinal and practice traditions, a critical factor in

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<sup>193</sup> Templeman, "A World Upside Down," 14–16.

Tibet.<sup>194</sup> Buddhist rulers in India, although they did practice and patronize Buddhism, did not combine political and religious power to the same extent as Tibetan rulers did, especially if they were *triülkus* or hereditary lineage holders of monasteries. A more comprehensive account of Tāranātha's ideas about rulers and violence would have to consider his other writings discussing these issues from other perspectives, for instance his autobiography, his tantric histories, even his biographies of the Buddha and Buddhaguptanātha. Much more research could be done using those sources.

This article demonstrates that Tibetan historical writing is a source of political and ethical thought that should not be overlooked. Tibetan ideas about religiopolitical ethics do not just come from explicitly political works like *nītiśāstra* texts. They can be found in other texts that recount the doings of kings, especially histories like the *History of Buddhism in India*. Despite Western accusations that Tibetan historiography is derivative, it has creative elements that reveal much about the concerns of its authors and their time. Scholars of Tibetan historiography have considered the religiopolitical implications of these works, focusing especially on narratives of the early imperial kings (like Songtsen Gampo) and their influence on Tibetan nationalism,<sup>195</sup> but a broader selection of texts could reveal more about a Tibetan Buddhist ethic of rulership. Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India*, long recognized for its attempt at a critical reconstruction of the history of India and Buddhism, is also rich in narratives of righteous and unrighteous kingship and religious rivalry that demonstrate the proper ends of statecraft and the just use of force, all in the service of Buddhism. These ideals especially come to the fore in a history of India, because Indian narratives, closely connected with the Buddha and other revered masters, have a formative authority for Tibetan Buddhists.

There is much in the *History* that would resonate with seventeenth century Tibetans. The causes of the decline of the dharma would have as much relevance in Tibet as in India, as would stories that warn of the dangers of foreign and sectarian enemies of the dharma, argue for the legitimacy of force and tantric ritual against them, and praise those who patronized and resolved disputes in the sangha. Many scholars (including Sperling, Debreczeny, and Cuevas)<sup>196</sup> have recently argued Tibetan Buddhism is an inherently political religion that has historically accepted political and ritual violence, and Tāranātha's *History* adds further support to that argument. Furthermore, it sheds light on

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<sup>194</sup> There were divisions due to different *vinaya* codes, but there were not separate institutions for Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna (for instance).

<sup>195</sup> For example, Sørensen's translation of *Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies*.

<sup>196</sup> Sperling, "Orientalism." Debreczeny, "Faith and Empire: An Overview." Cuevas, "The Politics of Magical Warfare."

who is considered the legitimate targets of that violence: foreign *mleccha* opponents of the “true dharma,” stereotyped as Muslim invaders but including any rival to Tibet, and also domestic sectarian opponents. The *History* also demonstrate a more constructive role a king can play in supporting the dharma, through patronizing of monastic communities and scholars and encouraging Buddhist morale. Finally, this work should put to rest any idea that Tibetan had no historical consciousness, or that their historical works lacked original interpretation. Tāranātha clearly did interpret his own life and his milieu in terms of the Indian past, and he used the *History of Buddhism in India* to express a vision of the ideal relationship between religion and politics, that justified the position of himself and the Jonangpa tradition in Tibetan society.

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