Notes on the Iconographical Program
of Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum* (1762)

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There is hardly a book more vexed in Tibetan Studies than the *Alphabetum Tibetanum* of the Augustinian Agostino Antonio Giorgi (1711–1797).[1] Giorgi's "alphabet" or "ABCs" of Tibetan was among the very first academic monographs on Tibetan religion and culture published in Europe. Although it was read favorably by Sir William Jones (1746–1794), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum* has been widely denigrated.[2] To take but one example: Wilfrid L. Heeley described it in 1874 as the "ponderous" tome of a stay-at-home traveler whose Coptic, Syriac, Hebrew, and Sanskrit marked it as a "striking monument of the misplaced erudition of the age." [3] And—to be perfectly frank—Giorgi's zany theorizing and ineptitude with the Tibetan language make the *Alphabetum Tibetanum* an easy target.[4] In the headlong rush to criticize Giorgi, many have failed to acknowledge that the *Alphabetum Tibetanum* made several important advances in Tibetan Studies, not least in the representation of Tibetan art. Books published in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries largely depicted Tibetan art with Western conventions and according to Western tastes. In contrast, Giorgi based his images of Buddhist art on Tibetan prototypes, credited a Tibetan iconographer (*lha 'bri pa*) named Yon tan, reproduced the artist's images according to Tibetan artistic conventions, and explained his images using texts from the Buddhist canon.[5]

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[1] The *Alphabetum Tibetanum* was published in two versions, one short and one long. The first is Giorgi 1759 [1763] and the second is Giorgi 1762 [1763]. For a German translation of the latter, see Lindegger 1999–2001.

[2] For a sampling of the charges made against Giorgi, see Pomplun 2020: 194-196.

[3] Heeley 1874: 139.

[4] A notable exception to the targeting of Giorgi is Bellini 2011. See Kaschewsky 1988 and Kaschewsky 1997 as well.

[5] Giorgi identifies the Tibetan painter as "Jon-de La-hu-rì." The Tibetan reproduced on the images in the *Alphabetum Tibetanum* shows the first name to be Yon tan, which is misspelled *yon ten*. La-hu-rì, which is supposed to represent the garbled *la'u ri'ab* phonetically, is likely *lha 'bri pa*, "iconographer."

Giorgi's image of the Wheel of Existence (*bhavacakra*, *srid pa'i 'khor lo*) is especially important in this regard. As the centerpiece of an historically significant iconographical program, Giorgi's depiction introduced Europeans both to one of the most famous Buddhist images and to the Buddhist notions it was meant to illustrate, namely, the twelve links of dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*, *rten cing 'brel ba 'byung ba*). Compared to the better-known images of Tibetan art found in books by Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), Bernard Picart (1673–1733), Orazio della Penna di Billi (1680–1745), and Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo (1748–1806), Giorgi's iconographical program marked a decided advance in Western depictions of Asian art. As it so happens, Giorgi's image was also published over a century before the famous reproduction of the Wheel of Existence by the Scottish explorer Lieutenant Colonel Laurence Austine Waddell (1854–1938), who is sometimes credited with introducing the image to Europe.[6] In what follows, I would like to outline the iconographical program in Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, explain its significance, and compare it to contemporary depictions of Tibetan art in Europe.

1. Agostino Antonio Giorgi and the Alphabetum Tibetanum

Francesco Maria Giorgi was born in San Mauro on May 10, 1711, the eldest son of Antonio Giorgi (1685–1723) and Antonia Semprini (1687–1767), whose families had lived in San Mauro since the sixteenth century.[7] Giorgi became a novice in the order of Augustinian Hermits in 1726 and made his novitiate in Bologna, taking the name Agostino Antonio after professing his vows in 1727. Giorgi studied with many of the best scholars of the order, conducting his philosophical studies under Agostino Gioia (1695–1751), who would later be elected the order's Prior General, and doing his theological studies under Gianlorenzo Berti (1696–1766), the greatest Augustinian theologian of the eighteenth century. Giorgi completed his course of studies in 1738 and was ordained by Cardinal Prospero Lambertini (1675–1758), the future Pope Benedict XIV. Before he had turned fifty, Giorgi had secured a chair at the papal university La Sapienza, appointments to the Congregation for Rites and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, and the directorship of the Bibliotheca Angelica, one of the most important libraries in Rome. At the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Giorgi worked with Costantino Ruggieri (1714–1763) and his successor Giovanni Cristoforo Amaduzzi (1740–

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6   Waddell 1892: 133-155.
7   For a biography of Giorgi, see Grigioni 1912.

1792), and his circle eventually widened to include the collectors
Francesco Carafa (1722–1818) and Stefano Borgia (1731–1804).[8] Giorgi
himself made important contributions to Western knowledge of
Etruscan, Arabic, Syriac, and Samaritan monuments and
manuscripts—as well as to the understanding of the Sahidic,
Akhmimic, and Fayyumic dialects of Coptic. He was named
Procurator General of the Augustinian order in 1764, thus serving as
its chief financial officer and fundraiser, and Vicar General in 1785, the
second highest rank in a religious order that counted over 20,000
members worldwide. Giorgi lost the election for Prior General in 1786
and was passed over by the order's leadership during the general
chapter of 1792. He died on the morning of May 4, 1797.

The first edition of Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum* was a typical
work of eighteenth-century Italian Orientalism. It consisted of a
preface, twenty-three small chapters, and three appendices, with basic
discussions of Tibetan orthography, pronunciation, and grammar.
True to the *alphabetum* genre, its first appendix includes interlinear
translations and transliterations of the Sign of the Cross, the Lord's
Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. Its
second appendix consists of transliterations of six small Tibetan
documents obtained from the Propaganda archives, with translations
and explanations of basic Tibetan vocabulary. Its third appendix,
however, took up the academic discussion on the Tibetan language
that had begun in Europe with Maturin Veyssière de la Croze (1661–
1739), Étienne Fourmont (1683–1745), and Theophilus Siegfried Bayer
(1694–1738). The second edition of Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum* is a
different beast altogether [Fig. 1]. In it, Giorgi took on the entire
Orientalist establishment of his day, including Samuel Bochart (1599–
1667), Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1620–1667), and Joseph de Guignes
(1721–1800). His chief adversary, however, was the Calvinist Isaac de
Beausobre (1659–1738), who had questioned the accuracy of patristic
accounts of Manichaeism.[9] Giorgi advanced an extended argument
that Tibetan Buddhism was an admixture of earlier Buddhist
traditions that had survived in Southeast Asia and later traditions that
were derived from Manichaeism and other "Gnostic" sources. Giorgi
compared Tibetan Buddhism to Egyptian, Greek, Indian, and
Japanese myths, charted the eastward course of Manichaeism along
the Silk Road and its influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism, and provided
an account of the history of Tibet, its provinces and rulers, the Tibetan
calendar, and so forth. In this regard, the second edition of Giorgi's

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[8]   On Borgia's role as a collector of Tibetan artifacts and manuscripts, see De Rossi
        Filibeck 2023: 163-165.
[9]   Beausobre 1734.

Alphabetum Tibetanum offered its readers nothing less than a comprehensive history of religions, an extended argument about the relationship of Tibetan Buddhism to Manichaeism, and an academic monograph on Tibetan history, geography, and culture. Were this not enough, Giorgi appended the entire first edition of the *Alphabetum Tibetanum* as a second part, bringing the entire production to well over 800 pages.

Whatever one might make of its arguments, the second edition of the *Alphabetum Tibetanum* is historically significant as a work of typography. The Press at the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith had long been at the forefront of non-Western typography, having introduced Europe to several Asian and African languages, but Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum* was the first book to use genuine Tibetan typeforms, with punches that were carved for the Capuchin mission by Antonio Fantauzzi (fl. 1720–1740).[10] In addition to Tibetan, the second edition also made lavish use of the Congregation's Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, and Devanāgarī founts. Paolo Antonio Ciccolini (fl. 1750–1770) served as the artistic designer, Alessio Giardoni (fl. 1760–1791) did the engraving, and a young Giambattista Bodoni (1740–1813) designed the decorations and the frontispiece for the second part. Johann Joachim Winckelmann—yes, *that* Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), the man many consider to be the founder of modern art history—wrote the formal *approbatio*.[11]

Be that as it may, Giorgi depended on missionaries for his knowledge of Tibetan religion and culture. It is an open question whether he knew much of the writings of the Jesuit Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733), the bulk of which languished in the Jesuit archives.[12] The Augustinian drew deeply on the Capuchin missionaries, especially Orazio della Penna di Billi (1680–1745), who undertook the reorganization of the mission in 1738 after living in Tibet from 1716 to 1733, from whom Giorgi took his descriptions of Tibetan cosmology, monasticism, history, geography, customs, and calendar.[13] Fr. Orazio, usually seen as the most talented Capuchin in Tibet, passed away

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[10]   For an overview of Tibetan typography in Europe in the eighteenth century, see Henkel 1973; Baerdemaeker 2020; and Kapstein 2024: 20-39.

[11]   Giorgi 1762 [1763]: 7.

[12]   For a discussion of the reception of Desideri's account of Tibet see: Sweet and Zwilling 2010. Bellini thinks that one can establish Giorgi's dependence on Desideri based on similarities in their descriptions of the Wheel of Existence. See Bellini 2011: 55, 70-72.

[13]   For important overviews of the Capuchin mission in Tibet, see Petech 1952–1956) [=*MITN*] 1: xv-cxx; Engelhardt 2002; Engelhardt 2005; and Sweet and Zwilling
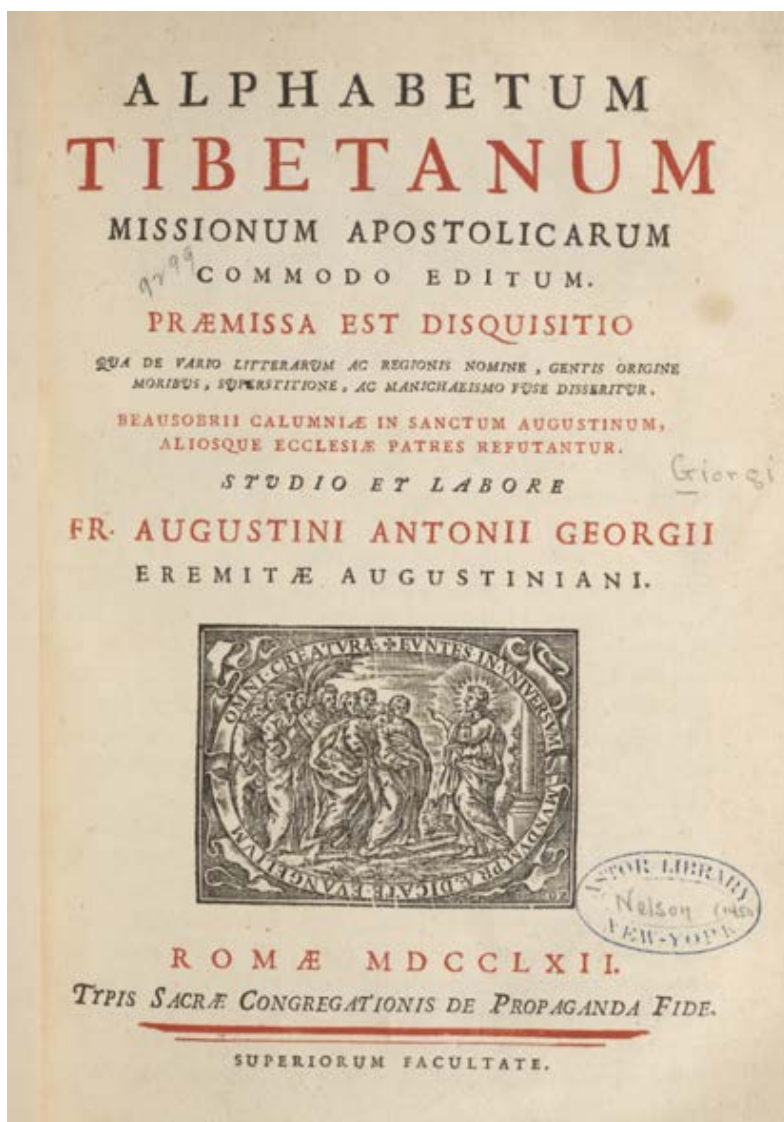
Fig. 1. Title page. Engraving, 28.8 × 20.3 cm. From Giorgi 1762 [1763]). New York, New York Public Library, call no. b14218996. Image © The New York Public Library.

2022. For a collation of Giorgi's borrowings from the Capuchins, see *MITN* 5: xciv-c. For a modern edition of Orazio della Penna, see Marini 2005.

before Giorgi began work on the *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, so Giorgi depended also on the Capuchin Cassiano da Macerata (1708–1791) for his life of the Buddha, a summary of Tibetan rituals, his description of Tibet temples, and his interpretation of Tibetan texts.[14] Fr. Cassiano had studied Tibetan with Orazio della Penna as the Capuchins returned to Tibet, but he lived in Lhasa for only about a year and a half. As a result, the Tibetan translations of Giorgi's *Alphabetum* cannot always be trusted.

2. *The Iconographical Program of the* Alphabetum Tibetanum

Whatever its flaws—which are many—the *Alphabetum Tibetanum*'s iconographical program marks a significant advance both in the Western depiction of Tibetan Buddhist images and in the European understanding of Tibetan Buddhism. Giorgi copied actual Tibetan images, attributed them to an actual Tibetan artist, and reproduced his images according to Tibetan iconographical norms—all things that had not been done in previous works on Buddhism published in Europe. What is more, Giorgi's use of images was scholarly. They served to support and to illustrate his presentation of various aspects of Tibetan religion and culture rather than merely to excite his readers' fantasies; indeed, Giorgi used the images in the exact way they were used in Tibet, namely, to teach and to illustrate basic aspects of Buddhist doctrine and cosmology. Giorgi also used his images to depict the material culture of Tibet. The *Alphabetum Tibetanum* includes images of Tibetan books and writing instruments, the floorplan of a Tibetan temple, and several small illustrations of Buddhist symbols. Its iconographical program, however, consists chiefly of five large images:

(1) The Procession by which Ministers of the Sacred Proceed to the Final Act of Solemn Sacrifice (*Pompa qua Sacrorum Ministri ad ultimam Solemnis Sacrificii actionem procedunt*), which shows a Mönlam procession.
(2) The True Image of the World (*Figura Mundi Sincera*), a reproduction of a Tibetan painting depicting Buddhist cosmology according to the *Lokaprajñapti*.
(3) The Cycle of Transmigrations (*Cyclus Transmigrationum*), a reproduction of a Tibetan painting of the Wheel of Existence.

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[14]   De Rossi Filibeck 1998.

(4) The Prayer Oṃ Maṇi Padme Hūṃ (*Oratio Hom-manì-peme-hum*), which depicts various Tibetan ritual implements connected with the Buddhist mantra.

(5) Some of the Deities, Great and Small, Lamas, Monks, Sorcerers, Meditators, Governors, and Tibetan Men and Women from Lhasa, of whom Mention is Made in the A[lphabetum]   T[ibetanum]" (*Effigies nonnullorum numinum, maximi minorumque lhamarum, trabarum, magorum, ritrobarum, debarum, virorum ac mulierum tibetanarum, lhassensium, de quibus mentio fit in A. T.*)[15]

A striking feature of these images—and this is no small thing—is that they actually look like the Tibetan artworks and figures they attempted to represent, especially the gatefolds depicting Buddhist cosmology and the Wheel of Existence, which were copied from Tibetan originals.

Let us consider each image in turn. The first gatefold depicts a "Procession in Which the Ministers of the Sacred Make Their Way to the Final Act of Solemn Sacrifice" [Fig. 2]. Giorgi's description of this procession deserves to be quoted at length:

In the solemn sacrifice, a mass of barley flour, kneaded into the shape of a cone, serves as material for the burnt offering. This sacred cone, which is called *Thurmà, rtur ma* [sic], is embellished with lotus blossoms and brought from a temple outside the city in a procession led by a lama, or priest, who is chosen to perform this ceremony in certain months of the year. Only during *Monlam, smon lam*, which is solemnly celebrated in the first month as a kind of jubilee and corresponds to the 22nd day of the month in our February, the Supreme Lama, or someone in his place, such as the divine *Lhama Kadèn, dga' ldan*, provides the service. A long procession is formed: standard bearers carry sixteen standards in front, on the tops of which is found the *trīsula* [sic], *trisul*, or trident, which is the symbol of *Mhadei* [*mahādeva*]. The lamas, and the *Kelong, dga slong* [sic], or professed monks, dressed in miters and a kind of pallium, proceed in pairs, beating timpani, blowing trumpets, and singing hymns. These are followed by *Nnga-rambà, sngags rams pa*, Magi, dressed in felt caps and vestments shaped like dalmatics, woven with designs

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15   Giorgi's program is somewhat confusing in that he explicitly identifies four of his images as "plates" (*tabulae*), even though these do not correspond to the four gatefolds. The first gatefold of the Mönlam procession [Fig. 2] is not identified as a plate. Giorgi's first self-identified plate is therefore the second gatefold [Fig. 3], the second plate is the third gatefold [Fig. 4], the third plate shows the Tibetan ritual implements [Fig. 5], and the fourth plate corresponds to the fourth gatefold [Fig. 6].

of skulls and *Turcè, rdo rje*. Ministers in stoles follow, of which six swing thuribles, and two carry silver-covered conch shells full of barley beer, which are used as pitchers.[16]

Fig. 2. Alessio Giardoni (engraver), The Procession by which Ministers of the Sacred Proceed to the Final Act of Solemn Sacrifice (*Pompa qua Sacrorum Ministri ad ultimam Solemnis Sacrificii actionem procedunt*). Engraving, 28.5 × 40 cm. From Giorgi 1762 [1763], between 212-213. New York, New York Public Library, call no. b14218996. Image © The New York Public Library.

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[16]   "In solemni sacrificio Massa ex hordeo in Coni morem formata holocausti materiem suppeditat. Sacrum Conum floribus Loti impressum, *Thurmà rtur ma* nuncupatum, e Templo extra unbis moenia praeeunte pompa singulis anni mensibus sacrum consumaturus educit Lhama Sacerdos: In *Monlam smon lam* tantum, quod mense primo tanquam solemne quoddam Jubilaeum celebrator, Luna XXII. in Februarium nostrum incidente, supremus Lhama, eiusque loco, qui est *Lhama Kadèn dga' ldan* divina ministrat. Longa instituitur Processio: Praeferunt Vexilliferi signa sexdecim, in quorum vertice *trīsula* [sic] *trisul*, Tridens est symbolum *Mhadei*. Lhamae et ipsi quoque *Kelong dga slong*, Religiosi Professi Mitra, ac Pallio veluti Sacerdotali induti, bini procedunt pulsantes tympana, inflantes buccinas, hymnosque canentes: Sequuntur *Nnga-rambà, sngags rams pa* Magi, tecti pileo et vestibus, quae calvariis, ac *Turcè rdo rje* intertextae formam exhibent Dalmaticarum: Tum stolati Ministri, quorum sex Thuribula accensa, duo reliqui argenteam concham hordei, et urceum gestant cerevisiae plenum." Giorgi 1762 [1763]: 211-212.

Giorgi's description is not bad at all. He goes on to mention monks that are not fully ordained (*gra ba*) and laymen, the tripod and yak-skin used in the ritual, the consecration and immolation of cake offerings (*gtor ma*), and the accompanying dances. The similarities Giorgi saw in the liturgies of Catholicism and Tibetan Buddhism are genuinely analogous. The "miters" worn by the fully ordained monks (*dge slong*) are depicted accurately, as are the censers, drums, and "trumpets" (*rgya gling*).

The first plate shown on the second gatefold, "The True Image of the World," is a depiction of Tibetan cosmology from the *Treatise on the Arrangement of the World* (*Lokaprajñapti, 'Jig rten gzhag pa*) [Fig. 3]. Here, Giorgi reproduces a Tibetan prototype and follows Tibetan iconographical conventions. The capital letters S, T, V, and W mark the east, south, west, and north, respectively. Starting from the bottom, the capital letters indicate Asia [A], including China [B], India [C], Tibet [D], Uḍḍiyāna [E], and Shambala [F], whereas capital letters G and H represent the islands to the east and west of Asia, both of which are identified as Buddhist lands. Following counterclockwise, the capital letters I, K, and L represent the western continent and its two islands; M, N, and O the northern continent and its two islands; and P, Q, and R the eastern continent and its two islands, completing the four continents and eight islands of traditional Buddhist cosmology. These lands are all found on a single plane from which the cosmological map projects upwards. Numbers 1-7 and letters a-g thus depict tiers of mountain rings and their seas on the mythical Mount Meru as it ascends to the celestial spheres. Numbers 8-33 depict the various realms of the gods and realized beings on an ascending scale according to the longevity of their lives and their freedom from desire and attachment. They are divided accordingly into the gods of the desire realm (*kāmadhātu, 'dod pa'i khams*), the realm of pure form (*rūpadhātu, gzugs khams*), and the formless realm (*arūpadhātu, gzugs med khams*). Numbers 32 and 33, which are indicated on the map only by small houses placed at the base from which the god realms are projected, thus represent the two final formless realms, the realm of nothingness (*ākiṃcanyāyatana, ci yang med pa*) and the realm of neither existence nor nonexistence (*naivasaṃjñānāsaṃjñāyatana, yod min med min*), the two most rarefied realms of Buddhist cosmology. Returning to the desire realms, number 34 depicts the mythical Jampū tree, whose fruit bestows near-immortality upon the gods, and numbers 35-38 depict the four great oceans of Buddhist cosmology. Giorgi also lists each tier with its dimensions, the life span of its inhabitants, and the Tibetan names of the deities and preternatural beings that govern each realm in the body of his text.

Fig. 3. Alessio Giardoni (engraver) and Paolo Antonio Ciccolini (designer) (after Yönten the Iconographer), The True Image of the World (*Figura mundi sincera*). Engraving, 58 × 40 cm. From Giorgi 1762 [1763], between 472-473. New York, New York Public Library, call no. b14218996. Image © The New York Public Library.

Giorgi was also aware of his image's value and limitations:

> Our engraving was made by a Tibetan painter, expressed in
> accordance with the latest opinions of the lamas. An earlier one, sent
> to Rome by Father Orazio, was lost, so that only this draft of the
> complex whole remains. We ourselves have used this one, which
> was made on the basis of a tracing, but it had to be accommodated
> to the technique of copperplate engraving.[17]

Giorgi's second plate on his third gatefold "The Cycle of
Transmigrations" represents the famous Wheel of Existence [Fig. 4].[18]
Tradition of course credits this iconography to the Buddha, who
commanded the image to be drawn in the vestibules of monasteries.[19]
The Buddha's injunction appears in several different stories, with
minor variations here and there, occurring in the story of
Anāthapiṇḍika's gift of the Jetavana Grove to the Buddha and his
nascent community, in one of the Buddha's conversations with his
disciple Ānanda about the paranormal endowments of Śāriputra and
Maudgalyāyana, and in the story of the kings Udrāyaṇa's and
Bimbisāra's attempt to capture the likeness of the Holy One.[20]

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[17]   "Haec nostra Tabula constructa est a Pictore Tibetano, cui placuit potremam
Lhamarum opinionem exprimere. Prior, quae Romam missa fuerat a P. Horatio,
jam periit, una superstite description systematis. Hac plane diagraphe usi nos ipsi
sumus; sed ea in praesentis accomodanda est schemati insculptae Tab." Giorgi
1762 [1763]: 481.

[18]   Lyudmila Klasanova informs me that the engraving of the Wheel of Existence
from Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum* held at the National Gallery in Bulgaria has
the additional inscription "Cyclus Transmigrationum ex Theologia Lhamarum
ex linteo quod fixum est Velitris in Museo Borgiano Pictor Tibetanus Ion-de La-
hu-ri ex archetypo sacro in Lhapranga Lhassensi asservato coloribus expressit,"
that is, a "Cycle of Transmigrations from the Theology of the Lamas that was
copied from the canvas of the Tibetan painter Yönten the Iconographer in the
Museo Borgiano in Velletri from a sacred prototype expressed in colors and
preserved in the Bla brang in Lhasa." Compare Figure 12, below. Dr. Klasanova
also tells me that the engraving in the Bulgarian National Gallery, which
influenced the orthodox iconographer Zahari Zograf (1810–1853), was probably
purchased by his father, who traveled in Western Europe during the late
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I am grateful for this information,
which was communicated to me personally on July 17, 2024.

[19]   The first known use of the Wheel of Existence as a visual symbol of *saṁsāra* is
found in a painting executed on a porch in the Ajaṇṭā complex from ca. 460–480
CE. Paintings of the Wheel of Existence had spread along the Silk Road to China
by the ninth century, and they probably began to appear in Tibet by the late tenth
century. See Teiser 2006; Zin and Schlinghoff 2022.

[20]   For a summary, see Sopa 1984.

Fig. 4. Alessio Giardoni (engraver) and Paolo Antonio Ciccolini (designer) (after "Yönten the Iconographer"), The Cycle of Transmigrations (*Cyclus Transmigrationum*). Engraving, 52 × 41 cm. From Giorgi 1762 [1763], between 486-487. New York, New York Public Library, call no. b14218996. Image © The New York Public Library.

In most of these stories, the Buddha enjoins his followers to write the following verses under the image of the Wheel of Existence, which Giorgi reproduces:

brtsam par bya zhing 'byung bar bya // sangs rgyas bstan la 'jug par bya // 'dam bu'i khyim na glang chen bzhin// 'chi bdag sde ni gzhom par bya// gang zhig rab tu bag yod par// chos 'dul 'di la spyod 'gyur ba// skye ba'i 'khor ba rab spangs nas// sdug bsngal tha mar byed par 'gyur//[21]

Gather up, cast away, and enter the Buddha's teaching. Trample the Lord of Death's minions like an elephant in a house of reeds. Whoever practices this dharma and monastic discipline with great care, having thoroughly abandoned the wheel of births, will bring suffering to an end.

This text appears frequently in the Buddhist canon, most prominently in the *Vinaya-vastu* and the *Vinaya-vibhaṅga*.[22] We may reasonably assume that Giorgi learned it through Orazio della Penna Billi, who read it in the *Prātimokṣa-sūtra*, a text he studied with Desideri in 1717.[23]

Giorgi's copy, which is based on a Tibetan design of the seventeenth or early eighteenth century, is typical, showing the boar, rooster, and serpent that represent the three poisons, the intermediate state, and the six realms. Compare it, for example, to an eighteenth-century Wheel of Existence in the Rubin Museum [Fig. 5]. What is more important, one finds the twelve links of dependent arising (*dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda, rten 'brel yan lag bcu gnyis*) with their symbols. Traditionally of course these are:

(1)   Ignorance (*avidyā, ma rig pa*)
(2)   Formation (*saṃskāra, 'dus byed*)
(3)   Consciousness (*vijñāna, rnam par shes pa*)
(4)   Name and form (*nāma-rūpa, ming dang gzugs*)
(5)   The six sense organs (*ṣaḍāyatana, skye mched drung*)
(6)   Contact (*sparśa, reg ba*)
(7)   Sensation (*vedanā, tshor ba*)
(8)   Craving (*bhavarāga, sred pa*)
(9)   Grasping (*partigraha/upādāna, len pa*)
(10)   Existence (*bhava, srid pa*)
(11)   Birth (*jāti, skyes pa*)
(12)   Old age and death (*jāra-maraṇa, rga dang shi*)

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[21]   Giorgi 1762 [1763]: 469. Giorgi makes several mistakes in his transcription.
[22]   See Sde dge 1, vol. 1 'dul ba ka 91b7-92a2 and Sde dge 3, vol. 7 'dul ba ja 115a2-115a3, respectively.
[23]   Sde dge vol. 5 'dul ba ca 20b4-20b6.

Fig. 5. *The Wheel of Life*, 18th century. Ground mineral pigment on canvas, 63.5 × 44.8 cm. New York, Rubin Museum of Art, Gift of the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, inv. no. F1997.40.10. Image © Rubin Museum of Art.

These twelve links are symbolized by (1) a blind man or woman, (2) a potter with his wares, (3) a monkey, (4) a person on a boat, (5) an abandoned house, often having windows to represent the senses, (6) a couple embracing, (7) a man with his eye pierced by an arrow, (8) a man receiving a drink from a woman, (9) a man or a monkey plucking fruit from a tree, (10) a husband and a wife, or sometimes an attractive or pregnant woman, (11) a woman giving birth, and (12) a man carrying a corpse on his back.[24] As we shall see below, Giorgi does not get each of these elements correct, but he appears to be mistaken for interesting reasons.

Giorgi's third plate, "The Prayer Oṃ Maṇi Padme Hūṃ," illustrates the various objects in his discussion of the Tibetan formula, all of which are related to Giorgi's explanation of the term *maṇi* [Fig. 6]. Giorgi wisely starts his discussion by noting that the term admits of many meanings.[25] I am tempted to say that it all goes downhill from there, since the presence of the word *maṇi* in the mantra is one of the chief reasons Giorgi believed Tibetan Buddhism to be Manichaean in inspiration. Leaving the Augustinian's creative etymology aside, his descriptions are fairly innocuous. The image contains the cairn (*lha tho*) often erected on mountaintops or high places [A], a *dar po che* or *dar lcog*, the flagstaff upon which prayers are written [B], a hand-held prayer wheel [C], a home adorned with prayer flags [D], three large prayer wheels [E], and another prayer wheel that shows the mantra written both in Tibetan and in "Sanskrit" [F]. Each of these objects is treated according to Giorgi's comparative fancy, but his understanding of their apotropaic and ritual uses is sound. He correctly characterizes the cairns as sites at which pilgrims leave prayer flags and other votive offerings, and he rightly realizes that the *dar po che* serves to avert misfortune (*depulsoria mali*). Giorgi's description of the *maṇi lag khor*, which he calls a "traveling *maṇi*" (*maṇi gestatorius*), is also spot on.

Giorgi's iconographical program is rounded out by a fourth plate, "Some of the Deities, Great and Small, Lamas, Monks, Sorcerers, Meditators, Governors, and Tibetan Men and Women from Lhasa, of whom Mention is Made in the A[lphabetum] T[ibetanum]," that depicts various participants, human and divine, who have been described over the course of his work [Fig. 7]. These images allow Giorgi to provide illustrations for the entire volume, including Amitābha, Avalokiteśvaram Vajrapāṇi, and Padmasambhava. Here,

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[24]   For a table that compares several variations, see Teiser 2006: 10-11.
[25]   "Manì praeterea apud Tibetanos nomen est ad plura significanda accomodatum." Giorgi 1762 [1763]: 508.
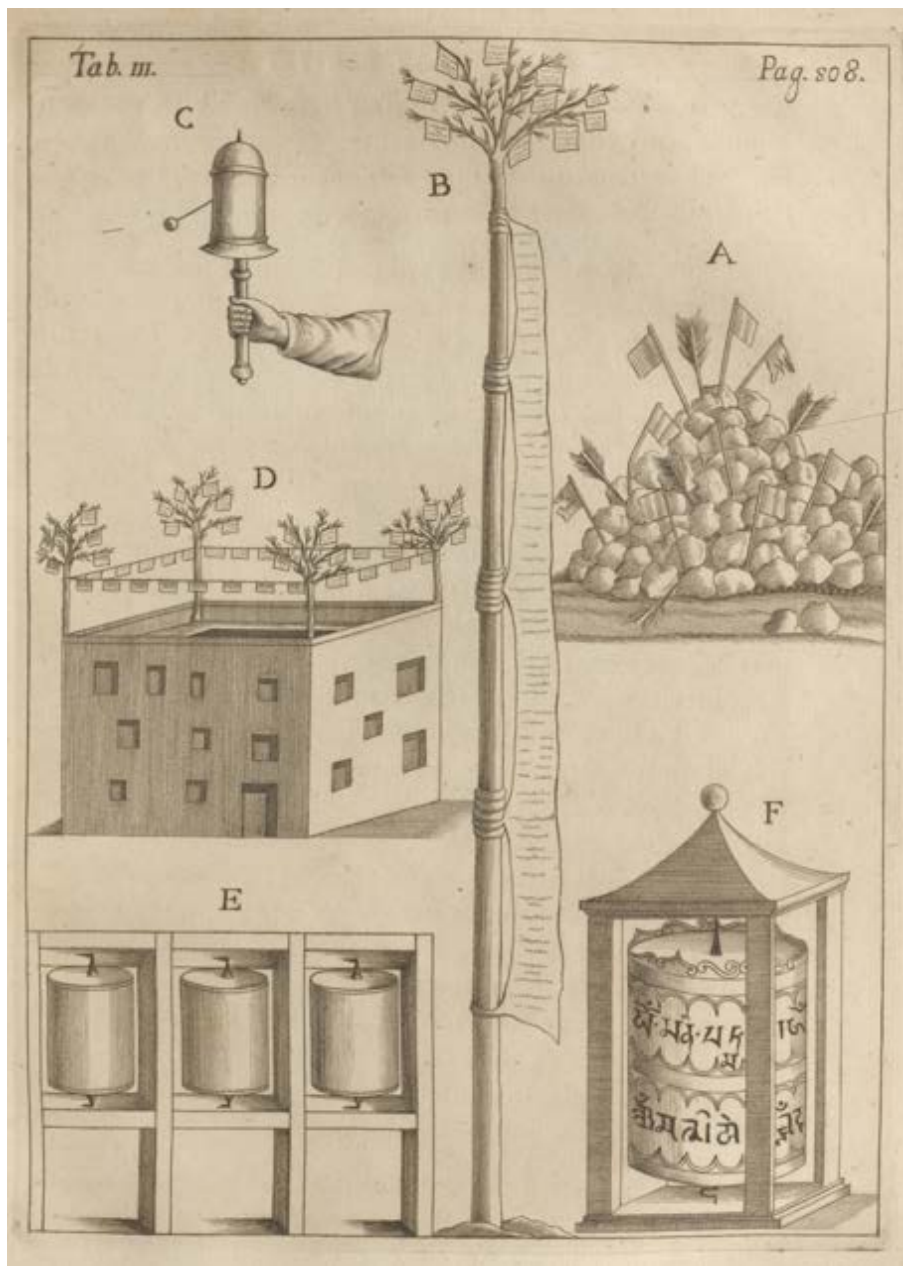
Fig. 6. Alessio Giardoni (engraver), The Prayer Oṃ Maṇi Padme Hūṃ (*Oratio Hom-manì-peme-hum*). Engraving, 24.6 × 18.1 cm. From Giorgi 1762 [1763], between 508-509. New York, New York Public Library, call no. b14218996. Image © The New York Public Library.

too, Giorgi is more accurate than his predecessors; if the religious figures are modelled more three-dimensionally to accord with European tastes, his basic iconography is sound, and the varieties of Tibetan dress are more detailed than in the more romantic depictions found in earlier works. Apparently, Ciccolini and Giardoni could not resist the urge to place Vajrapāṇi in a slightly more dramatic contrapposto than is usual.

Fig. 7. Alessio Giardoni (engraver), Some of the Deities, Great and Small, Lamas, Monks, Sorcerers, Meditators, Governors, and Tibetan Men and Women from Lhasa, of whom Mention is Made in the A[lphabetum] T[ibetanum] (*Effigies nonnullorum numinum, maximi minorumque lhamarum, trabarum, magorum, ritrobarum, debarum, virorum ac mulierum tibetanarum, lhassensium, de quibus mentio fit in A.T.*). Engraving, 28.5 × 36 cm. From Giorgi 1762 [1763], between 552–553. New York, New York Public Library, call no. b14218996. Image © The New York Public Library.

Still—to be fair—Tibetan canons do require Vajrapāṇi to be depicted in *pratyālīḍha*, the posture appropriate to warriors in Indian drama, especially those who have hurled javelins or other weapons.[26]

3. The Artistic Merits of Giorgi's Program

Giorgi's images might not seem especially dazzling today. Here, though, it might be helpful to compare Giorgi's program to contemporary depictions of Tibetan art which were not based on Tibetan models. Such depictions, based largely on missionary reports—presumably reports with little concern for artistic form— follow Western visual conventions with anachronistic—and often comical—results. Consider, for example, a famous image from the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher's *China illustrata*, "The Idol Manipe in the City of Barantola in the Kingdom of Lhasa, with Another Idol of Manipe" (*Idolum Manipe in urbe Barantola regni Lassa; Aliud Idolum Manipe*), which—even if the Jesuit was unaware that two different figures were represented—shows Tibetans bowing before images of Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara [Fig. 8].[27] Kircher shows a somewhat conservative taste for the time: he depicts the statues as Roman busts or figures on basic pedestals, monumental compositions based on cubes and regular pyramids with square bases. Perhaps he makes the slightest nod to more modern tastes by the high apex implied in the statue of Avalokiteśvara, even if it sags a little to the right, but spiral compositions more typical of mannerist or baroque tastes—or even simple diagonals—are conspicuously absent in Kircher's images. Tibetan statuary is similarly monumental, and its iconographical conventions favor compositions based on interlocking geometrical forms, but the volumes of Tibetan sculpture project neatly from the clean, regular lines of Tibetan painting. Kircher does not do badly representing the bodhisattva's heads, although the canonical form has eleven heads, not the nine depicted by Kircher. Tibetan artists, however, would never bisect the bodhisattvas in the way that Kircher did to accommodate them to Roman tastes, nor would they be especially concerned with the softer, more naturalistic forms depicted by Kircher.

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[26]   The Indian contrapposto is described with other dramatic poses in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* XI.70-72, the traditional Indian treatise on the performing arts. See, for example, Ghosh 2016, 1: 276-291. For Tibetan examples of Vajrapāṇi that would have been known in Orazio's milieu, see Cüppers, van der Kuijp, and Pagel 2012, plates 100-103.

[27]   Kircher 1667: 72.

Fig. 8. The Idol Manipe in the City of Barantola in the Kingdom of Lhasa, with Another Idol of Manipe (*Idolum Manipe in urbe Barantola regni Lassa; Aliud Idolum Manipe*). Engraving, 17.7 × 20.1 cm. From Kircher 1667: 72. New York, New York Public Library, call no. b13034598. Image © The New York Public Library.

Kircher—or one of his informants from the missions—has also removed all but two of the arms, effectively destroying the symbolism of the bodhisattva's measureless ability to assist those in need. Indeed, it is difficult to say that Kircher attempted to reproduce Tibetan artworks at all; having none at his disposal, he simply improvised. Nor does the Jesuit discuss the artworks' pedagogical function or the Buddhist doctrines associated with them.

Consider, too, Bernard Picart's embellishment of Kircher's image, "The Idol Manipe, or the Divinity of Lhasa to whom One Offers Those Who Have Been Killed by Buth" (*Manipa Idole, ou Divinité de Lassa, à*

laquelle on offre ceux, que Buth a tué) [Fig. 9].[28] The French engraver, working in 1727, seems to have found Kircher's tastes a little stodgy. If anything, though, Picart strays even further from Tibetan conventions than Kircher does. Once again, Avalokiteśvara is placed on a pedestal in half-form with decidedly European forms and volumes. Picart, however, places Kircher's simple pedestal on a large double plinth, adds another plinth to separate the statue from the pedestal and decorates the statue with "Chinese" characters. Picart also depicts the scene in an awkward two-point perspective, or to be more precise, two different two-point schemes. In the first, the projection of the statue is so basic as to be almost strictly isometric. The second, which follows an orthogonal towards the door, is made more dramatic by the addition of some figures, although they appear to occupy a rather different space than the statue or the supplicants in the foreground. The supplicants, who appear to be illuminated by a second source of light, are composed even more haphazardly. The two swooning figures on the left appear to fall under the first perspectival scheme, with the foregrounded figures occupying—but not quite harmonizing—the two schemes in a central tangle of forms. The single slain woman, who falls to the right of the pile, is drawn on a horizontal line that defies both schemes, being as spatially awkward as the figures behind her.

Picart also seems to have been slightly unhappy with Avalokiteśvara's proportions. He trims the deity by raising the vertical, adds just enough to the lower body to suggest a classical torso, and slightly elevates the angle of the arms. By happy accident, Picart eschews Kircher's Roman arch, but he places the statue in an architectural setting that is equally strange. One presumes it to be a domed structure, rather than a circular tent like those depicted through the door; it supports several hanging lamps, and the wall paintings appear to be part of the structure. The paintings, which appear to adopt Chinese conventions, are more or less accurate to the period, but the rug is rather incongruous. One need not criticize Kircher or Picart too severely, though. Faced with the lacunae found in any text or verbal description, an artist is forced to make choices that an author—or in this case a missionary—might leave undetermined. But, here again, there is no effort to depict the Tibetan artworks according to anything resembling Tibetan conventions, nor did the images themselves contribute much to Western understandings of Buddhism beyond what was said in the texts.

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[28]   Bernard and Picart Bernard 1728 [1727]. For other examples of what he calls "pictorial plagiarism," see Brauen 2004: 15.

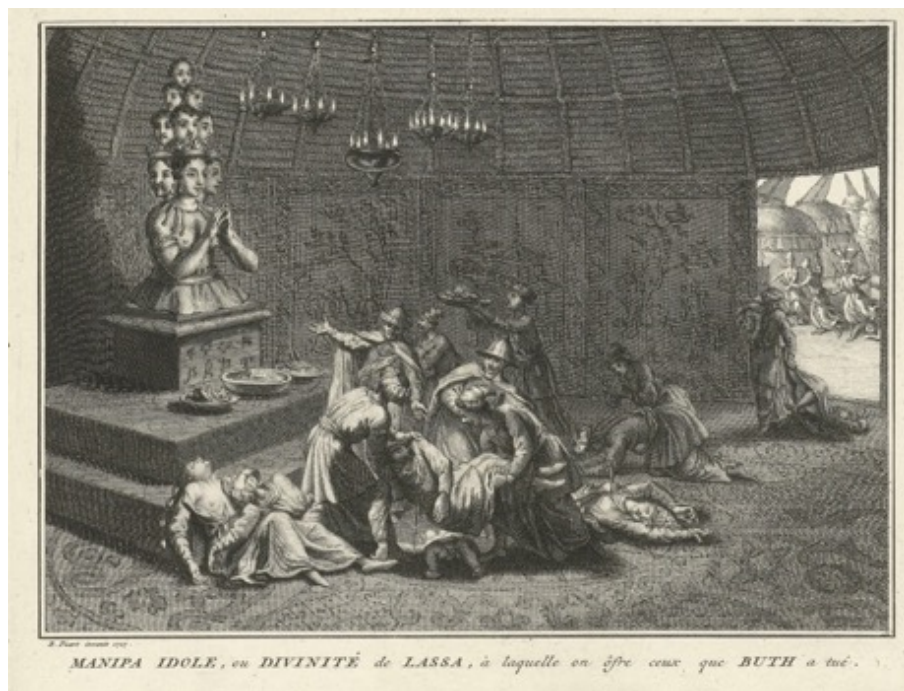MANIPA IDOLE, ou DIVINITÉ de LASSA, à laquelle on offre ceux que BUTH a tué.

Fig. 9. Bernard Picart (engraver), The Idol Manipe, or the Divinity of Lhasa to Whom One Offers Those Who Have Been Killed by Buth (*Manipa Idole, ou Divinité de Lassa, à laquelle on offre ceux, que Buth a tué*). Engraving, 33.5 × 22.3 cm (sheet). From Bernard and Picart 1728, 2, part 1, between 354-355. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP–P–1911–3219. Image © Rijksmuseum.

Giorgi's image may be also compared favorably to another "Image of Tibetan Transmigrations" (*Tibetische Transmigrations Tafel*) based on Orazio della Penna di Billi's description [Fig. 10].[29] This image, which was made without a prototype, is a perfect example of just how far an artist can stray when he is working solely from a written text or verbal description. What has gone wrong? First, hard as it might be to imagine, this image fuses Orazio della Penna's descriptions of the *Lokaprajñapti* and the *bhavacakra*. The central heap, then, is not the Wheel of Existence, even though the six realms are shown with it, but rather the "quadrangular world mountain" (*viereckigen Welt-Berg*) that arises from the four great oceans in Indian cosmology that Giorgi

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[29]   Orazio della Penna di Billi 1740: 114-119.

depicted in Fig. 3.[30] Following the description found in the text, there
is "an abominable monster," which, according to the Tibetan opinion,
is a symbol of human deeds [A]; the Tibetan "pseudo-God," who is
thought to be the composite of all the Tibetan saints and who has a
body made entirely of gemstones [B]; "Sciachia tu-pha," the final
reformer and reviver of the Tibetans' "pseudo-religion" [C]; and his
mother [D]. Arguably, the strangest aspect of this image is the
substitution of a more-or-less iconographically correct Garuda for
Yama, the Lord of Death, who is said in the text to "attack" the world.
It is not clear why he is placed to the far right. Similarly, the
description of the Buddha appears to subsume an understanding of
the *buddha*, *dharma*, and *saṃgha* by interpreting the word "jewel" to
indicate the buddhas' and bodhisattvas' impassible, adamantine
bodies. By distinguishing the Tibetan "God" from the Buddha, the
author might suggest a dim understanding that the historical
Śākyamuni was but an incarnation or emanation, but it is hard to
imagine such a notion would have been understood or intended here.
From there, one finds the six realms with gods placed in the upper left
[1], demi-gods placed in the upper center [2], animals placed in the
lower left and the lower right [3], ghosts placed on the upper right [4],
hell-beings placed in a central cavity [5], and human beings sailing the
seas to the far left, looking up at Mount Meru in apparent wonder.
Iconographic errors abound. The placement is all wrong. The gods,
who appear to be wearing jeweled turbans, listen to the priest of some
solar religion as they enjoy star-shaped toys. The ghosts, which the
text rightly describes as "the tantalized" or "tantalians" (*Tantaler*),
appear to be enjoying their food and having a grand old time. While
the animals on the right seem to be minding their own affairs, those
on the left seem to be clamoring to get into hell, where the damned are
placed more modestly in distant caves, presumably so that the
indignity of their sufferings might not be exposed to devout eyes.

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[30]   "Nun folget die weitere Erklärung dises gegenwärtigen Kupfer-Bilds; und zwar
        Anfangs, was anbetreifft die Figuren, so mit denen Buchstaben gezeichnet seynd.
        'A. Diss stellet uns vor ein abscheuliches Monstrum, welches nach der
        Thibetischen Meynung seyn solle ein Sinbild der Menschlichen Wercken, so sie
        Las dbang sgam po phywa benambsen […] 'B. Zeiget an ihren Affter-Gott,
        welcher auss allen Thibetischen Affter-Heiligen zusam gegeisteret, einen
        materialischen Leib von lauter kostbaren Edelgesteinen haben solle […] 'C. Hier
        wird vorgestellet der letzte Reformator und Wider-Ergäntzer der Thibetischen
        Affter-Religion, Sciachia tupha genant, welcher, wie sie glauben, ihr Gesatz von
        vilen Fehleren gereiniget, und solches mit Beyhilff seiner Lehr-Jünger in 300
        Bücher solle verfassen haben […] 'D. Die Mutter dess erst-erwehten
        Reformators" Orazio della Penna Billi 1740: 118.

Fig. 10. Image of Tibetan Transmigrations (*Tibetische Transmigrations Tafel*). Engraving, 17.7 × 25 cm. From: Orazio della Penna 1740, between 118-119. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, call no. 4 H.eccl. 600–1/2. Image © Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

In a detail that would have probably been surprising even to Christian viewers, the scene of judgement records what appears to be a rising number of sins—first 100, then 200, then 1,000. Of course, Buddhists would have been shocked to see that the demi-gods—seemingly for the first time in beginningless existence—enjoy sole possession of the mythical Jampū Tree.

Giorgi's image is not without its flaws either. Ciccolini and Giardoni, while adhering as much as they could to the rigorously two-dimensional conventions of Tibetan iconography, could not resist a little three-dimensional modelling, especially in the musculature of the figures' arms [Fig. 6]. There are also some peculiarities in Giorgi's depiction of the twelve links of dependent arising. If one looks more closely, one sees that Giorgi's list is not quite right. He has

(1)   Ignorance (*ma rig pa*)
(2)   Ideation (*'dus shes*)
(3)   Formation (*'dus byed*)
(4)   Consciousness (*rnam par shes pa*)
(5)   Name and form (*ming dang gzugs*)

(6)   The six sense organs (*skye ched* [sic] *drung*)
(7)   Contact (*reg ba*)
(8)   Sensation (*tshor ba*)
(9)   Craving (*sred pa*)
(10)   Grasping (*len pa*)
(11)   Birth (*skyes pa*)
(12)   Old age and death (*rga dang shi*)

This is strange. The relative paucity of misspellings suggests that Orazio della Penna is the source of this list, unless perhaps Cassiano copied the terms at some point, but someone seems to have confused things along the way. Giorgi does not have existence (*srid pa*), which is often inserted as the tenth step in most lists of the twelve links and includes ideation (*'dus shes*) as the second step between ignorance and mental formations. There is logic to this, though, as ideation is better known as the third of the five aggregates that comes before mental formations (*'dus shes*) in the traditional Buddhist list of aggregates from which sentient beings are composed, viz. form (*rūpa*, *gzugs*), feeling (*vedanā*, *tshor ba*), ideation (*saṃjñā*, *'dus shes*), mental formations (*saṃskāra*, *'dus byed*), and consciousness (*vijñāna*, *rnam par shes pa*). My guess is that Orazio della Penna, like many beginning students of Buddhist philosophy, got his lists confused.

The iconographic images follow a different sequence as well. Following clockwise in the traditional iconographic order, one sees:

(1)   A blind man with a walking stick
(2)   A potter with his vases
(3)   A monkey
(4)   A couple embracing
(5)   A person on a boat
(6)   An abandoned house
(7)   A man receiving a drink from a woman
(8)   A person pierced by an arrow
(9)   A person in bed
(10)   A woman plucking fruit from a tree
(11)   A husband and a wife
(12)   A corpse being carried

Here is how Giorgi describes each, with its accompanying emblem:

(1)   The lack of understanding (*intellectu carens*): the burden-bearer (*bajulus*)
(2)   The inclination to evil (*propensio ad malus*): the wayfarer (*viator*)

(3)   To act evilly (*male agere*): the potter (*figulus*)
(4)   A symbol of the soul (*symbolum animae*): a consuming ape (*simia comedens*)
(5)   Name and body (*nomen et corpus*): a sailor and his ship (*navis et gubernator*)
(6)   The heart and the six bodily senses (*cor, et sex corporis*): an uncompleted and abandoned house (*deserta et imperfecta domus*)
(7)   Touch (*tactus*): a man and woman embracing (*vir et mulier inter amplexus*)
(8)   The power of sensing (*vis sentiendi*): a man with an arrow in his eye (*sagitta hominis oculo infixa*)
(9)   Desire (*cupiditas*): a woman offering an ascetic a goblet of beer (*mulier cervisiae poculum offerens ascetae*)
(10) Grasping (*ablatio*): a woman plucking fruit from a tree (*mulier fructus ex arborae decerpens*)
(11) Birth or transmigration (*nativitas, vel transmigration*): a husband and wife (*conjuges*)
(12) A dying old man (*senex moriens*)

As one can see from the numbers in the image, these are out of order. Still, the only image that cannot be immediately associated with those in traditional lists is the image of the person in bed. Perhaps this was supposed to be an image of a woman giving birth, and Orazio della Penna or Ciccolini did not understand the original image. Most Tibetan images are relatively explicit in this respect, but some are more modest, and it is always possible that Ciccolini worked at least partially from memory. Nor did any of the Europeans realize that the burden-bearer in Giorgi's Cycle of Transmigrations was carrying a corpse, whose limbs can barely be made out in Giardoni and Ciccolini's design [Fig. 11]. As a result, Giorgi used the image to represent ignorance (the first link) rather than old age and death (the twelfth), displacing the image of a blind man to serve as a representation for ideation, the new second link. From there the images follow the traditional sequence, even if they are presented in the wrong order spatially. This makes it a bit hard to fathom what happened with the design. Perhaps Ciccolini took liberties with the composition without realizing that the figures of the outer circle followed a particular order. Still, even if one supposes that the numbers and the Tibetan names were added to the engraving to correct the artist's mistake, Giorgi's description shows that he did not understand the images traditionally associated with each link.

Fig. 11. Alessio Giardoni (engraver) and Paolo Antonio Ciccolini (designer), Man Carrying a Corpse, detail of Fig. 4.

Still, if Giorgi's image is superior to the fantastical creation of the *Missio Apostolica Thibetano-Seraphica*, it is also more accurate than the "The Tribunal of Yama" (1791) found in the *Systema Brahmanicum* of the Discalced Carmelite Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo [Fig. 12].[31]

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[31]   Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo 1791: 177–180. Upon close inspection, one sees that the images are not strictly identical; it appears that Paulinus re-used Ciccolini's design, but that another engraving was made. On Paulinus, see Županov 2006.

Fig. 12. Unknown artist, copy of Alessio Giardoni (engraver) and Paolo Antonio Ciccolini (designer) (after "Yönten the Iconographer"), The Tribunal of Yama (Tribunal dei Yàma). Engraving, 28.1 × 24.2 cm. From Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomeo 1791, pl. 23. New York, New York Public Library, call no. b14156307. Image © The New York Public Library.

This image, which was copied from the *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, has been simplified in many respects, and Paulinus repeats the errors in the order of the twelve links and their symbolic representations. The

Tibetan is the same, but rewritten, sometimes less legibly. Of the explanatory letters and numbers, all are absent, save M, N, and O, which indicate the three poisons and the upward and downward rebirths in the intermediate state. These, though, were all that Fr. Paulinus needed for his exposition, which was more concerned to demonstrate the Tibetans' dependence on the Indian myths he knew from his missionary work in Kerala between 1776 and 1789. Although Paulinus rightly calls Yama by his Tibetan name, *gshin rje chos rgyal*, the Carmelite is content to argue that the first link in dependent arising, *ma rig pa*, or the lack of understanding, which is symbolized by the burden-bearer (*baiulus*), is the corrupted form of an Indian word that means forgetfulness. Paulinus is wrong, of course. Unfortunately, however, his argument was based on one of Giorgi's own mistakes. With Paulinus, though, there is no attempt to explain the Buddhist doctrine the image was meant to illustrate beyond what he needed to advance his own arguments for the dependence of Tibetan Buddhism on "Brahmanical" myths. His image has been stripped of its pedagogical elements. The six realms, the twelve links of dependent arising, and the accompanying Tibetan text have been abandoned.

My suspicion is that Paulinus did not describe the Wheel of Existence in detail because he presumed an educated reader would consult the *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, which was still a respected authority, even if Fr. Paulinus mercilessly criticized Giorgi himself. If the Carmelite still depended upon the Augustinian's tome almost thirty years later, he was fighting a very different battle. Giorgi hoped to use the whole of what was known about Tibetan religion and culture in the first half of the eighteenth century to show that the Calvinist Isaac de Beausobre was wrong to criticize the historical accuracy of texts by Tertullian, Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Augustine, and other ancient Christian writers. Fr. Paulinus, by contrast, hoped to use his knowledge of Indian and Tibetan religion to show that the atheism emerging in Europe was a historical anomaly, unknown in other eras and lands beyond the modern West. The Wheel of Existence, he argues,

> shows the changes that mortals will undergo after death, when everything will be examined in the open and rewards or punishments will be assigned for merits and demerits. At this point someone from the ranks will rise up […] a trifler, a dress-dealer, or an arrant fool, and accuse the Indians, the Tibetans, and the other nations of Asia of Spinozism, materialism, or atheism….[32]

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[32]   "Atque mortalium vicem ea tabula conspiciedam exhibit, quae post mortem subeunda erit, dum omnia in propatulo examinanda et pro meritis aut demeritis praemio aut poena afficienda erunt. Hic iam ex offibus […] exsurgat gerro,

With this, though, a rather different chapter in the history of the Western fascination with Tibet begins, in which Buddhism would be thought irreligious—if not nihilistic—and the accomplishments of both Giorgi and Paulinus would soon be forgotten.

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nugigerulus, aut morio, et Indicas, Tibetanas, ac reliquas Asiae gentes spinosismi, materialismi, aut atheismi accuset...." Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomeo 1791: 178.

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