


*Dharmabhāṇakas, Siddhas, Avatāraśiddhas, and gTer stons: Rethinking Treasure (Part Three)*¹

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Introduction

ne of the principal ways in which traditional Mahāyāna Buddhists could classify their texts was according to the nature of their proposed authorial voices: those texts thought to be uttered by the Buddha (however conceived) could be classified as Buddha word (*buddhavaṇana*, *bka'*) while those understood to be authored by human intellects could be classified as treatises (*śāstra*, *bstan bcos*). Thus in the Tibetan tradition, for example, the former, the actual words of the Buddha himself in Tibetan translation, found their home in the Kangyur (*bka' 'gyur*), while the latter, the Tibetan translations of treatises mainly authored by the great Buddhist masters of India, were gathered in its parallel collection, the Tengyur (*bstan 'gyur*).

It is true that on closer examination, the boundaries between *buddhavaṇana* and *śāstra* can in several instances prove quite elusive, so that a complex philosophical debate arose around such issues, notably in Tibet.² Nevertheless, in simpler bibliographical terms, or as a rule of thumb, I think one can still say that the production of *buddhavaṇana* is, by definition, considered to be beyond the capacity of ordinary people. Mere mortals like ourselves should not just compose a text and then

¹ Several colleagues have contributed to this paper: Anna Sehnalova, Cathy Cantwell, Berthe Jansen, Dagmar Schwert, Dan Martin, David Drewes, David Germano, David Gellner, David Gray, Eric Greene, Fabrizio Torricelli, George Fitzherbert, James Gentry, Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, John Nemec, Joie Chen, Jonathan Silk, Lewis Doney, Marta Sernesi, Michael Radich, Natalie Gummer, Per Kvaerne, Péter-Dániel Szántó, Reinier Langelaar, Rob Campamy, Ryan Overbey, Tomoko Makidono, Ulrike Roesler, and more. My heartfelt thanks to them all. I am also very grateful for the support of Wolfson College, Oxford, and the participants of the Treasure Seminar held there since 2017, and DFG grant ME 20006/3-1 at RUB Bochum, 2017-2019.

² See for example the excellent discussions in Schwert 2020 of the blurred boundaries between the categories of valid scriptures of the Buddha (*lung tshad ma*) and valid expositions by Indian masters (*bstan bcos tshad ma*) in the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud Mahāmudrā transmission, and the broader Tibetan controversies around the different kinds of *tshad mas* (*pramāṇas*).

attribute it to the Buddha, since this could be considered amongst the worst kinds of forgery. On the contrary, and by definition, *buddhava-cana* is usually understood as sacred scripture that has to be and can only be revealed to us by an enlightened mind. Yet nevertheless, a major distinguishing feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its tantric offshoots was that just such revelation of *buddhava-cana* was considered to have continued almost unabated long after the passing of the historical Buddha, with huge quantities of hitherto unknown *buddhava-cana* continuing to appear down the centuries. Nor could such a momentous event as the first appearance of a newly discovered scripture uttered by the Buddha himself be easily consigned to mere chance. On the contrary, as I describe below, Mahāyāna *sūtra* texts clearly indicated that their appearance or revelation was considered to be the outcome of the enlightened intentionality and prophetic power of the immanent Buddha of Mahāyāna, while parallel metanarratives existed also in tantric Buddhism. In what follows, I am going to use the term *scripture* to designate *buddhava-cana*, and I am going to use the term *revelation* to describe the introductions of such previously unknown scriptures into human history.

The social and cultural institutions and conventions that necessarily must once have existed in South Asian Buddhism to separate texts deemed as authentic but newly come to light scripture, from texts deemed as human compositions, or even as forgeries, still remain extremely little understood (although their equivalent mechanisms in Tibet are still extant and available for study). Be that as it may, few would argue with the proposition that South Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism and its tantric offshoots were religions substantially based around the acceptance of an ongoing revelation of hitherto unknown scriptures. Even the most conservative traditional Buddhist masters must have had to concede that while *sūtras* generally purported ultimately to have been taught by the historical Buddha, and tantras by the timeless *dharmakāya* Buddha, even the most important examples of such scriptures could nevertheless reach us via circuitous routes that required an additional and subsequent event of revelation into our human world. These circuitous processes are prominently described, for example, in the widely accepted origin myths of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, which is among the earliest of Mahāyāna scriptures, and the *Kālacakra*, which is among the latest of the great tantric revelations.³ Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhist history in South Asia was therefore the history of more

³ The *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures, some of which are amongst the earliest Mahāyāna *sūtras*, were said to have been brought from nāga world (*nāgaloka*) to the human world by Nāgārjuna, hundreds of years after the Buddha originally taught them.

than a thousand years of belief in and acceptance of a continuous, ongoing, revelation of scriptures taught by the Buddha (however understood) but previously unknown to contemporary humans, beginning with the earliest Mahāyāna *sūtras*, up to the final revelations of the late tantric period. This acceptance of the ongoing revelation of scriptures is surely amongst the most definitive and significant features of South Asian Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism, without which they would have been very different religions. It is also one of the main features differentiating them from Theravāda Buddhism. If we want to understand South Asian Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism at all, understanding their processes of ongoing scriptural revelation is surely indispensable; yet, unfortunately, they still remain very little understood indeed.

Because belief in the ongoing revelation of scriptures was such an integral feature of South Asian Mahāyāna, it is very hard to imagine how it could have failed to impact on Tibetan Buddhism too. Like their counterparts in China, Tibetan Buddhists must immediately have been confronted in the Mahāyāna scriptures they translated, with numerous narratives describing prophetic declarations made by the Buddha about the future propagations of his *sūtras* by reincarnated Dharma Preachers (*dharmabhāṇaka*, *chos smra ba*). Such narratives about *dharmabhāṇakas* offered a culturally accepted template for authentic scriptural revelation.

The figure of the *dharmabhāṇaka* in Mahāyāna has been the focus of considerable Buddhological scholarship in recent years.⁴ In brief, the Mahāyāna *dharmabhāṇaka* is a constantly recurring figure who appears in a great many Mahāyāna *sūtras*, and is typically understood as a literary representation of the first persons to publicly recite any given Mahāyāna *sūtra*. The consensus scholarly view is that such *dharmabhāṇakas* were considered by Indian Mahāyānists to be the prophesied reincarnate revealers of the *sūtras* in which they appear. Thus Drewes, Gummer, *et al.*, propose the *dharmabhāṇaka* should be understood as the prophesied reincarnations of the Buddha's close dis-

Likewise John Newman (2021: 1) describes the origin myth of the Kālacakra, the very last of the major Indian Vajrayāna scriptures, thus: "The foundational texts of the Kālacakra tantra provide an origin story in which this system of mysticism was taught by the Buddha Śākyamuni at Śrī Dhānyakāṭaka. The original text of the tantra, the *Paramādibuddha* (the Kālacakra *mūlatantra*) is said to have been redacted by Dharmarāja Sucandra – emperor of Sambhala and an emanation of the tenth stage bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi – who wrote the tantra down in a book and carried it to Sambhala. Hundreds of years later, the tradition maintains, the Kālacakra tantra was brought from Sambhala and introduced in India."

⁴ See *inter alia* Harrison 1990: xxi; Hino 2010; Drewes 2011 and 2022; and Gummer 2012, 2014, and 2021.

ciples who had first heard the *sūtra* directly from the Buddha in a previous life. They (or their mind streams) had been ‘entrusted’ (*parindanā* / *gtad pa*) by the Buddha with the stewardship of the *sūtra*, thus creating a deep karmic destiny and connection with the *sūtra* text that could persist across future reincarnations. Simultaneously a physical copy of the *sūtra* could sometimes be hidden in the environment, to be guarded by long-lived *yakṣas*, *nāgas*, or other territorial deities, whose long life-span served to bridge the time of the Buddha with the time of the Mahāyāna *sūtra*’s first preaching. All of this is accompanied by the Buddha’s prophecy about how the disciple or disciples will reincarnate in future times, long after the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa*, to recover the *sūtra* text from its concealment and preach it. This trope is indeed repeated in a very large number of Mahāyāna *sūtras*, and is seen as the standard narrative for explaining their sudden coming to light in the early centuries CE India. See my discussion below of these themes, which Drewes has dubbed “the ‘standard claim of Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature’”. Despite having been a staple topic within Mahāyāna *sūtra* scholarship for several years now, this understanding of the *dharmabhāṇakas* has been a bit slow to penetrate Tibetan studies, and I was not completely aware of its full ubiquity until comparatively recently. On the contrary, I had mistakenly thought it occurred in only a few *sūtras*. Yet, as I show below, this trope seems to have been a major component in the development of the foundation myths of rNying ma Treasure (*gter ma*) in Tibet.

Perhaps even more impactful than these *sūtra* narratives, and especially through the first few centuries after the establishment of Tibetan Buddhism, numerous Tibetan pilgrims, scholars, translators, and traders, visiting South Asia must also have been directly exposed to actual concrete practices of ongoing tantric revelation. These continued apace so long as Buddhism flourished, most notably in some special holy places geographically proximate to Tibet, such as Uḍḍiyāna and Bengal.

Some Tibetologists have suggested to me that forms of Buddhism which gradually developed elsewhere, notably China and Tibet, might somehow have remained insulated from and ignorant of the ongoing revelation of scriptures in India. This is difficult to believe, because ongoing revelation is deeply inscribed in so many Mahāyāna scriptures. Regarding China, to take just one example out of many: the *Pratyutpanna-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra* is amongst the very first Mahāyāna *sūtras* to be translated into Chinese, in Luoyang, in 179 CE, and became hugely influential in China. As Paul Harrison pointed out in his landmark studies (Harrison 1978, 1990), the *sūtra*’s very name invokes ongoing revelation: *The Samādhi of Direct Encounters with the Buddhas of the Present*. The message of the *sūtra* is uncompromising:

Yes, the Buddha has long ago passed away, yet we still can receive fresh discourses directly from him, as though he were still alive, through visionary encounters with a Buddha in their pure land such as Amitāyus in Sukhāvatī (Chapter 3), through prophesied rediscovery of purposely long-buried texts (Chapter 13), through receiving teachings in visionary dreams (Chapter 14), and so on. As Paul Harrison explains (Harrison 1990: xx-xxi), a 'major concern' and 'main aim' of this *sūtra* is 'justifying the continuing production of Mahāyāna *sūtras*'. It seems inconceivable that the Chinese could have translated this text so early, valued it so highly, for so many centuries, and not noticed this central message. Ditto its translation into Tibetan. Yet as we will see below, this is only one of dozens of Mahāyāna *sūtras* to convey such a message.

Turning to Tibet and tantra (again, only one example out of many), we can cite a biography of Tilopā (*rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug ti lo pa'i lo rgyus*) from a bKa' brgyud *gser phreng* collection that possibly dates to the 12th century and is traditionally attributed to Mar pa. This text purports to show that during his many years in India, Mar pa not only became deeply acquainted with the revelatory practices of his Indian teachers, but also prominently conveyed that knowledge through his writings to his substantial bKa' brgyud religious heritage in Tibet (see Torricelli 2018: 102, 171-178). Whether this biography of Tilopā represents unmodified Indian narratives (perhaps less likely), or Tibetan modifications of them (perhaps more likely), there can be no doubt that the idea of ongoing scriptural revelation in India was widely recognised among Tibetan followers of the Mar pa traditions.⁵

The prolific nature of such tantric revelations in Indic Buddhism should not be underestimated. Even if we are to exclude the numerous *dhāraṇī* scriptures, and the later Nepali revelations, Isaacson and Sferra have estimated that around 500 original tantric scriptures of South Asian origins remain extant, some in Sanskrit, others only in Tibetan and Chinese translations. They further suggest these were mainly produced over a roughly 500 year period, from the 6th to the 11th centuries.⁶ We thus arrive at an admittedly very approximate average frequency of around one scriptural revelation per annum, through five centuries. The real figure is likely to have been higher, not only because we know without doubt that more texts were revealed than the 500 which have survived loss or destruction, but also because the Sanskrit tradition resembled its Tibetan *gter ma* successor in the practice of re-revealing the same scripture to different persons on different occasions

⁵ Thanks to Marta Sernesi and the late Fabrizio Torricelli for their advice on this issue.

⁶ Isaacson and Sferra: 2015: 307-15.

(for the act of revelation could be a profound spiritual experience in itself, far more than a mere addition to the collection of holy texts).⁷ Over the same period, there were also a great number of Śaiva tantric revelations. Given the often considerable intertextuality of Buddhist and Śaiva tantric scriptures and the often polytropic nature of tantric devotion in India, the revelations of Śaiva tantras were unlikely to have gone entirely unremarked by Indian tantric Buddhists.

One should also point out that fresh scriptural productions continued in Nepal even after the decline of Buddhism in the Indian heartlands. Isaacson and Sferra observe that 'the compilation of tantric scriptures seems to have continued in Nepal almost up to modern times'.⁸ Some of these became very important: the 15th century, for example, saw the appearance in Nepal of both the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* and the *Guṇākaraṇḍavyūha*; the former remains the basis for all the extensive *vrata* practices in contemporary Newar Buddhism, while the latter provides the scriptural basis for their important cult of Lokeśvara or Matsyendranāth.⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Dunhuang sources bear witness to a number of indigenous Tibetan Buddhist tantric scriptures that appeared already well established by the 10th century, indicating that Tibetans very soon produced their own revelations.¹⁰ It is not unreasonable to speculate that they began by using models for scriptural production directly inspired by their foreign Buddhist teachers, since for a period of at least one or even two hundred years, the earliest Tibetan scriptural productions occurred contemporaneously with tantric Buddhist scriptural revelation that was still occurring in India, and undoubtedly the Tibetans produced these early scriptures very much in the mould of Sanskrit Buddhist tantras, albeit with some signs of localisation. The Tibetan Empire had adopted Buddhism in the last decades of the 8th century, initiating a prolonged period of intensive interaction between Indian Buddhist teachers and their Tibetan students and translators. It is true that some of the famous Indian tantric scriptures already existed

⁷ See Torricelli 2018: 177, where Tilopā receives afresh the already known Cakrasamvara in fifty one chapters, and Cantwell 2020a and 2020b for a detailed study of the re-revelation of already known texts in Tibetan *gter ma*. For an eye-witness account of the powerful religious experiences associated with a contemporary *gter* discovery in East Tibet, see Hanna 1994. For an autobiographical account of Guru Chos dbang's life-changing experiences connected with the excavation out of the earth of his *Yongs rdzogs bka' brgyad* and the associated mystical flight to meet Padmasambhava in his pure land to get direct instruction on these teachings, see Guru Chos kyi dbang phyug 1979: 141 ff.

⁸ Isaacson and Sferra 2015: 315.

⁹ Rospatt 2015: 827.

¹⁰ Cantwell and Mayer 2012: 6-9, 84-86. For a detailed analysis of the textual evidence suggesting a Tibetan compilation of these texts, see Mayer 1997.

when Buddhism was introduced to Tibet in the last decades of the 8th century, for example, the *Vairocanābhisambodhi*, the *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha*, and the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*. Some others, such as the *Guhyasamāja*, were possibly making their first appearance around that time. However, many others, including most of the tantras that were eventually to become the most influential in Tibetan Buddhism, were only revealed in India *after* the formal adoption of Buddhism by the Tibetan Empire. Hence the earliest *Cakrasaṃvara* scriptures perhaps appeared within the 9th century; the *Catuspīṭha* perhaps in the late 9th century; the *Hevajra* maybe in the early 10th century; the *Abhidhānot-tara* possibly also in the 10th century; the *Kālacakra* probably in the early 11th century; and so on.¹¹ At least a hundred and possibly as many as two hundred particularly fruitful years which saw the revelation of influential tantric scriptures in India were therefore *contemporaneous* to a parallel period of early revelations of similarly influential rNying ma tantric scriptures in Tibet, and did not precede it.

Surprisingly perhaps, little study has yet been made of the impacts of the Sanskrit Buddhist revelatory traditions on contemporaneous Tibet. This earliest phase of Tibetan Buddhist scriptural production was characterised by what one might call the anonymous appearances of mainly tantric scriptures—anonymous in the sense of seldom having easily identifiable or prominently named revealers, places of revelation, or moments of revelation. By contrast, the next phase of Tibetan Buddhist scriptural production was characterised by the open identifications of named text revealers, the places at which their revelations took place, and the occasions of their revelations. For convenience, I shall for present purposes call this later phase the age of *gter ma* revelation, even though in my usage here it will also subsume the technically distinct system of *dag snang* or 'Pure Vision'. In many or even most cases, *dag snang* does not necessarily count as *gter ma*, yet it can often participate in the same religious culture, thus sharing with *gter ma* proper the quality of usually being open about the identifications of its named text revealers.¹²

¹¹ For the dates of the *Vairocanābhisambodhi*, the *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha*, the *Cakrasaṃvara*, and the *Hevajra*, see Isaacson and Sferra 2015: 315; for the dates of the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, see Tribe 2015: 353; for some possible dates for the *Guhyasamāja*, see Tanemura 2015: 327; for the dates of the *Catuspīṭha*, see Szántó 2015: 320; for the dates of the earliest *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Abhidhānottara*, see Sugiki 2015: 363-4; for the dates of the *Kālacakra*, see Sferra 2015: 341.

¹² *Dag snang* or Pure Vision is a method of revelation in which a Buddha, such as Amitābha, appears before a devotee and transmits to them a new teaching or scripture. It is well attested in Mahāyāna texts such as the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* (Chapter 3), and has been widely adopted by the rNying ma school, but similarly occurs in other schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The rNying ma are usually quite open about

Our earliest knowledge of the first phase, of anonymously produced Tibetan Buddhist mainly tantric scriptural texts, comes to us from the Dunhuang finds, where they are witnessed in particular genres that were eventually preserved in the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* canon (henceforth NGB). As far as I am aware, no one has written very much at all about the processes of scriptural production in this early phase, although they must surely have had significant influences on later developments. Indeed, it is quite possible that many of the procedures and protocols for scriptural production used in this early phase of anonymous revelations were carried over into the later *gter ma* traditions; for undoubtedly, there is considerable overlap of both style and content between even the earliest among the mainly anonymous *rNying ma* tantras nowadays contained in the NGB, and the later *gter ma* texts.

Regarding style, it is said traditionally that the NGB texts are a prime measure by which the validity of a *gter ma* can be assessed: if a *gter ma* diverges too far from the NGB's doctrinal, ritual, and iconographic norms, it might not be considered valid. Regarding content, there can be considerable intertextuality between the NGB scriptures and *gter ma* revelations, with numerous instances of shared textual passages. Moreover, a certain proportion of NGB texts can simultaneously be classified as *gter ma*, for example Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's (c. 1124 -1192) *rDzogs chen Man ngag sde yang ti'i skor* root tantra, *rGyud kyi rgyal po nyi zla 'od 'bar mkha' klong rnam dag rgya mtsho klong gsal gyi rgyud* (Rig 'dzin vol. Ja folios 25b-40b; Tb. 270); rDo rje gling pa's (1346 – 1405) important *rDzogs chen Man ngag sde* tantra *Chos thams cad kyi don bstan pa rdzogs chen thig le nyag gcig ye nas bya btsal bral ba* (Rig 'dzin vol. Nga folios 88b-204b; Tb.188); and Ratna gling pa's (1403-1479) Hayagrīva root tantra *dPal che ba'i mchog rta mgrin gsang ba 'dus pa* (Rig 'dzin vol. 'A folios 247b-254b; Tb. 580). Albeit mainly shorn of their *gter ma* punctuation (*gter tsheg*), the above three texts openly identify themselves as *gter ma* in their colophons, which clearly name their discoverers; hence they should also be preserved separately within the par-

the identities of the recipients of Pure Vision teachings and the circumstances of the revelation; such revelations are not anonymous. According to Tulku Thondup, most Pure Vision teachings in Tibet do not count as *gter ma*, except when the vision awakens in the recipient a memory of a teaching imprinted in the essential nature of their mind in a previous life (Thondup 1986: 61-62; 101; 165). Nevertheless, treasure revealers not infrequently make visionary journeys to Padmasambhava's pure land to receive teachings directly from him, which can be further explications of, or otherwise associated with, the texts they discovered elsewhere as *gter ma*. Similarly, Dagmar Schwerk tells me (personal communication 14th April 2024) that the relationship between *dag snang* and *gter ma* in the Bhutanese '*Brug pa bka' brgyud* (*lho 'brug*) is highly interesting.

allel collections of their discoverers' own *gter ma*. However, identifications of NGB texts as having *gter ma* origins are not always so clear cut as the above examples, and the true situation is not yet known.¹³ For

¹³ When cataloguing the 406 texts of the *Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu* edition of the NGB, Cathy Cantwell and I very provisionally tagged 55 texts (approximately 13.5% of the total) that seemed very likely to be identified as *gter ma*, and provisionally tagged a further 25 texts (approximately 6.2% of the total) that were possibly identifiable as *gter ma*. But not all editions of the NGB need be the same: for example, it has been suggested by other scholars that the Bhutanese NGB recension in 46 volumes might have a higher proportion of texts with *gter ma* origins than the *Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu* edition. It is not yet known with any degree of accuracy what further proportion of NGB texts might also have started as root tantras of *gter ma* origins, but subsequently have lost clear markings as such. Making such identifications is not as simple as it might at first appear. Firstly, there is strong evidence that very old tantric texts sometimes adopted as explicits a variety of seals of secrecy that could resemble what later became accepted as *gter ma* conventions, yet which in their own historical contexts do not necessarily seem indicative of *gter ma*, or at least, not as we now know it (see Cantwell 2017: 149 note 19, citing Ba ri lo tsā ba 1974: 231-42; Cantwell 2022: 47, and note 6; and Cantwell 2022(2024): 151, and notes 107 and 108). Secondly, the re-revelation of already existing tantric text and even entire scriptures seems to have been an attested practice in India, and similar practices of textual reuse was widely continued in Tibetan rNying ma *gter ston* circles, who would sometimes also repackage the re-revealed text (Cantwell 2020a, 2020b). For example, we now have solid textual evidence that the entire 150-plus pages of the *Phur pa* section of Myang ral's *bDe gshegs 'dus pa* revelation was constructed out of the wholesale reuse of a complete much earlier text in six sections, some folios of which have also survived at Dunhuang (Cantwell 2020b). Current knowledge of such practices remains in its infancy, although a ground-breaking and meticulously researched start has been made by Cathy Cantwell (Cantwell 2020a, 2020b). As Cantwell points out (personal communication 14th April 2024), it will therefore require a much more sustained philological investigation to ascertain beyond doubt which of the NGB texts indubitably have *gter ma* origins, and which do not. In a brilliant recent article, James Gentry (2023: 144-5) reports that a *gter ma* root tantra revealed by Ratna gling pa appears in parallel as a root tantra in the mTshams brag NGB, but here with a slightly different title and shorn of nearly all of its *gter ma* identifiers such as *gter tsheg* and *gter ma* colophons. Ratna gling pa was a key redactor of the NGB, so that Gentry tentatively attributes the presence of this text in the NGB to a deliberate attempt by Ratna gling pa to obfuscate the tantra's origins as his own *gter ma*, and pass off the NGB version as a much older text revealed by Padmasambhava. Elsewhere in the mTshams brag NGB however, a subsequent *gter ma* root tantra also revealed by Ratna gling pa is openly acknowledged as his own *gter ma* (see the example I cite above). This raises the question, why would Ratna gling pa, as redactor of the NGB, apparently conceal the identity of one of his *gter mas*, but not the other? One should also note that removal of the *gter tsheg* is a commonplace when transcribing a *gter* root tantra into the NGB, and is found in a significant proportion of NGB texts that openly claim to be the discoveries of named *gter stons*, so that this feature cannot be used as evidence for deliberate obfuscation, as Gentry has tentatively suggested. For example, within the mTshams brag NGB, out of the three root tantras that are clearly and openly identified as *gter ma* which I give as examples

largely pragmatic and historical reasons, few new scriptures have been added to the NGB corpora since the 15th century. Nevertheless many important *gter stons* have continued up until our own times to discover root tantras amongst their *gter ma*, which (to current knowledge) seem congruent with the genres of NGB texts. For example, the late Dil mgo mKhyen brtse's (1910-1991) treasure cycle *Padma tshe yi snying thig* contains such a root tantra, which is widely accepted as a valid scripture, but it has not been added to the NGB. For an English translation of one such scripture revealed by 'Jigs med gling pa (1729-1798), also accepted as scripturally valid but not included in the NGB, see van Schaik 2003.

Although the revelation of texts of this genre seems to have continued into our own times, we know surprisingly little about how such texts were revealed in their earliest phase, almost 1,200 years ago. All we can currently know with any real certainty about the first and very important foundational period of this kind of Tibetan tantric scriptural revelation is that it seems to have resembled much of the parallel and contemporaneous South Asian tantric revelation both by largely being anonymous, in the sense of not generally having easily identifiable or prominently named revealers, places of revelation, and times of revelation; and also in the broadly similar styles and contents of the texts produced. For the greater part of the oldest NGB materials dating from this early period that have so far been studied in detail seem to consist mainly of careful calques of Indian tantric scriptures, albeit with a few localised features (Mayer 1997, Cantwell and Mayer 2007, 2012). It might be noteworthy that an important example of this genre, the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*—which has no colophon that claims it was translated—seems to tacitly celebrate the fact of its compilation in Tibet, insofar as its original redactors and subsequent rNying ma exegetes alike have quite explicitly and deliberately eschewed any effort to erase its evidence for Tibetan compilation, even where it was within their power

above, two (Myang ral's Tb. 270 and Ratna gling pa's Tb.580) have lost all of their *gter tsheg* whatsoever, and the third (rDo rje gling pa's Tb.188) virtually all of its *gter tsheg*, except for those few occurring on seals such as *samaya% rgya rgya rgya%* which here are used to mark sections within the text. I would therefore suggest two alternative scenarios that might be equally plausible as Gentry's tentative suggestion of deliberate obfuscation: (i) it's possible that a whole sequence of Ratna gling pa root tantras, upon incorporation into the NGB, were allocated a collective secondary *gter ma* colophon naming Ratna gling pa but placed only after the last text in the sequence, thus leaving earlier texts with only individual primary colophons naming Padmasambhava (ii) it's also possible that Ratna gling pa's *gter ma* discovery might have been his re-revelation of an earlier already current root tantra traditionally attributed to Padmasambhava, so that he felt no need to include his own name.

to do so (Mayer 1997: 629-630). It goes without saying that our investigations would be made very much easier if we knew more about tantric revelation in India, but unfortunately, I remain unaware of any sustained academic studies of this highly important yet frustratingly inaccessible topic.

The second phase of revelation, which I am here calling *gter ma*, was no longer anonymous and usually had clearly identifiable revealers (it also bifurcated interestingly into two religious streams, Buddhist and Bon, but here we can only focus on the Buddhist).¹⁴ The underlying social historical factors associated with the emergence of this second period are quite complex, including the further penetration of Buddhism within Tibetan communities, the decline of scriptural revelation in India, a Tibetan nostalgia for the past glories of Empire, and a period of widespread opening up of old burial tumuli in Tibet. The latter two have already been discussed by Ronald Davidson (2005, 2006) and Guntram Hazod (2016). I will be revisiting social-historical factors at greater length elsewhere, but here, my focus is on methods of revelation *per se*.

In no longer being veiled by anonymity, this second phase differed from much or most Indian Buddhist revelation, but resembled the contemporaneous scriptural revelatory practices in nearby Kashmir. At that time, Kashmir was host to many Tibetans visiting Kashmir's Buddhist monasteries,¹⁵ while the regions of Gilgit and Brusha (nowadays usually considered parts of greater Kashmir) are suggested to have been under the actual political control of the Western Tibetan Kingdom of Guge until the 11th century.¹⁶ As specialists in Śaivism point out (Sanderson 2007; Williams 2017; Nemec 2020, 2022), in this Kashmiri

¹⁴ It is important to note that *gter ma* was from the start bifurcated into two separable yet intertwined religious traditions, Buddhist and g.Yung drung Bon. In what follows, I will regrettably but necessarily be focusing exclusively on the Buddhist traditions. This is, quite simply, because I do not yet know enough about the emergence of g.Yung drung Bon *gter ma*. The topic raises important social-historical questions that are high on my agenda for upcoming research, but have not yet been satisfactorily answered. As Per Kvaerne recently wrote to me, "The question is not so much which of the two traditions is the older one (which might be very difficult to establish), but how and why the two traditions arose at roughly the same time and in all likelihood in similar milieus, and how and why they came to share so many characteristic traits. Much more work must be done on studying the Bön textual material containing narratives of the earliest Bön termas, and try to establish the genesis and chronology of the Bön tradition in this respect, as well as the contents of the Bön termas themselves." (Per Kvaerne, personal communication, 23rd August 2023).

¹⁵ See Nemec 2020: 285, note 4.

¹⁶ See the recent works by John Mock, who further supports the earlier suggestions with newly discovered inscriptional evidence (Mock 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

tradition of revelation, chiefly associated with non-dual Śaiva traditions like the Kaula, but also with some Buddhist examples, publicly named scriptural revealers became normalised.¹⁷ In important instances, they were described as revealing their new tantric scriptures in the holy place of Uḍḍiyāna. While the nascent Tibetan *gter ma* system resembled its Kashmiri contemporaries (see Cantwell and Mayer 2023) in prominently referencing Uḍḍiyāna, for example citing Padmasambhava of Uḍḍiyāna as the patron of revelation, it differed from the Śaivas by developing other more conspicuously Buddhist narratives. Most prominently, as I will discuss below, it adapted for its own use the aforementioned Mahāyāna literary device of prophetic declarations made by the Buddha regarding the future propagations of his *sūtras* by reincarnated *dharmabhāṇakas* who would appear after his *parinirvāṇa*. Localising the Mahāyāna *sūtra* trope to Tibet and to the history of Tibet's various schools of Buddhism, Tibetans began developing narratives of the rediscovery by named and prophesied *gter stons* of sacred texts that had been hidden for later recovery by the important Buddhist missionaries to Tibet, notably Vimalamitra, and above all, Padmasambhava, who now stood in for the Buddha. Similarly, the great Indian missionary Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna was himself said to have discovered some such texts in Tibet.

Fortunately, the major academic author on the origins of *gter ma*, Ronald Davidson, has consistently affirmed that the evolution of the *gter ma* tradition in Tibet should be seen as a confluence of both Indian and Tibetan influences.¹⁸ Less fortunately perhaps, given the vast range of his writings, constraints of time seem never to have allowed him to enlarge as well as he undoubtedly could have done on the Indian aspects. On the contrary, his focus has necessarily and correctly prioritised the non-Buddhist indigenous Tibetan aspects. There are good reasons for this. Firstly, it continues the conversations begun by Erik Haarh in the 1960's and Michael Aris in the 1980's. Secondly, the Tibetan aspects are more elusive than the Indian aspects because little direct textual evidence of them survives, and despite the sustained attention they have received, comparatively few real certainties have yet emerged. Exploring them has thus become an intriguing intellectual challenge that Davidson and most subsequent authors have been unable to resist. I must confess I am no exception, and for the last few years, have been working with an anthropological colleague towards a major work that aspires further to clarify the extremely important

¹⁷ Several colleagues have remarked that scriptural revelation by named persons also occurred elsewhere in India, for example, the Deccan. However, the Tibetan exposure to this practice in tantric Śaivism and Vajrayāna Buddhism is more likely to have occurred in Kashmir.

¹⁸ Davidson 2005: 212-219.

non-Buddhist indigenous components of the *gter ma* traditions. In particular, following remarkable indications in Guru Chos dbang's *gTer 'byung chen mo*, I look at the indigenous categories of *gter* (treasure) and *bcud* (essence) within the nexus of environmental (and sometimes also ancestral) beliefs and practices connected with Tibetan territorial deity cosmologies. Thus the present paper offers a decidedly one-sided view of my understanding of *gter ma*; for a more complete understanding, the reader is invited to look at Mayer 2019 and the video podcast Mayer 2024,¹⁹ which latter offers a preliminary presentation on *gter* in relation to Tibetan territorial deity cosmologies. It is my belief that recent ethnographic contributions to this field, notably those from Anna Sehnalova, will go a long way towards demystifying the so-far little understood topic of indigenous Tibetan factors in the emergence of *gter ma* (Sehnalova 2024).

However, a discussion that merely acknowledges Indian influences without actually examining them, is manifestly incomplete. It seems plausible (although so far little discussed) that cultural influences relevant to *gter ma*, such as *nāga* beliefs, might have reached Tibet from Nepal, Kashmir, and other South Asian regions, even before the formal adoption of Buddhism in the late 8th century. So far, insufficient studies have tackled the Indian influences, and despite Davidson's and Janet Gyatso's assertions of their importance,²⁰ the heritage has persisted of earlier authors such as Haarh who seemed barely aware that they even existed, so that many authors still overlook them. Obviously, it would be retrograde in the extreme to try to reduce Tibetology to an appendage of Indology, as it sometimes was in its early days. But to ignore the extraordinarily creative civilisational exchanges that occurred between Tibet and South Asia over many centuries would equally be a wasted opportunity. This was a rare interaction between two vibrant cultural spheres, the study of which offers numerous insights.

Our own study will therefore invest a proportionate effort into researching South Asian, Chinese, and other possible influences on *gter ma* too, for if we don't first know what might have come to Tibet from its various neighbours,²¹ how can we differentiate what was indigenously Tibetan? Secondly and even more critically, we believe that the

¹⁹ Mayer 2019 suggests possible Chinese, Mongolian, and other sources; and Mayer 2024, 'Asian Territorial Deity Cosmologies as Vehicles for the Transmission of Buddhадharma', at <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/asian-territorial-deity-cosmologies-vehicles-transmission-buddhadharma-oxford-treasure-seminar>

²⁰ Gyatso 2015: 398-9.

²¹ rNying ma texts can sometimes claim to be translations from several different languages, such as the languages of Uḍḍiyāna, or Brusha/Bruzha. I am not aware of any detailed studies of this phenomenon.

various South Asian and indigenous elements often became inseparable, like the ingredients of a cake after baking, and thus difficult to reverse-engineer. This process was facilitated by a number of independently occurring structural similarities between some aspects of the treasure cultures found in both India and Tibet; for example, in both cultures, Indian and non-Buddhist Tibetan traditions alike, treasures were guarded by potentially dangerous territorial deities who also controlled the broader environment, and through that, wealth, fertility and economic wellbeing. Our approach therefore will not be to attempt the impossible by separating out indigenous aspects on their own from the outset. Rather, we will set out with a more holistic view that accepts and directly addresses the fascinating interactions of South Asian and indigenous non-Buddhist cultures.

We are fortunate that restoring a better balance should not prove too difficult, since the Sanskrit Buddhist influences on *gter ma* are easy to access and describe from a plethora of extant textual sources, both in Sanskrit and in Tibetan translation. From the point of view of Indologists and scholars of Indian Buddhism, they might even look obvious. Certainly my undemanding and straightforward efforts in this regard cannot be compared with the astonishing brilliance and virtuosity demanded of scholars like Ronald Davidson, and Guntram Hazod, who have done so much to infer the altogether more elusive non-Buddhist indigenous Tibetan influences on *gter ma* from often little more than circumstantial evidence connected with the Imperial burial cults.²²

Thus in a lengthy paper published in 2022, and more briefly in a blog posting of 2023,²³ I make a start by reflecting on how the Indian term *nidhi* was consistently (perhaps even invariably) translated into the Tibetan word *gter*. Since it appeared upon investigation that the word *gter* was not evident in Old Tibetan before its usage in Buddhist translations, Joanna Bialek has speculated that it might have been a Buddhist neologism specifically created for the purposes of translating the Sanskrit term *nidhi*.²⁴

²² Hazod (2016) has made a tremendously important contribution from a social-historical perspective: he has shown how the *gter ma* traditions began to appear in the very period when traditional burial tumuli full of grave goods were widely being opened up and emptied. Davidson's (2005, 2006) main contribution has likewise been social-historical and has brilliantly anticipated some of the anthropological findings of scholars such as Charles Stewart (2012): he showed how *gter ma* discovery was linked to nostalgia for the lost empire and its bodhisattva emperors, and an attempt to recover some of their charisma for the benefit of present and future generations.

²³ Mayer 2022 and Mayer 2023.

²⁴ Joanna Bialek, personal communication, 7 September 2021. To Bialek's speculation, I add another of my own, that the word *gter* might possibly have had a pre-

Despite its ubiquity across a very wide range of Indian texts of many genres and many periods,²⁵ for some reason the complex and ancient Indian category of *nidhi* has perhaps not so far been sufficiently widely studied by Indologists, which might explain why it has barely been heard of by many Tibetologists.²⁶ Yet it seems to have played a very central role in Indian understandings of wealth within a landscape dominated by territorial deities (most notably, *nāgas* and *yakṣas*). Through their integration into a wide variety of Buddhist texts, Indian conceptions of *nidhi* came to exert a powerful influence on the conceptualisation of the Tibetan *gter* traditions, not least through Guru Chos dbang's influential *gTer 'byung chen mo*. In Indian thinking, the *nidhis* are perhaps most popularly classified in terms of the Nine *Nidhis* of Kubera, the king of the *yakṣas* (territorial tree spirits), who is the owner of all wealth in the natural environment. Other enumerations, such as eight *nidhis* in some Purāṇas, Gaṇeśa, Lakṣmī, and Hanuman cults, or four *nidhis* in Buddhist texts, or just the two *nidhis* of lotus (*padmanidhi*) and conch (*śaṅkhanidhi*) to summarize all the nine, are also widespread, but the principal tends to remain the same: the classifications into nine, eight, four, or two, *nidhis* acted as shorthand for summing up all known categories of wealth and economic wellbeing. It should be noted that *nidhis* were also sometimes personified, often in the forms

history in the Tibetan terminology of indigenous environmental concepts, just as it does today; and thus by extension also in the fields of mining and mineralogy.

²⁵ See Mayer 2022 and 2023.

²⁶ As far as I know, Norman 1992 is the only academic study dealing with very important the nine *nidhis*, but is based exclusively on ancient or old sources, and does not deal with important later and tantric sources. Bautze-Picron 2002 is an art-historical study of the two *nidhis*, Padma and Śaṅkha, and also the artistic depiction at Ajaṇṭā of many *nidhis* as *yakṣa* personifications of all manner of natural wealth. An excellent further article on the histories of Padma and Śaṅkha *nidhis* is currently in press from John Guy (Guy forthcoming). The two *nidhis* Padma and Śaṅkha, which can serve as a shorthand for all nine *nidhis*, are also prominent in the Jambhala iconography, usually depicted as lotus and conch shell upon which Jambhala in *yakṣa* form sits or stands, but I am not yet aware of any study of them from the scholars of Tibetan and Tantric Buddhist art. Other art historical studies include Chandra, M., (1964-1966) '*Nidhiśrṅga* (Cornucopia): A Study in Symbolism'. *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India*, 9, pp. 1-33, and Tarr, G. (1969) 'The Śiva Cave-temple of Dhokeśvara. The Development of the Nidhi'. *Oriental Art*, 15, 4, pp 269-80. My earlier work (Mayer 2022) focused mainly on tantric adoptions of *nidhi*, including translations from the *Kriyātantras* of procedures for finding *nidhi*. I drew inspiration from Balbir's ground breaking work (1993), which is more focused on the science of treasure hunting (*nidhi-vāda*), rather than on how the *nidhis* were cosmologically understood as environmental and economic factors controlled by, or personified as, territorial deities. The latter and core topic has not yet been systematically approached by academic study at all, with the partial exception of Vogel 1926, who made a commendable if brief start, and my own very preliminary efforts so far (Mayer 2024). If there are richer pickings to be found within the anthropological and ethnographic literature, I am not yet aware of it.

of the *nāgas* (territorial serpent spirits) or *yakṣas* (territorial tree spirits) who guarded or embodied them.

The term *nidhi* is ancient, widespread, and to this day remains truly ubiquitous in India, as a web search can show.²⁷ It occurs, for example, over a hundred times in the Sikh scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, has chapters devoted to it in some *Purāṇas*, plays a prominent role in the iconography and cult of Lakṣmī, and is a major topic of focus in certain strata of tantric literature, especially Buddhist. Yet as K. R. Norman has observed, it is also a very old category, integral to the ancient roles of *nāgas* (and *yakṣas* and other territorial deities) as guardians of environmental wealth and similar hidden treasures, and thus amply attested in early Jain and Pāli texts.²⁸ In similar vein, Nalini Balbir (1993) has remarked on how classical Indian narrative literature has numerous references to *nidhi* and *nidhivāda*, the art of discovering *nidhi*. Balbir's paper is only a first introduction to the very broad topic of treasure or wealth finding in India, and was largely derived from a comparatively narrow range of those literary and Jain narrative texts that already comprised her special areas of academic focus. Yet even without paying very much attention beyond these confines, for example amongst tantric texts, she nevertheless discussed *nidhivāda* in relation to at least thirty different narrative works.

I continue in Mayer 2022 by looking at Guru Chos dbang's (1220-1270) comprehensive exploration of the full range of meanings of this translational terminology *gter* in his *gTer 'byung chen mo*, and how he

²⁷ A Google search (20th August 2023) for the 'Nine Nidhis' produced over 900,000 results for '*nava nidhis*', over 100,000 results for the more Sikh-friendly '*nau nidh*', and even 86,000 results for the English search term '*nine nidhis* of Kubera'. On closer inspection, many of these were from English-language Indian websites, representing a vast range of different sectarian, cultural, and regional belief systems. Kubera the king of *nidhis* himself threw up 10,600,000 such search results, although many of these were for his namesakes, be they financial advisers, crypto currency dealers, fintech programs, or even video games. One can also search for the eight *nidhis*, often associated with Hanuman, and find very large numbers of hits (1,230,000). I am not sure what numbers would appear if the searches were made in Hindi or Tamil. By contrast, as far as I am currently aware, Norman 1992 is the only academic study specifically of the Nine Nidhis, and there are no academic studies at all of Kubera other than some art-historical works. Even Lakṣmī and Jambhala in their famous capacities as wealth deities seems to have been largely overlooked by modern academic research. While sex and violence in Indian religions have been amply studied for many years, perhaps some prudishness or reticence still inhibits research into these extremely important traditions. Yet in truth they do not reflect merely an ethos of religiously justified greed, as scholars seem to suspect, but rather, they can embody profound reflections on how human well-being is grounded in our landscape and our environment, and their continuities with India's ancient territorial deity traditions are also of great interest.

²⁸ Norman 1992: 190.

seeks to understand it in the light of the rich and complex Indian understandings of its Sanskrit original, *nidhi*. Presumably because he is Buddhist, Chos dbang, like his successors Ratna gling pa and U rgyan gling pa,²⁹ upholds the distinctive Indian Buddhist enumeration of *nidhi* as fourfold, which distinguishes Indian Buddhist writings on *nidhi* from the various ninefold classifications of *nidhi* favoured by the Brahmins and the Jains, or the eightfold classifications found in some Purāṇas. As K. R. Norman points out,³⁰ the Buddhist four-fold enumeration is very old, and is described in such varied texts as the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Mahāvastu*, a number of Pāli commentaries, the Khotanese *Book of Zambasta*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*, the *Karmasataka*, and other Mahāyāna sources. But the inquisitive Chos dbang seems to have gone further, and I suspect he might also have consulted some of the Tibetan language *abhidhāna* (*mngon brjod*) literature related to Amarasiṃha's *Nāmalīṅgānusāsana* lexicon, more popularly known as the *Amarakośa*, since his very wide-ranging and extremely thoughtful analysis of all the possible meanings of the word *gter* does seem to subsume popular Indian understandings of the famous *Nine Nidhis*, as found in the *Amarakośa* and its derivative literature, or for that matter the 12th century Jain Hemacandra's *Triṣaṣṭiśālākāpuruṣacaritra* (which as far as I know was not translated into Tibetan).

However, the most important point to bear in mind is that very close parallels existed between Indian ideas of territorial deities and the natural wealth or *nidhis* that they guard, and Tibetan beliefs about *gzhi bdag* and the *gter* that they guarded. I suggest such beliefs were already present and well established in Tibet long before Chos dbang's time, and indeed, long before Buddhism became the established religion of Tibet. One need only compare textual and ethnographic data from South Asia and Tibet to see how clearly this is the case. To what degree such similarities derived from cultural diffusion and to what degree they developed independently as the typical cultural expressions of many pre-modern agricultural and pastoral systems, might never be knowable, but I suspect both of these factors were substantially at work over many centuries. Certainly I believe that Chos dbang interpreted his Indian texts as merely creating a new and more Buddhist language for a terrestrial deity cosmology that was already deeply familiar to Tibetans.

Also in the same paper (Mayer 2022), I present a translation made with the help of P. Ogyan Tanzin Rinpoche, of sixteen pages I selected from the Indian Buddhist *Āryavidyottama-mahātantra* on the finding

²⁹ Doctor 2005: 21-22.

³⁰ Norman 1992: 187.

and opening of treasure doors, or *gter sgo*.³¹ This is only one among the dozens of passages on *nidhi* in the Indian Buddhist *kriyātantras*. It describes treasure doors as complex and varied magical portals, whose hidden location is disclosed to yogins in dreams bestowed on them by special treasure gods. Such portals are guarded by dangerous spirits and deities but can nevertheless be magically opened and closed, to expose the treasures they conceal. Such material was indubitably influential on the later Tibetan *gter ma* tradition. This particular *Ārya-vidyotta-mamahātantra* passage also has extensive thematic parallels with the *nidhiśāstras*, the Sanskrit texts describing the work of the *nidhivādins*, the typically tantric specialised treasure hunters of medieval India who recovered hidden treasures from the landscape guarded by *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, and other territorial deities, as well as from old temples, religious statues, and the like. Although the *nidhivādins* are often typified as Śaiva, and sometimes in literary narrative specifically as Pāśupata by affiliation, according to Balbir (1993), some of the still extant *nidhiśāstras* make particularly prominent reference to the Buddhist figure, Nāgārjuna.

In a further paper recently published in Leonard van der Kuijp's *Festschrift*,³² Cathy Cantwell and I make a start on looking at Padmasambhava as a *siddha* in the context of the closely entwined Śaiva and Buddhist tantric cultures of his native Uḍḍiyāna, a task which has never been approached before. If the term *siddha* might seem familiar to Tibetological scholars, then, as I have learned from Śaiva scholars such as John Nemec,³³ appearances can be deceptive, because *siddha* had very differing implications in different genres of medieval Sanskrit literature. In earlier texts such as Epics, Purāṇas, and in Kāvya, *siddhas* were mythic semi-divine beings who lived in the sky (*antarikṣa*), comparable to *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, and the like. In later centuries, for most Buddhists, *siddhas* were human beings who achieved realisation through the practices of Vajrayāna.

But in Kashmir's non-dual Śaiva traditions, the term *siddha* was more complex. While some *siddhas* could be accomplished human beings approximately resembling the Buddhist definition, others could be very much more: they could be divine or semi-divine non-humans, primordially realised from the very start, who merely adopted the

³¹ *Āryavidyottamamahātantra* or 'Phags pa rig pa mchog, D746, filling folios 1a to 237b of the Sde dge Kangyur's Volume 95. The 16 pages I translate are from folio 70b to 78b of this edition.

³² Cantwell and Mayer 2023.

³³ Lecture delivered to the Oxford Treasure Seminar, Monday 25th April, 2020, 'Perfected Beings in Human Form: The Siddha Tradition in Śaiva Tantra.' Available as a podcast from: <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/perfected-beings-human-form-siddha-tradition-saiva-tantra>

guise of human *siddhas* to descend from their exalted spiritual abodes to specific geographical locations in the Kashmir region, notably Uḍḍiyāna, for the express purpose of disseminating previously unheard tantric scriptures. The term that came to be applied to such primordially realised *siddhas* descended from on high to disseminate tantric scriptures was *avatāraka*, which Sanderson translates as “promulgator,” (2007: 263-4) and Williams as “agent of revelation” (2017: 135, 136, etc). Another term used was *avatīrṇa*, implying Śiva descended to earth. Some *avatāraka* or *avatīrṇa siddhas* could be hugely significant, as sources of entire tantric dispensations. For example, Abhinavagupta (fl. 975-1025) described the three *siddhas* Tryambaka, Āmardaka, and Śrīnātha, as the agents of revelation respectively of the non-dual, dual, and non-dual-cum-dual teachings of Śiva, while his learned 13th century commentator Jayaratha described the *avatāraka siddha* Matsyendra-nātha as the sole source of revelation of the entire Kaula tradition.³⁴

Despite being so heavily mythologised, these *avatāraka* or *avatīrṇa siddhas* are believed by most modern scholars to have been historical persons, and Kalhaṇa's 12th century history of Kashmir, the *Rājataranginī*, discusses them.³⁵ It is still not clear to me if some version of the *avatāraka* or *avatīrṇa siddha* trope already accompanied Padmasambhava in the late eighth and early ninth century, or if it was retrospectively applied to him in later years, but the more I reflect, the more confident I am that the mythology of Padmasambhava as preserved in Tibet reflects the cultural backdrop of this Kashmiri tradition of *siddhas* as primordially realised divine emanations, working specifically as agents of non-dual tantric revelation, and often with a connection to Uḍḍiyāna. It is equally striking how the first emergence of named *avatāraka* or *avatīrṇa siddhas* in Kashmir and of named *gter stons* in nearby Tibet are historically near contemporaneous, and that the mythology of the Tibetan *gter stons* refers so repeatedly to Uḍḍiyāna.³⁶

³⁴ Sanderson 2007: 264; Williams 2017: 166.

³⁵ Sanderson 2007: 427: “Kalhaṇa speaks of the reign of Avantivarman (c. 855/6-883) as one that was marked by the descent of Siddhas among men for the benefit of the world. That this development had a major impact on Kashmirian society is evident in the fact that Kalhaṇa records it. For he is generally silent about the recent history of religion in the valley beyond noting the religious affiliations of certain kings and the temples and other religious foundations that they established. Such figures as Bhaṭṭa Rāmakāṇṭha, Abhinavagupta, and Kṣemarāja, who loom so large in the learned literature of the Śaivas of Kashmir and beyond, receive not even a passing mention.”

³⁶ Within the Krama tradition, a named individual, Jñānanetra (a.k.a. Śrīnātha, circa 850–900), is said to have revealed the *Kramasadbhāva* and *Kālikulapañcaśataka* scriptures, in Uḍḍiyāna. See Williams 2017: 147 and Sanderson 2007: 264; for the Sanskrit colophons, see Sanderson's footnote 97. By contrast, gShen chen klu dga' was

Tibetology has sought for many years but without complete success to understand the Padmasambhava and related *gter ma* mythology exclusively through the prism of Tibetan history and culture. I suggest these tasks might have been eased a bit by considering from the outset the distinctive Kashmiri cultural background as well. That is not to say of course that indigenous Tibetan culture can be ignored in any study of *gter ma*, because it's certainly possible, for example, that the cultural conventions of the tumulus burial cults also contributed to the eventual public identification of *gter stons*.

Still awaiting my attention is an attempt to compare the constant references to *ḍākinīs* in the Tibetan *gter ma* tradition, with the similarly prominent role of *ḍākinīs* in Indian Vajrayāna revelation. Following Indian tradition, some Tibetans had a special reverence for Uḍḍiyāna *ḍākinīs*, who played a prominent role in Sanskrit Vajrayāna revelatory narratives, for example, in Līlavajra's revelation of the Sanskrit *Vajrabhairavatantra* in Uḍḍiyāna,³⁷ or Lūyīpāda's and Tilopā's re-reception of already revealed Cakrasaṃvara tantras there.³⁸ Uḍḍiyāna is of course also the homeland of Padmasambhava, and a major location for revelation by Śaiva *siddhas*.

Mahāyāna's 'standard claim' and the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*

For the remainder of this paper, I want to return to the Mahāyāna theme of *dharmabhāṇakas* reincarnating into future times to propagate the *sūtras* they had first heard directly from the Buddha in his own lifetime, which as I mentioned above came to play a highly visible role in the construction of Tibetan *gter ma* narratives. Returning to this theme will also give me the opportunity to correct a basic mistake I made in a recent article, *Rethinking Treasure (part one)*, in which I gave a brief preview of this topic in advance of a more detailed article still to come. In *Rethinking Treasure (part one)*, I presented a list of characteristics shared by an Indian Mahāyāna *sūtra*, the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra* (henceforth *Pratyutpanna Sūtra*), and

active only by the early 11th century, although we can infer there were *gter stons* a generation or two before him. A direction of influence is therefore possibly indicated not only by the constant referencing of Uḍḍiyāna in the Tibetan *gter ma* tradition, but also because the earliest known named scriptural revealers in Kashmir seem to have preceded their Tibetan counterparts by a few decades.

³⁷ Wenta 2020: 118.

³⁸ Torricelli 2018: 94-5, 171, 177; personal communication, 22nd April 2021.

the Tibetan *gter ma* traditions. The *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* has been extensively studied by Paul Harrison,³⁹ and much of its materials on the concealment and revelation of Mahāyāna *sūtras* does indeed display striking parallels with the Tibetan *gter ma* tradition, so that my analysis was correct, as far as it went. However, I also made a mistake: I naively imagined that the *Pratyutpanna* was somehow unique, or at least rare, in containing such narratives. On the contrary, as I have since learned from David Drewes, Natalie Gummer, and other Mahāyāna scholars, the scenario described in the *Pratyutpanna* is not by any means rare, let alone unique. The diametric opposite is actually the case. This narrative structure is so commonplace in Mahāyāna *sūtras*, so ubiquitous, that it constitutes what David Drewes has termed the 'standard claim' of Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature, and is replicated in dozens of different Mahāyāna *sūtras* as the prime method of explaining their existence. As David Drewes wrote to me:⁴⁰

The standard claim is that the Buddha spoke the *sūtra* to bodhisattvas during his (final) life and appointed them with the task of returning to this world to reveal them five hundred years later. This scenario is actually presented already in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*.

Numerous Mahāyāna *sūtras* contain self-referential narratives intended to explain their own existence. The internal logic of these narratives bears partial resemblance to that of the *jātakas*, the stories of the Buddha's past lives, since similar themes of karmic cause and effect, of travel through time, and of reincarnation, are found in both. But in these Mahāyāna *sūtras*, the narratives are specifically focused on how the *sūtra* will continue to be propagated after the Buddha's *Nirvāṇa*, and into the future.

The *Pratyutpanna Sūtra*'s narrative to this effect is typical of numerous other *sūtras*. Much of it occurs in Chapter 13, which opens with the interlocutor, the layman Bhadrapāla, asking the Buddha: 'Reverend Lord, at a future time, in that age following the *Nirvāṇa* of the Tathāgata, will this *samādhi* [of the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra*] circulate and spread here in Jambudvīpa?' The Buddha replies that while the *samādhi* of the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* will continue to circulate for 40 years after his *Nirvāṇa*,⁴¹ at a later date, copies of it will have to be sealed up within caskets (*sgrom bu*), and hidden in caves, *stūpas*, rocks and mountains, where they will be protected by *nāgas* and suchlike deities. Then, says the Buddha (Chapter 13B), in the degenerated last 500

³⁹ See especially Harrison 1978 and Harrison 1990.

⁴⁰ David Drewes, personal communication, 21st January, 2022.

⁴¹ Harrison 1990: 96-98 explains why the correct reading is 40 years, not 4,000 or 40,000 years.

years, when true dharma [Mahāyāna?] is rejected and false dharma [deprecating Mahāyāna?] prevails, and when all kinds of other bad things will happen,⁴² a few beings of exceptionally great merit and karma will deliberately appear, for the specific purpose of recovering the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* from its hiding places. These special persons will rediscover the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra*, make copies of it, study it, and expound it to others. On hearing the Buddha say these words, the interlocutor Bhadrapāla and his laymen colleagues were deeply moved, and made a mighty aspiration that they should be the ones to reincarnate into that dreadful last 500 years, to recover the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* from its places of concealment, and teach it to others. But they were not unaware of the gravity of their undertaking, and the difficulties with which it would be fraught; for as they observed, they would be proclaiming teachings that will not have been heard before, and preaching a profound Dharma in which the inhabitants of future times might not believe. Others in the audience exhorted the Buddha to entrust the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* to these noble volunteers so that they could fulfil their great aspiration, which the Buddha duly did. The Buddha then made very exact prophecies specifying the eight named individuals within his audience who would be the ones to reincarnate in the future to uphold the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra*, and enlarged on the very great merits they would acquire by so doing. Although these eight individuals were all laymen, there is no mention of what their status should be when they reincarnate. The Buddha then prophesied that a further 500 persons within his audience would also reincarnate in those future times, to receive, make copies of, and further propagate the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* teachings recovered by the reincarnations of the eight laymen.⁴³

The similarities of this narrative to those of the Tibetan *gter ma* traditions are self-evident, and I set them out in more detail in the table at the end of this paper. If there are any readers unfamiliar with the Tibetan *gter ma* narratives, then all one really needs to remember are a few key substitutions:

- Firstly, the location is moved from Jambudvīpa in general, to Tibet in particular.
- Secondly, important Buddhist missionaries to Tibet, notably Vimalamitra, and, above all, the Second Buddha Padmasambhava, become substituted for the Buddha of the Mahāyāna texts.

⁴² For a full citation and some discussion of the oft-repeated formula describing the dystopian last 500 years, see Harrison 1990: 96-98, 13B.

⁴³ See Harrison 1978: 102-115, and Harrison 1990: 96-113.

- Thirdly, the close students of these missionaries, especially those of Padmasambhava, accordingly become the ones prophesied to reincarnate in the future to revive and propagate the teachings.
- Fourthly, along with this basic narrative framework, some other less crucial details and items of terminology are also adopted.

A colleague has tentatively suggested a possible rNying ma divergence from the *sūtra* narrative, pertaining to the understanding of the age of degeneration. He suggests that the 'last 500 years' formula in Mahāyāna sources such as the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* implies that the reappearances of hidden scriptures will only occur after the *buddhadharma* has entirely disappeared from the world; while *gter ma* were (and are) of course recovered while Buddhism is still established in Tibet, notwithstanding any rhetoric to the contrary.⁴⁴ Yet I don't think that this need be counted as a divergence, since the suggestion is seemingly based on a misunderstanding of the Mahāyāna texts. As Harrison (1990: 97-98, note 2) points out, the composers of the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* rhetorically considered themselves to be living in the last 500 years; but quite certainly *buddhadharma* was by no means extinct in South Asia between the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, when that *sūtra* was created. The consensus among contemporary Mahāyāna scholars is to agree with Harrison: the entire logic of what Drewes has dubbed the 'standard claim' supports Harrison's view, not only in respect of the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra*, but also in respect of all the many other Mahāyāna *sūtras* which appeared in the early centuries C.E., yet which characterised their time of revelation to be the dystopian 'last 500 years'.

Moreover, rNying ma authors from Guru Chos dbang in the 13th century up to Kong sprul in the 19th century also believed the revelation of the Mahāyāna *sūtras* to have happened in an historical period equivalent to the one known to us as the early centuries CE, notwithstanding those *sūtras'* formulaic rhetoric about a 'last 500 years'. Chos dbang explains how the majority of Mahāyāna *sūtras* that were extant in his own time (13th century) had previously been buried as *gter* in Uḍḍiyāna (*o rgyan thod dkar gyi yul du*) before being recovered; and he further explains that other Mahāyāna *sūtras* familiar in Tibet such as

⁴⁴ It is interesting that this quibble was originally raised by a famous 14th century Tibetan critic of *gter ma*, dPal 'dzin. As my colleague wrote to me: "This general point of difference has been made by Tibetan critics of *gter* like dPal 'dzin who saw in the apologetic citation of *sūtras* like this a false equivalence—for dPal 'dzin the *sūtras* emphasize that concealment is for revealing dharma teachings in a period when there is no dharma (or its practice is severely attenuated)."

“the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* and the *Mahāratnakūṭa* and so on” had previously been hidden in treasure caskets [*gter sgrom sbas*] in the temple at Vikramaśīla, before being rediscovered (Guru Chos kyi dbang phyug, 1979: 91). Similarly Kong sprul in his *Biographies of the Hundred Treasure Revealers* (*gTer brgya’i rnam thar*) actually cites the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* (Kong sprul 2007: 347) as well as the *Sarvapunya-samuccaya-samādhi-sūtra* (Kong sprul 2007: 349), and then remarks that shortly after the Buddha’s passing, much of the Mahāyāna was preserved only in the worlds of *devas* and *nāgas* and was no longer visible to humans, but that eventually, many of the Mahāyāna sūtras were recovered by the masters of the Mind Only school, while the *Perfection of Wisdom in 100,000* was revealed by Nāgārjuna from *nāgaloka* (Kong sprul 2007: 350).⁴⁵ It is perfectly clear that neither the Mind Only masters nor Nāgārjuna lived after the dharma had left this world; both lived during the early centuries CE, when *buddhadharma* still thrived in India. Indeed, as Kongtrul goes on to say (2007: footnote 42), this fact underlines the central apologetic for the rNying ma *gter ma* tradition: just as Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna scriptures were initially hidden among the territorial or wordly deities of India (*lha klu la sogs pa*) and then only gradually revealed to humans over the centuries following the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa*, so also, he implies, the *gter ma* texts of Tibet were initially hidden among the territorial deities of Tibet, and then only gradually revealed to humans over the centuries following Padmasambhava’s departure. Thus the rNying ma pa simply continue this age-old Buddhist tradition.

We must conclude that rather than having a single literal meaning to indicate a time after *buddhadharma* has disappeared altogether, the ‘last 500 years’ formula must instead be seen as a somewhat rhetorical device, fluid of interpretation, and capable of many different applications. For Rig ‘dzin rgod ldem, for example, the ‘last 500 years’ could

⁴⁵ [350 line 2] *thun mong mchog gi sprul sku thub pa’i dbang po’i gsung rab rnams kyang bka’ bsdu rim par byung ba’i rjes su theg chen gtso bor gyur pa’i* [line 3] *sde snod phal mo che lha klu la sogs pa’i gnas tha dad pa rnams su byon cing mi snang bar gyur la/ rgyud sde rnams ni rdo rje ‘dzin pa dang mkha’ gro ma rnams kyis bsdu shing o rgyan dharma ganydzo sogs su rgyas btad sde gnyer du* [line 4] *mdzad pa las / phyis dus su babs pa’i tshe theg pa chen po’i mdo sde rnams sgrub sel sogs byang sems rnams las sems tsam gyi slob dpon rnams kyis blangs pa dang/ sher phyin stong phrag brgya pa ‘phags pa klu sgrub* [line 5] *kyis klu yul nas spyen drangs ps sogs mang la/ grub chen sa ra ha/ rta mchog / mtsho skyes/ lū yi pa/ tsi lu pa sogs mchog gi dngos grub brnyes pa rim par byon pa rnams kyis gsang ‘dus bde dgyes dus* [line 6] *‘khor gtso bor gyur pa’i rgyud sde spyen drangs pa thams cad zab gter kho na yin pas rgya gar dang gangs can yul gyi khyad par dang / gang zag rnams ‘byon snga phyi’i dus tshod tsam las sgo thams cad nas don gcig par shes par* [351 line 1] *bya’o/* / For a useful English translation of the *gTer brgya’i rnam thar*, see Jamgon Kongtrul, trans. Yeshe Gyamtso 2011.

mean something as parochial as a specific obstacle to his current patron, a regional king of Mang yul Gung thang; yet the 'last 500 years' formula when associated with this localised obstacle could still serve to signal the prophesied moment for one of his *gter ma* revelations (Valentine 2024: 154-5).

Strictly speaking then, my analysis in *Rethinking Treasure (part one)* can be considered correct: there are indeed very striking parallels between the basic narrative structure of the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* and those used to explain Tibetan *gter ma*. However, where my analysis fell short is that I had not realised the extent to which narratives resembling those of the *Pratyutpanna* are typical of Mahāyāna *sūtras* in general. As I mentioned earlier, David Drewes has described such narratives as the 'standard claim' of Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature, which is replicated across numerous such texts to explain their existence. Although not always the same in every detail, the basic structure remains constant in most cases.

More pertinently to my purposes, we can say with certainty that many of the famous *sūtras* best known in early Tibetan Buddhism have such themes, and in most cases, present them quite prominently: the *Akṣayamatinirdeśa*, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, the *Samādhirāja*, the *Suvarṇabhāṣottara*, the *Pratyutpanna*, the *Vimalakīrti*, and probably several more that I am not yet aware of. If Tibetan *gter ma* literature came to reproduce a conspicuous Mahāyāna *sūtra* literary trope, then this is not down to the disproportionate influence of a single text, but rather, to the pervasive cultural influence of the entire *sūtra* genre.⁴⁶

The central role of Mahāyāna *sūtras* in early Tibetan Buddhist thinking

Since this is the case, it becomes much easier to understand what was previously puzzling to me: how, when, and by whom, did such narratives become appropriated for the usages of Tibetan *gter ma* literature? To approach these questions, it is best to begin by investigating the nature of Tibetan engagement in Buddhist scholarship in the period leading up to the first appearances of *gter ma*, which Dan Martin has established as being not later than the final decades of the 10th century.⁴⁷ As Ulrike Roesler has pointed out in a recent paper delivered at

⁴⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of this topic, see David Drewes' lecture to the Oxford Treasure Seminar, 'Early Explanations for the Appearance of Mahāyāna *sūtras*', 16th May, 2022; podcast at: <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/early-explanations-appearance-mahayana-sutras>

⁴⁷ See Martin 2001.

Oxford,⁴⁸ before the 11th century, and especially during the so-called “early dissemination” of the dharma in Tibet, it was the Mahāyāna *sūtra* corpus that dominated Tibetan Buddhist scholarship. She observes that taken together, Mahāyāna *sūtras* made up approximately two thirds of the texts listed in the two early Imperial translational catalogues, the *Ldan dkar ma* and ‘*Phang thang ma*. She continues with these words:

In addition to the sheer predominance of *sūtra* over *śāstra* in terms of numbers, we are also informed in a document from the Tibetan Imperial court that two *sūtras*, the *Ratnameghasūtra* and the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, were among the earliest texts translated into Tibetan and the vocabulary used became normative for subsequent translations. It is therefore evident that during the 8th and 9th centuries Mahāyāna *sūtras* were given pride of place among the Buddhist texts received from India and elsewhere. They were among the first Buddhist texts to be translated; they form the largest group of texts among the Buddhist translations; and they are listed first in the imperial catalogues.....it was not until the second translation period, from the 11th century onwards, that there was a noticeable shift away from the Mahāyāna *sūtras* and towards the later stages of tantric literature on the one hand, and scholastic literature on the other.

As Roesler acknowledges, Buddhist translations were a public activity sponsored by the royal court, and on the ground, tantric Buddhism would also have been practiced more privately by a number of often hereditary lay householder lineages, some of which might have been quite influential, and also by monastics, probably reflecting Indian usages of the time. But that in no way detracts from her main point that the period is characterized by the considerable impact of Mahāyāna *sūtras* amongst those actively involved in the dissemination of Buddhist texts, since those were the greater and most revered part of the Buddhist translations generally available at the time.

Named *gter stons* began to appear in the 10th and early 11th century, probably building on various already existent traditions. Certainly gShen chen klu dga’, the early Bon po *gter ston* active in the early 11th century, describes for us a *gter ma* culture that is already complex and mature, and which cannot have been extremely new in his own

⁴⁸ Ulrike Roesler: ‘The Mahāyāna Scriptures in Tibet: Recitation, Veneration, and Use’. Paper delivered to *Reading Mahāyāna Scripture Conference, 2021*, St Anne’s College, University of Oxford, 25 September 2021. Thanks to Ulrike Roesler for supplying me with a printed version of her talk.

time.⁴⁹ It therefore seems highly probable that the very earliest *gter stons* emerged from an intellectual environment preceding the 11th century shift that Roesler describes, in other words, from an intellectual environment in which the study of Mahāyāna *sūtras* was still paramount. It might therefore be significant that some among the early Buddhist *gter ma* traditions seem to have contained prominent Mahāyāna motifs, while this became less evident in later *gter ma*.

Two of the earliest Buddhist *gter ma* literatures to have survived, the *bKa' chems ka khol ma* and the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, are traditionally said to have been discovered in the Jokhang in Lhasa, notionally in the 11th century. However, the textual history of these texts is convoluted to say the least. Langelaar's forthcoming work (Langelaar forthcoming, b) shows them to have extremely open redactions, to exist in widely divergent editions, and to contain many materials that postdate the lives of their ostensible revealers. Langelaar presents strong evidence to suggest that the different redactions of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* in particular can best be looked upon as variable compendia of materials pertaining to Srong btsan sgam po, that were for the sake of convenience attributed to the *gter ma* revelations of two famous rNying ma masters, Grub thob dngos grub (precise dates unknown), and his student Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (c. 1124–1192). These collections of Srong btsan sgam po lore contain much overlapping text presenting the first great Tibetan religious king as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who was to become the patron deity of Tibet. They therefore drew substantially from the famous Mahāyāna *sūtra*, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, which introduced for an Indian public the cult of Avalokiteśvara and his mantra, *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*. The various *Maṇi bka' 'bum* traditions could even be seen as serving in some senses an equivalent function as the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* for a Tibetan audience, to convey its basic message of devotion to Avalokiteśvara and his mantra. Guru Chos dbang (1212–1270) later produced a further text under the name of *Maṇi bka' 'bum*.

Even though, as Langelaar has demonstrated, any simplistic attributions of these texts to the *gter ma* discoveries of Grub thob dngos grub and Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer are probably unreliable, and even though they contain many later materials, I suspect it is likely that a core of Srong btsan sgam po and *Kāraṇḍavyūha* related traditions existed early enough to have been known to the seminal early *gter stons* Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer and Guru Chos dbang, who did so much to

⁴⁹ Dan Martin tells me that the Bon *Klu-'bum* for example was recovered as *gter ma* well before gShen chen klu dga' was born. Traditional Bon chronologies tell us this, and also find further corroboration: gShen chen's father was a master of the *Klu-'bum*, and it was this that inspired him to call his son Klu-dga'. Personal communication, 14th April 2022.

codify the *gter ma* traditions.⁵⁰ It is therefore of interest that these narratives draw as heavily on *sūtra* themes as on tantric ones, in contrast to later rNying ma *gter mas*, which are mostly tantric. In addition, Myang ral was the author of historical works, such as the *Chos 'byung me tog snying po brang rtsi'i bcud*, that had much to say about general Buddhism in India, while Chos dbang also shows an awareness of Mahāyāna themes in his *gTer 'byung chen mo*.

What this appears to indicate is that the two great tantric masters who did so much to codify the rNying ma *gter ma* system were themselves in all likelihood well versed in Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature. In my view, we therefore need not be surprised that Myang ral was also capable of adopting a prominent Mahāyāna *sūtra* motif for use at the very heart of his vision of *gter ma*, which is indeed how rNying ma apologists understood their tradition (Kapstein 1989), and especially since there were already most likely precedents for Myang ral to work from. While it might be that Myang ral showed little sign of engagement in *śāstric* Buddhist scholarship, this need not mean that he was ignorant of Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature, which, as Roesler has pointed out, remained a predominant field of Buddhist learning until quite shortly before Myang ral's own times. The same is true of the early Bon *gter ston*, gShen chen klu dga': while his *gter mas* included many genres of scripture, the *sūtra* scriptures of his *Khams brgyad* were by far the greatest in terms of sheer bulk.⁵¹ Of course *gter ma* was from the start replete with tantric influences, for example, *ḍākinīs* adopted from the non-dual tantras, and *nidhivāda* notions taken from the *kriyātantras*; yet *sūtrayāna* influences seem to have been equally important to the early development of the *gter ma* traditions, notably in the framing narrative we are describing here (see my discussion below of the rNying ma 'vision-narrative' as an adaptation of Mahāyāna's 'standard claim').

As further circumstantial evidence in support of my hypothesis, we can turn to the example of Myang ral's older contemporary, the Bka 'gdams pa turned bKa' brgyud pa, sGam po pa bSod nams Rin chen (1079–1153). sGam po pa became commonly known as Zla 'od gzhon nu or Candraprabha Kumāra, after the protagonist by that name in the Mahāyāna's *Samādhirājasūtra*. In this influential *sūtra*, Candraprabha Kumāra is the principal interlocutor whom the Buddha prophesies

⁵⁰ Their contributions include the first comprehensive literary formulations of the narrative structures that framed and gave shape to rNying ma *gter ma* discovery, as well as complex theoretical explorations and practical advice. I am referring here to such works as Myang ral's famous biography of Padmasambhava, the *bKa' thang Zangs gling ma*, his huge *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, and Chos dbang's analysis of the meaning of the word *gter* and the practice of its recovery, in his *gTer 'byung chen mo*.

⁵¹ Personal communication, Dan Martin, 14th April 2022.

will reincarnate as a *dharmabhāṇaka* in future ages, to promote the teachings of the *Samādhirājasūtra* after the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*. According to Marta Sernesi,⁵² the belief that Gampopa was just such a reincarnation of Candraprabha probably shortly post-dated his life time, developing among his direct (or second-generation) disciples who were engaged with the tradition building activities of the early bKa' brgyud masters, in the late 12th century. His recognition as Candraprabha was specifically attributed to his bKa' gdams pa teacher dGe bshes Po to ba, and became widely accepted in Tibet. Thus, as David Jackson describes, sGam po pa's alleged promotion of a controversially *sūtra*-based (rather than tantra-based) *Mahāmudrā* meditation system also came to be interpreted as derived from the *Samādhirājasūtra*, which it was believed sGam po pa had specifically reincarnated to propagate.⁵³ Indeed the central teaching of this *sūtra* is a meditation on Evenness, or *mnyam pa nyid*, an important technical term in some bKa' brgyud traditions of *Mahāmudrā*⁵⁴ and also in the parallel doctrines of *rDzogs chen*.⁵⁵ Be that as it may, we can see that classic Mahāyāna *sūtra* literary themes of prophecy, reincarnation, and the revelation of previously concealed teachings, surely played a vital role in the tradition-building that characterised 12th century Tibet.

In a lecture delivered to the Société Française d'Études du Monde Tibétain in Paris on 23rd March 2022, *Travelling in Time: The Role of Jātaka Stories and Prophecies in the Construction of the Kadampa School*, Ulrike Roesler has given an interesting account of the important role of certain classic Indian Buddhist literary conventions in the tradition-building texts of the Bka' gdams pas.⁵⁶ Here she develops on themes earlier introduced by Matthew Kapstein on the 12th century emergence of a Tibetan *jātaka* literature now populated by great Tibetan teachers (Kapstein 2003:774-5), associated with the move among Tibetans of that time towards rediscovering the Buddhist holy land of India within Tibet and Tibetans. Specifically, Roesler paints a compelling picture of

⁵² Marta Sernesi, personal communication, 28th August, 2023. She adds: "There is a statement attributed to the Kadampa master [Potoba] that the Great Seal is the teaching of the *Samādhirājasūtra*, and this statement has been linked to the belief that Gampopa was the bodhisattva's reincarnation. The *Blue Annals* add that Potoba believed Gampopa to be the reincarnation of Candraprabha, but this is not found in the early biographies of Gampopa nor in Kadampa sources."

⁵³ Jackson 1994: 17-18.

⁵⁴ This is a complex topic, since there are differences in the understandings of *Mahāmudrā* between different bKa' brgyud traditions, for example, between the 'Brug pa and Karma pa schools. Thanks to Dagmar Schwerk for this information (personal communication, 14th April 2024).

⁵⁵ It also plays the central role in the *Guhyagarbhatantra* and **Upāyapāśatantra*, two key Mahāyoga tantras often thought to have a connection with rDzogs chen.

⁵⁶ Accessed from the SFEMT YouTube channel on 16th April 2022: <https://youtu.be/fLfNqUpCTOo>

how *jātaka* and *sūtra*-derived notions of *vyākaraṇa*, time travel, and re-incarnation, were adapted for incorporation into the narratives of the *Pha chos* and *Bu chos* of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*. Analysing the Sanskrit term *vyākaraṇa*, Roesler explains that it means rather more than its usual translation as 'prophecy'. *Vyākaraṇa* implies a broader understanding of causality through all the three times of past, present, and future, a supernormal knowledge (*abhijñā*) accessible only to the very most advanced beings, and a necessary component of the omniscience ascribed to a Buddha. In these narratives, Atiśa moreover assumes a role parallel to the Buddha's in the Indian literary prototypes, and Atiśa's leading disciples assume roles parallel to those of the Buddha's leading disciples. Thus when Atiśa discloses the past and future births of his disciples to illustrate their longstanding karmic destinies with his teachings through many lifetimes, he thereby simultaneously signals his own Buddha-like knowledge of the three times.

The rNying ma 'vision-narrative' and its adaptation of Mahāyāna's 'standard claim'

Turning now to the largest and most influential *gter ma* tradition in Tibetan Buddhism, the still thriving *gter ma* practices of the rNying ma school, we can see that such knowledge of the three times is equally central to their narratives. Inspired notably by the mythic templates established by Myang ral (1124 – 1192) and his successor Chos dbang (1212-1270), rNying ma *gter ma* ideology came to be articulated and codified into what I am very provisionally going to call a 'vision-myth' or maybe a 'vision-narrative', I am not sure yet. I am referring here to the coherent and consistent but nevertheless flexible mythic narrative structure, centered on the story of Padmasambhava and his contemporaries, which has determined the shape and content of the visionary experiences of rNying ma treasure finders for so many centuries. Padmasambhava was of course not the only concealer of *gter ma* in rNying ma historiography, but his mythos became predominant, and will serve as our focus here.⁵⁷ By lending form to treasure finders' visionary

⁵⁷ From a strictly chronological perspective, it could be argued that the cult of Padmasambhava was not very widely established until the 13th and 14th centuries, and that Vimalamitra was a significant figure earlier on, that even non-Indian persons like gNubs were said to have buried *gter mas* for rediscovery, and that several very early rNying ma *gter ma* traditions seem not to have been Padmasambhava-centric at all. Nevertheless, it was the Padmasambhava narrative established by Myang ral in the 12th century that eventually became the dominant narrative within rNying ma, and continues to be so to this day. Thanks to David Germano for his thoughts on this issue.

experiences, the Padmasambhava mythology has also shaped, predicted, and explained the content of their actual treasure discoveries. In turn, the 'vision-narrative' itself becomes reaffirmed, perpetuated, and enriched, with each subsequent visionary experience, and with each subsequent treasure discovery, century after century. While this vision-narrative has perhaps served most prominently to underpin the ongoing revelations of new *gter mas*, it simultaneously supports many other aspects of rNying ma ritual, practice, and identity, since so many of these are inseparably connected with treasure discovery, and with Padmasambhava and his circle.

Anthropologists might detect some resemblance between my provisional terminology of vision-myth or vision-narrative, and the anthropological idea of the 'myth-dream'. The idea of the 'myth-dream' was first articulated by a Canadian anthropologist, the late Kenelm Burridge (1922-2019), and subsequently adopted and refined by further scholars. Recently, Charles Stewart used Burridge's ideas in his remarkable study of the key role played by communally occurring and communally curated religious dreams, in the miraculous rediscoveries by a Greek Orthodox community of a series of long-hidden ancient sacred icons, reputedly buried on their island of Naxos by early Christian refugees from Egypt.⁵⁸ The dreams were received by several persons, continued over time, and were characterised by specific, coherent, repeated narratives. They indicated to the villagers where they should dig to find the icons, while also illustrating their ancient origins and sacred power. Today, after decades of sustained religious outpouring, these icons form the basis of one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in Greek Christianity. The myth-dream Stewart describes in Naxos is, from an anthropological perspective, not very unusual, and ethnographers have described comparable examples in various parts of the world. Perhaps what David Drewes has termed the 'standard claim' of the Mahāyāna *sūtras* was one such myth-dream, since it worked as an implicit mythic structure that lent a unifying cohesion to the multifarious revelations of Mahāyāna *sūtras* by different *dharmabhāṇakas* over long periods of time.

But what sets the rNying ma vision-narrative apart from the 'myth-dreams' of most other cultures, including the Mahāyāna, is the truly comprehensive manner in which it has been extracted from its wider contexts and developed into an independent theme, moving from the implicit to the explicit, becoming formally codified and organised, been committed to writing not merely once but many times over, and developed as a major literary genre in its own right. As far as we currently know, this extraordinary rNying ma vision-narrative was first

⁵⁸ Stewart 2012.

committed to writing by the 12th century master, Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, in his seminal work, the *Zangs gling ma*, although Myang ral surely drew on earlier sources. A central concern of Myang ral was to portray the very soil of Tibet and the *gter stons* inhabiting it as the new holy land populated by siddhas and saints, equivalent to India in its sanctity and thus in its capacity to support the manifestation of new Buddhist scripture. Hence we are much reminded of Kapstein's discussion (2003:774-5) of the 12th century Tibetan preoccupation towards rediscovering the Buddhist holy land of India within Tibet and Tibetans—indeed, the fuller emergence of the Buddhist *gter ma* tradition with its associated mythology at just this time can surely be seen as part of that movement.

In a variation on Po to ba's alleged recognition of sGam po pa as the reincarnation of Candraprabha Kumāra, and like all *gter stons* who were to follow after, Myang ral necessarily accepted himself as a prominent figure from the vision-narrative. In Myang ral's specific case, he was the reincarnation of Padmasambhava's and Vimalamitra's most illustrious disciple of all, the Emperor Khri srong lde btsan.⁵⁹ Yet we should take note that such an identification with an emperor seems not have been entirely unique to the rNying ma, since at some stage the *bKa' chems ka khol ma* too was similarly used to identify Atiśa as the reincarnation of Emperor Srong btsan sgam po.⁶⁰ Be that as it may, Myang ral's identity as the reincarnation of Khri srong lde btsan enabled him to rediscover both the *Phur pa 'phrin las* section and the actual Root Tantras of the majestic *bDe gshegs 'dus pa* cycle directly from the Emperor's own personal manuscripts, the very same manuscripts entrusted by Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava to the Emperor 400 years previously, and then concealed as *gter ma*.⁶¹ Further iterations of

⁵⁹ See Hirshberg 2016: 25-27, 53, 65-68, 170, 191-97

⁶⁰ Thanks to Tomoko Makidono (personal communication 5th July 2022) and Reinier Langelaar (personal communication 19th July 2022) for pointing out the complexity of the *bKa' chems ka khol ma* tradition, and the difficulty of ascertaining exactly when the narrative of Atiśa as the reincarnation of Srong btsan sgam po first appears in it. Yet this narrative certainly does appear at some stage. Langelaar in particular is to be commended for his excellent and detailed attempts at clarifying the transmission of the *bKa' chems ka khol ma* (Langelaar forthcoming, a). He reports that the narrative of Atiśa as the reincarnation of Srong btsan sgam po appears in his witness M (the widely used Lanzhou edition edited by sMon lam rgya mtsho), and his witness S (published by the Ser gtsug nang bstan dpe rnying 'tshol bsdu phyogs sgrig khang in Lhasa). However, this narrative is absent in other editions.

⁶¹ As described in Cantwell (2022/2024: 152-153), the colophons of the *Action Phurpa* section thus declare themselves to be 'Emperor Khri srong lde btsan's own manuscript' (*rgyal po khri srong lde'u btsan gyi phyag dpe*), while the colophons of the several Root Tantras (*rtsa ba'i rgyud*) similarly declare themselves to be *rgyal po'i bla dpe*, another way of saying the same thing.

the rNying ma vision-narrative were subsequently committed to writing by numerous later masters, the most influential of which was probably O rgyan gling pa's (1323 – c. 1360) 14th century *Padma bka' thang*. The rNying ma vision-narrative has by now become so popular, so well known, and so influential, that it counts as the cultural property of all Tibetans, regardless of school or lineage. The name given to such texts is often *bka' thang*, a notoriously difficult term to understand or translate. However, in popular rNying ma usage, which is what concerns us here, it typically refers to a genre of biographies or histories concerning Padmasambhava revealed as *gter ma* treasure.⁶²

The religious aspect of the *bka' thang* genre is so far less explored than the cultural or social historical aspects. Yet it is important to understand that the primary function has always been religious. It continues to play a key role in the inner religious lives of contemporary Buddhists, informing their meditative experiences, religious dreams, and visions, as well as shaping the still ongoing revelations of *gter mas*. Its relatedness to the outer forms of religious life is equally pronounced. Whole episodes of the *bka' thang* can originate in tantric ritual, subsequently transcribed into symbolic narratives about Padmasambhava. *bKa' thang* derived liturgies such as Rig 'dzin rgod ldem's *Le'u bdun ma* should be recited at every 10th day *tshogs*, which themselves worship the Padmasambhava of the *bka' thangs*. One could cogently argue that the *bka' thang* narratives live even more within their innumerable liturgical and visionary manifestations, than in the comparatively fewer famous long texts by O rgyan gling pa or Sangs rgyas gling pa.

In these richly devotional texts, themselves usually discovered as *gter mas*, Padmasambhava is envisaged as a Second Buddha, the re-appearance of Śākyamuni as a direct emanation from the Buddha Amitābha, who takes miraculous birth fully-formed and fully-enlightened upon a magical lotus in a lake in Uḍḍiyāna. Like his *avatāraka* or *avatīrṇa* Śaiva counterparts, his purpose in manifesting is to teach non-dual tantras that were often not known to humans before: as Khenpo Palden Sherab puts it, "...Buddha Śākyamuni presented Hīnayāna and Sūtra Mahāyāna teachings, while Guru Padmasambhava taught the Vajrayāna..."⁶³ Yet Padmasambhava also has a special karmic relationship with Tibetans, so that he can manifest teachings for them

⁶² See Rangjung Yeshe Dictionary, s.v. *bka' thang*.

⁶³ In the developed rNying ma tradition as represented by Guru Chos dbang (1220-1270) and O rgyan gling pa (1323-?1360), Padmasambhava is envisaged as the Buddha himself who needs no human teachers either for his own realisation, or to transmit teachings to others. For example, Chos dbang makes visionary journeys to visit Padmasambhava in his Pure Land of Zangs mdog dpal ri to receive tantric

that no other nations have received. Thus the *bka'thang* texts usually place special emphasis on his stay in Tibet, with a discussion of his prolific concealment of *gter mas* in the Tibetan landscape.

And here the *bka'thang* literature borrows one of its main narrative frameworks from the Indian Mahāyāna literary convention previously described. As a knower of the three times, the Second Buddha Padmasambhava has the ability to understand all karmic causes and effects in the minutest detail. Like the Buddha of the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, he too can foresee the future vicissitudes of his teaching dispensation down to the smallest particulars. Armed with that foresight, like the Buddha of the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, he can see that the teachings he has just given his disciples in 8th century Tibet, will need to be concealed for a time, and then re-revealed in future centuries. Like the Buddha

teachings (Guru Chos kyi dbang phyug 1979: 139 ff). In similar vein, Chapter 3 of O rgyan gling pa's definitive *Padma bka' thang* describes how across numerous different world systems, just as in ours, the Buddhas appear in dyadic form, comprising a Śākyamuni-type emanation to teach the *sūtras*, and a Padmasambhava-type emanation to teach the secret tantras (O rgyan gling pa 1985, ff.32-43). A prominent modern rNying ma scholar, the late *mKhan po* Palden Sherab, explains the Śākyamuni-Padmasambhava dyad of our own world thus:

"For the most part, Buddha Shakyamuni presented Hinayana and Sutra Mahayana teachings, while Guru Padmasambhava taught the Vajrayana. ...The Buddha only gave Vajrayana teachings privately, to select groups of disciples. Because the essence and even the form of these higher teachings is beyond common conception, they are also known as secret teachings. After the Buddha entered mahaparinirvana, these secret doctrines were preserved by a host of wisdom dakinis. ...When Guru Rinpoche appeared as the reincarnation of Buddha Shakyamuni, he revealed the Vajrayana teachings in their entirety. This is why Guru Rinpoche is known as the Buddha of the Vajrayana." Palden Sherab 1992: 2-3.

We do not yet know when such a narrative first appeared. On the one hand, Kalhaṇa writing in the 12th century associates 'descended siddhas' especially with the reign of Avantivarman (c. 855/6-883), and there is quite strong evidence to suggest some of the Dunhuang sources could be interpreted as portraying Padmasambhava as a 'second Buddha' (Dalton 2020: 33-42) and revealer of non-dual tantras (Cantwell and Mayer, 2023). On the other hand, the testimony from Myang ral (1124-1192) needs further study, and might transpire to pull the other way. It's true that Chapters 2 and 3 of the now popular redaction of the *Zangs gling ma* contained in Volume 1 of the *Rin chen gter mdzod* (Doney's ZL1) do seem to envisage Padmasambhava as a *nirmāṇakāya* independent of any need for human masters either for his own realisation or to transmit teachings to others (for an English translation, see Kunsang 1993: 37-44). But Lewis Doney informs me that what he currently believes to be the earliest *Zangs gling ma* recension, his ZL3, does not necessarily support such a view: while it does describe Padmasambhava as achieving *siddhi* under the non-human tutelage of wisdom *ḍākinīs*, it lacks further sentences found in ZL1 that unambiguously affirm Padmasambhava's subsequent study with human gurus was merely to dispel his contemporaries' fears about someone who displayed miracles without having a teacher, and also to establish for future generations the necessity of having a master (personal communication 10th August 2022; see Doney 2014: 44, 110-11, 233-34). The testimony from Myang ral's huge *bKa' brgyad bDe gshegs 'dus pa* has yet to be studied.

in the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, Padmasambhava's knowledge of even the most minute workings of *pratityasamutpāda* allow him to discern to which of his disciples he should at this moment entrust each particular teaching, and in which particular future time, and in which precise location in Tibet, they must be reborn to recover those teachings. He also knows exactly where, when, and with which companions, they should recover them in those future lives. Like the Buddha's students in the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, Padmasambhava's students too are inspired to take mighty vows, to be reborn in those future times, to uphold the teachings with which Padmasambhava has entrusted them. Accordingly, like the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, numerous *bka' thang* texts attribute prophecies to Padmasambhava, in which he discloses details about the future vicissitudes of his teachings, their concealments, his entrustments of those teachings to his close students, the vows of those students to be reborn to propagate them in future lives, and many particulars about their rediscoveries. O rgyan gling pa's *Padma bka' thang* is perhaps the most famous for the sheer quantity and detail of its prophecies, but all *bka' thang* texts describe them. And accordingly, at a more abstract doctrinal level, the classic Mahāyāna *sūtra* process of entrustment (*parindanā*, *gtad pa*) that occurs so prominently in the Mahāyāna *sūtra* narratives is adopted as the central doctrinal cornerstone of rNying ma *gter ma* transmission by leading scholastic exegetes.⁶⁴

If we turn from the *bka' thang* literature to the practical mechanics of revelation in Tibet, we find that tantric and indigenous themes play equally prominent roles, which we have no space to discuss here. Nevertheless, I should mention that the outer classificatory envelope containing these mechanics once again adopts Mahāyāna categories as paramount. Paul Harrison has researched Indian Mahāyāna scriptural revelation for many years. He argues that its various mechanics of revelation are summarised in Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, where it cites a

⁶⁴ This will necessarily have to be the subject of a separate more doctrinal study. In brief I can only mention here that Dodrupchen III Jigme Tenpai Nyima's *Las 'phro gter bgyud kyi rnam bshad nyung gsal ngö mtshar rgya mtsho* takes *gtad rgya* as its central premise for explaining *gter ma* transmission, and we are also aware of much earlier presentations of this understanding. The Tibetan term *gtad pa* is a translation of the Sanskrit *parindanā* or *parīdanā* and related forms. Unfortunately, despite its ubiquity in Mahāyāna *sūtras*, Paul Harrison tells me that he is not aware of any in-depth academic studies of this term (personal communication, 15th March 2022). Hence I have begun my own investigation, based on 20 entire chapters or chapter sections from scriptural texts in the Kangyur which specifically address this term. My current impression, based on the several of these occurrences that I have managed to analyse so far, is that Tibetan authors such as Dodrupchen III Jigme Tenpai Nyima and the others who did make detailed investigations of this term, represented it accurately.

passage from the *Sarvapunya-samuccaya-samādhī-sūtra*. Harrison translates as follows:

Vimalatejas, the Buddhas and Lords resident in other world systems show their faces to reverent and respectful *bodhisattvas* and *mahāsattvas* wanting the dharma, and they cause them to hear the dharma. Vimalatejas, treasures of the dharma are deposited in the interiors of mountains, caves and trees for *bodhisattvas* and *mahāsattvas* wanting the dharma, and endless dharma-teachings in book form come into their hands. Vimalatejas, deities who have seen former Buddhas provide *bodhisattvas* and *mahāsattvas* wanting the dharma with the inspired eloquence of Buddhas.⁶⁵

Very similar tripartite classificatory structures were applied to Buddhist revelation in Tibet, through appropriation of the Mahāyāna schema. Although already thematically apparent in earlier authors such as Guru Chos dbang (1220-1270) and Klong chen pa (1308–1364),⁶⁶ this tripartite classification possibly acquired its familiar present-day terminology rather more recently. Nowadays we know them as [1] *dag snang* or 'Pure Vision', meeting the Buddha face to face in a vision and receiving teachings; [2] *sa gter ma*, or 'Earth Treasure', meaning sacred texts concealed within the material world; and [3] *dgongs gter* or 'Mind Treasure', a direct divine inspiration of the mind permitting the spontaneous confident utterance of dharma.

Conclusion

To summarise: Tibetology has long been unanimous that the *gter ma* traditions of Tibet developed from the confluence of indigenous and foreign influences. India, China, and Tibet independently had complex and varied treasure cultures, several of which merged over time. So far, however, the various Indian influences have remained largely unexplored. I am hoping to make a start on this potentially fruitful but hopefully not very difficult undertaking of researching the Indian influences (even if most of my research effort still remains devoted to

⁶⁵ Harrison 2005: 124-5

⁶⁶ There is ample evidence from Chos dbang's autobiographical writings that in parallel with his discoveries of earth treasures (*sa gter*), Chos dbang also enjoyed prolonged face-to-face encounters with Padmasambhava in his paradise to receive important teachings from him, in a process that might later have been associated with pure vision (*dag snang*). I'm not yet clear if Chos dbang also enjoyed the kind of experiences nowadays associated with mind treasure (*dgongs gter*). However, in the following century, Klong chen pa does seem to have done so, for example, in the production of his *Seven Treasures*, which can sometimes be classified as Mind Treasures.

Tibetan influences). It promises to be interesting. On the one hand, it seems likely there might have been some direct historical continuity between Indian and Tibetan revelatory practices in the largely anonymous revelation of some early rNying ma tantras. As careful calques of Sanskritic tantras and largely based on reused Indian text, they were quite likely produced with the same revelatory methods that were still being used at that time by Indian gurus. By contrast, the slightly later *gter ma* system was a uniquely Tibetan mélange of numerous sources with no precise counterpart anywhere else. Unlike Indian Buddhism's largely anonymous *dharmabhāṇakas* and often anonymous tantric *sid-dhas*, it openly identified its text revealers. Mixing the contemporaneous tantric traditions of Kashmir and India with powerful indigenous Tibetan elements, it drew them all together within frame narratives inspired by Mahāyāna *sūtra* literary motifs apparently long discontinued in India,⁶⁷ but which thereby found a remarkable new life in 10th century Tibet.

TABLE 1
Thirteen literary motifs shared between the <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> Chapter 13, wider Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature in general, and Tibetan <i>gTer ma</i> literature.
All locations in the <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> from Harrison 1978 and 1990.
[1] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : Concealment of the <i>sūtra</i> so it can be reintroduced afresh following a foreseen future religious decline (13 B-D).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif is widely present, whether concealment is conventional or supernatural.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif is widely present, whether concealment is conventional or supernatural, but substituting Tibet for Jambudvīpa.

⁶⁷ A later instance of this mythic structure in a Mahāyāna context and outside of Tibet can be found in a source from late 6th century China. In his *Lidai sanbao ji* (T 2034), compiled in 594, the canonical cataloguer Fei Changfang ruled that a key factor rendering the nun Nizi's previously unheard *sūtra* canonical, was that she had remembered it from a past life (*suxi*). By contrast, Fei Changfang did not accept "divine transmission" (*shenshou*), i.e. transmissions direct from deities. As Campamy writes, "for Fei, "divine transmission" (*shenshou*) is either a non-existent phenomenon or, if it does occur, it is not a way in which authentic *sūtras* are produced. What he does admit as authentic are *sūtras* "learned in a former life" (*suxi*) and spontaneously recalled and chanted in this life" (see Campamy 1995: 8-9). However, as Eric Greene observes, although these and similar criteria might have been acceptable in some circles during the earlier periods of Chinese Buddhism, such criteria later came to be rejected by the official bibliographic traditions, for whom only translated *sūtras* with a proven Indic origin could officially be deemed authentic (Eric Greene, personal communication, 5th July 2023).

[2] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : Specific prophecies regarding the already spiritually advanced future discoverers of the PraS (13 K, esp. vv. 3-11, 14-15).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif is widely present.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif is widely present (substituting Padmasambhava's 25 close disciples reincarnating as <i>gter stons</i> , for the Buddha's close disciples reincarnating as <i>dharmabhāṇakas</i>).
[3] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : All future reincarnating discoverers are present among the audience when the Buddha first teaches the <i>sūtra</i> (13; 13 K vv. 3-11).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif is widely present.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif is widely present (substituting Padmasambhava and his 25 close disciples for the Buddha and his close disciples).
[4] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : Future reincarnating discoverers make aspirations to teach the <i>sūtra</i> in the future times (13 D-H).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif is widely present.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif is widely present (substituting Padmasambhava's 25 close disciples and teachings for those of the Buddha).
[5] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : The Buddha first directly teaches and then entrusts (<i>parindanā</i> / <i>gtad</i>) these named disciples with the <i>sūtra</i> , with the prophecy they will rediscover it again and again in repeated future lives (13, 13 H).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif is widely present (concepts <i>parindanā</i> / <i>gtad</i> and <i>vyākaraṇa</i> / <i>lung bstan</i> often explicit, other times implied).
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif is widely present (substituting Padmasambhava and his 25 close disciples for the Buddha and his close disciples).
[6] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : White-robed non-monastic status of the eight who will later incarnate to recover the <i>sūtra</i> (13 C, 13 E; Harrison 1990: xvii). Their status after reincarnation not specified.
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: When attending the Buddha, future <i>dharmabhāṇakas</i> often non-monastic, or monks. After reincarnating as <i>dharmabhāṇakas</i> , even if monastic, can be married, or transgressive (e.g. Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra).
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: When attending Padmasambhava, future <i>gter stons</i> often non-monastic, or monks. After reincarnating as <i>gter stons</i> , even if monastic, need consorts to reveal <i>gter ma</i> ; often transgressive.

[7] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : Five hundred prophesied recipients, who also heard the original teaching of the PraS in their past lives, will repeatedly be reborn to accompany the eight prophesied treasure discoverers, to receive, copy and propagate the newly revealed teachings (13 G-H, 13 K v.3, 14-15).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif is sometimes present (prevalence not yet ascertained).
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif often present, and systematised (cf. the <i>chos bdag</i> who is first to receive the <i>gter ma</i> from the <i>gter ston</i> , and is charged with putting it in writing and disseminating it).
[8] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : It is predicted that after rediscovery, the <i>sūtra</i> and its discoverers might be seen as controversial, and not readily accepted by the wider Buddhist public (13 F, 13 K vv. 12-13).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif is widely present.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif is widely present (substituting <i>gter ma</i> texts and their <i>gter stons</i> for Mahāyāna <i>sūtras</i> and their <i>dharmabhāṇakas</i>).
[9] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : Uses a key technical term <i>gtad pa</i> (13 H).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: <i>Gtad pa</i> / <i>parindanā</i> widely present.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: <i>Gtad pa</i> widely present, becomes doctrinally central.
[10] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : Concealed manuscripts are stored in caskets (<i>sgrom bu</i>) (13K v. 8).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: <i>sGrom bus</i> can occur in those Mahāyāna <i>sūtras</i> where scriptures are concealed in the environment.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: <i>sGrom bus</i> occur in the particular class of <i>gter ma</i> where scriptures are concealed in the environment (<i>sa gter</i>).
[11] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : Treasure caskets (<i>sgrom bu</i>) are hidden in such places as caves, <i>stūpas</i> , rocks and mountains (13 K v.9; 13 B).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif occurs when texts are concealed in the environment.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif occurs where texts are concealed in the environment (<i>sa gter</i>), extending also to lakes, the sky, temples, statues, etc.
[12] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : <i>Nāgas</i> and suchlike deities are charged with protecting the casket during its long concealment (13 K v.9).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif present where texts are concealed in the environment.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif present where texts are concealed in the environment (<i>sa gter</i>), specifically <i>nāgas</i> etc. inhabiting Tibet's landscape.

[13] <i>Pratyutpanna Sūtra</i> : Prophecies of where the PraS will be rediscovered ('in the north', 13 K v.14-15).
Mahāyāna <i>sūtra</i> literature: Motif shared by many Mahāyāna <i>sūtras</i> , can be in this world system or another.
<i>gTer ma</i> literature: Motif ubiquitous, usually specifying locations in Tibet.

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