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Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhism

The myths concerning the powerful Indian *guru* Padmasambhava (8th–9th cents.) suffuse almost all aspects of public and private life in the Tibetan cultural sphere. These myths are instantiated in literature, art, dance, church–state relations, and domestic and calendrical ritual. Many Tibetan Buddhists worship him as the "precious guru" (*Gu ru rin po che*), the "lotus (*padma*) from Uḍḍiyāna" in modern day northern Pakistan (*U/O rgyan padma*), or the "second Buddha" (*Sangs rgyas gnyis pa*). This master of magic and mantra is one of the foremost culture heroes of the Tibetan language zone. He is remembered to have become the teacher of the Tibetan emperor, Khri Srong lde brtsan (742–c. 800), and to have spread esoteric Buddhism at the apex of the imperial period (7th–9th cents.), an era eulogized as a "golden age" of Dharma practice. The tradition of Padmasambhava's religious biography has its roots in southern Tibet and matured within the Rnying ma school, which claims to possess an unbroken lineage dating back to the imperial period. However, this biographical tradition has exerted a huge influence on later historiography across the schools, including the ecumenical and foreign policy of the Dalai Lamas.

Over time, Padmasambhava came to be known by many names and in the guise of numerous manifestations, and the representations of him in literature and art that have survived reflect only a fraction of the multiple traditions and practices existing at one time or another (see most recently the essays in Pakhoutova, ed., 2018). Yet mythological themes common from the earliest to the latest sources on Padmasambhava are his role in pacifying and converting local worldly deities, especially in the Himalayas, southern, and central Tibet, his preference for Mahāyoga and Atiyoga (Rdzogs chen) forms of esoteric Buddhism, and his status as a culture hero of tantric ritual. Such characteristics of Padmasambhava are still remembered in Tibetan Buddhist communities today (Diemberger, 2007). The biographical and iconographical traditions on Padmasambhava create not just another saint, but a religious founder and embodiment of Tibetan esoteric Buddhism akin to the Buddha and saviors of other World Religions.

Early Mythographic Depictions

Padmasambhava's existence, questioned in the early Tibetological literature (Bischoff, 1978), is today cautiously accepted (→BEB I: Gter ma, 400), while his historicity is less intensively studied in the field than his changing representation throughout Tibetan history (Dalton, 2004, 769–770). Tibetan Buddhists ascribe a vast number of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist works to his authorship or inspiration, perhaps most convincingly the *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba* commentary on chapter 13 of the *Gsang ba'i snying po* (**Guhyagarbha*; Karmay, 1988, 137–174) and the *Thabs zhags padma 'phreng* (Eastman, 1983) exposition of Mahāyoga together with its commentary – although the *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba* and *Thabs zhags padma 'phreng* share little uniquely in common (Cantwell & Mayer, 2012, 87–91). An early Tibetan exegete of esoteric Buddhism, Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (9th–10th cents.), makes reference to Padmasambhava's authorship of the former work (unless this is an interpolation into his text), and praises him for his deep learning and attainments (Cantwell & Mayer, 2013). However, we only possess much later exemplars of *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba* and the works of Sangs rgyas ye shes.

The *Thabs zhags padma 'phreng* offers us perhaps the earliest extant description of Padmasambhava, provided in a 10th-century manuscript from Cave 17 of the Mogao cave complex near Dunhuang (Dalton & van Schaik, 2006, xi–xvi, 51–52). Immediately preceding the final colophon, a praise of homage is included to "he who has attained the supreme *siddhi* of great wonder, the Lotus King (*padma rgyal po*) [who] is not worldly; [he who] unravels from the expanse the *Tathāgata*'s great secret pith instructions (*man ngag gsang chen*)" (IOL Tib J 321. 84a5–6; Cantwell & Mayer, 2012, 92–93). In this portrayal, Padmasambhava is already mythologized as an enlightened and supramundane master.

His earliest narrative depiction is contained in the 10th-century Dunhuang manuscript, P. tib. 307 (Dalton, 2004). After a description of seven Tibetan demonesses in a *maṇḍala*, it states that "the Indian master Padmasambhava" (*rgya gar gyi mkhan po pad ma sam ba ba*) and Rlang Dpal gyi Seng ge subjugated and suppressed them under the class of Buddha Vajradhara. The description of the demonesses suggests that they and Padmasambhava are here implicitly linked to earlier Indic traditions of Rudra subjugation (as found in the *Guhyagarbha*) and the cult of the "Seven Mothers" (*ma bdun*; *saptamātṛkā*). Yet these demonesses are explicitly described as ladies of Tibet (*bod khams gyi bdag mo*) rather than India. Binding them to be guardians of Tibet, Padmasambhava is here mentioned in a Tibetan context (Dalton, 2011, 66–73). Thus, the Indian Padmasambhava controls the Tibetan landscape in subjugating them and has Tibet as his sphere of ritual practice even in this earliest narrative representation.

The slightly later narrative in P. tib. 44 similarly displays his mastery over a tetrad of *bse* goddesses, troublesome local deities of the earth (→Spirits of the Soil, Land and Locality in Tibet), in current-day Nepal. This late 10th-century Dunhuang document contains a ritual preceded by a short narrative, which depicts Padmasambhava as an expert in *kīlaya* (*phur pa*; "dagger" or "spike") rituals (Bischoff & Hartmann, 1971; Kapstein, 2000, 158; Cantwell & Mayer, 2008a, 41–67). At Yang la (=le) shod in Nepal, on his way to procure a collection of such ritual texts titled the *Phur bu'i 'bum sde* (Dagger-Collection Scripture) from Nālandā, "Pad ma sam ba ba" transforms and tames these four *bse* goddesses (who are trying to kill him) by means of his magic hat. Then, practicing *kīlaya* rituals alongside practices ranging from Kriyāyoga up to Atiyoga, "Ācarya Sam ba ba" achieves accomplishments and is granted a vision of Vajrakumāra (Rdo rje gzhon nu, i.e. Vajrakīla; Rdo rje phur pa), a deified form of the *kīlaya*. He subsequently transmits these teachings to disciples in Tibet, who practice at Brag dmar and As (=Has) po ri in the heart of the Tibetan empire – southeast of Lhasa – and in Lho brag and 'Bum thang – in southern Tibet and what is now Bhutan, respectively. This work provides no evidence that Padmasambhava ever met Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan. Yet, it depicts him as a South Asian master performing esoteric Buddhist rituals in the Himalayan region and the instigator of an important tantric practice in Tibet during the reign of that 8th-century emperor.

Maturation and the First Full-Length Biography

The above representations circulated and were expanded during the early part of the 2nd millennium CE, when clan and religious groups vied for power in central and southern Tibet. The memory of these events within the context of later ritual explications, especially in what became the Rnying ma school, is a testament to their continuing power in traditional religious contexts (Cantwell & Mayer, 2008a, 45–49). Elements of the Dunhuang representations of Padmasambhava recur in extended or adapted form in the 12th-century *Zangs gling ma* chapters 4, 5, and 9 (Doney, 2014, 3–4), a work explained below. This evidence shows the continuous growth and spread of the cult of Padmasambhava, who is mythologized from the start, rather than a break between a "historical" Padmasambhava and a deified Padmasambhava newly reinvented from the 11th century onwards.

Outside of the Dunhuang cache of manuscripts, the earliest narrative depiction of Padmasmabhava is found in the 11th- or 12th-century *D/R/Sba(')bzhed* (Testimony of Ba) tradition. This history purports to narrate the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet from the perspective of members of the Ba family (whose clan name is variously spelled as Dba', Rba, Sba, etc.), especially Ba Gsas/l snang who acts as minister and then spiritual preceptor to Emperor Khri Srong lde btsan in the narrative. Fragments of the *Testimony of Ba* narrative were recently found among the Dunhuang documents (Or. 8210/SN9498(A) and Or. 8210/SN13683(C); van Schaik & Iwao, 2008) – although none of these concern Padmasambahava. The *Dba' bzhed* (Wangdu & Diemberger, 2000) appears to be the oldest complete exemplar of the *Testimony of Ba* available at present, retaining many archaic features, and in it Padmasambhava plays an important though limited role. Later versions of the *Testimony of Ba* display amplification, elision, and alteration of the main narrative given in the *Dba' bzhed* (see Doney, 2013) and devote a little more of their texts to his time in Tibet and relationship with Khri Srong lde brtsan/btsan.

Padmasambhava's sojourn in Tibet takes up 7 folio sides out of 60 in the *Dba' bzhed*. As in the above works, Padmasambhava subjugates many local deities on the border of Tibet. Yet he also travels around the Yar lung valley in central Tibet and performs numerous miracles and acts of water

magic (Wangdu & Diemberger, 2000, 13–14). He carries out these acts for the sake of the emperor's longevity, the stability of Bsam yas monastery's construction, and ensuring a long future for Buddhism in Tibet (Wangdu & Diemberger, 2000, 11a–13a). The Indian abbot, →Śāntarakṣita, recommends Padmasambhava to the Tibetan emperor as India's greatest master of mantra (Wangdu & Diemberger, 2000, 11b2–7), his power worthy of comparison with that of the Buddha to tame the deities and *nāga*s of the Jambudvīpa continent (*'dzam bu gling gi lha klu* →Worldly Protector Deities in Tibetan Buddhism). Padmasambhava extends the life of the emperor by means of a ritual using a vase of longevity (*tshe bum*), but Khri Srong lde btsan eventually grows suspicious of his power and asks him to return to his homeland (Wangdu & Diemberger, 2000, 13a6–b6). As Padmasambhava departs, he criticizes the ruler and prophesies the decline of the Dharma and disagreement among Buddhists because his threefold binding of the deities and *nāga*s remains unfinished (Wangdu & Diemberger, 2000, 14a2–5). He then plays no further part in the narrative.

He is from the start spiritually superior to the mundane ruler, Khri Srong lde btsan, who feels great sorrow at his departure and who eventually brings about a decline in Buddhism marked by the famous "Bsam yas debate" (Wangdu & Diemberger, 2000, 14a6 and 18b5ff.; Seyfort Ruegg, 1989, 56–92). In contrast to earlier imperial representations of the emperor as the deified center of Tibetan society, the *Testimony of Ba* account glorifies religious figures and highlights their role in the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. This trait is indicative of the gradual replacement of a cult of the divine emperor with cults of religious deities and masters such as Padmasambhava in Tibet during this period (Doney, 2017). Yet, in the main narrative taken as a whole, Padmasambhava's time in Tibet is rather short, while other Buddhist masters take center stage.

The growth of the cult of Padmasambhava inspired his inclusion in other early histories of the Dharma in Tibet, written from outside the Rnying ma school. For example, the second patriarch of the Sa skya school, Slob dpon Bsod nams rtse mo (1142–1182), included Padmasambhava in his history of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, the *Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo* (Introduction to the Dharma; dating according to Martin [1997, 34, no. 24] from c. 1167). During a very short description of Buddhism during the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan, he mentions Padmasambhava (as "the master of Uḍḍiyāna, Padma sam bha wa") alongside Śāntarakṣita as subduing the deities and spirits (*lha srin*) of Tibet (*Sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum*, *kha*, 343b4–5). This gives a strong sense of the importance of Padmasambhava at this time, although his role is still limited compared with later accounts.

Other early works of historiography depict Padmasambhava as a divine emanation (*sprul pa*) rather than a human adept. Davidson (2003, 78n61) notes that this is the case with the perhaps 11th- or 12th-century *Bka' chems ka khol ma* (Pillar Testament), the main narrative of which describes the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara incarnating as Emperor Srong btsan sgam po (d. 649), in order to build temples and spread Buddhism in the 7th century. Its closing summation states that some say Padmasambhava was an emanation of Śākyamuni, just as they say the emperors were emanations of bodhisattvas (*Bka' chems ka khol ma*, 318:12–16). It goes on to claim that, since such emanations were either born in or invited to Tibet, all of its shrines and monasteries – such as Ra sa 'phrul snang and Ra mo che – have been greatly blessed (319:1–3). This statement may represent an interpolation into the text. However, here Padmasambhava joins the ranks of deified Tibetan emperors and mythic Buddhist princes. The identification of Padmasambhava as an emanation of Amitābha in later literature and iconography (see below) apparently replaced his earlier identification with the historical Buddha (see below).

The earliest example of a full-length biography of Padmasambhava is now known as the *Zangs gling ma* (see Doney, 2014; trans. Kunsang 1999). It is represented as a "treasure" (*gter*) discovered by the famous "treasure revealer" (→*Gter ston*), Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1136–1204 or 1124–1192; Hirshberg, 2016). The Rnying ma especially claim that treasure texts were buried by Padmasambhava himself in the 8th century, for reincarnations of his disciples to discover either in physical caches or in their minds in the future (→BEB I: Gter ma, 400–402). Nyang ral is supposed to be the reincarnation of Khri Srong lde btsan, for example, discovering texts that Padmasambhava transmitted to him during the 8th century (Doney, 2014, 15–19). This role in treasure text burial was relatively new for Padmasambhava in the 12th century, yet the technology evidently offered a way for the Rnying ma school to provide up-to-date tantric rituals for their members but represent them as ancient and authoritative through their connection to Padmasambhava. In that way, indigenous

textual production could compete with the Indic esoteric Buddhist works containing cutting-edge rituals that were flooding into Tibet at the time (Phillips, 2004, 386). Nyang ral's *Zangs gling ma* has been fundamental to much of the later tradition of Padmasambhava biography as well as deeply influencing historiography in general.

The *Zangs gling ma* describes Padmasambhava very differently from the *Dba' bzhed*. The latter only introduces him within the context of his arrival in Tibet, and takes the perspective of his superior in Tibetan society, Emperor Khri Srong lde btsan. The *Zangs gling ma* instead begins with a South Asian king's quest: King Indrabhūti/Indrabodhi of Uḍḍiyāna is searching for a wish-fulfilling jewel and finds the eight-year-old Padmasambhava, who has miraculously appeared on a lotus in the middle of the ocean (*Padma bka' chems brgyas pa*, 1b2–7a5). He adopts this child-incarnation of Amitābha to be his royal son, but Padmasambhava arranges his self-exile by killing a minister's son with his iconic *khaṭvāṅga* staff (present in all figs. 1–4). He is banished from the kingdom, allowing him to practice higher tantric rites in charnel grounds all over India (*Padma bka' chems brgyas pa*, 7a5–10b1). He is thus simultaneously a buddha's incarnation and a king's son, but he lives a →*siddha*'s life (like Nyang ral himself) in the wilds outside society. Returning home with his tantric consort, Princess Mandāravā, Padmasambhava survives immolation by his adoptive father, and converts the realm to esoteric Buddhism (*Padma bka' chems brgyas pa*, 13a2–17a5). This *topos* is akin to the reclamation of the kingdom by the exiled prince in many other state founding and royal hero myths (Miller, 2000) and to Samudra's conversion of King Aśoka in the *Aśokāvadāna* (Strong, 1983, 74).

Later, Padmasambhava is invited to Tibet in order to aid Khri Srong lde btsan (here called a "king," *rgyal po*) in building Bsam yas monastery and binding the autochthonous deities to protect Buddhism. Padmasambhava's status as a *siddha* proves him superior to this king too (*Padma bka' chems brgyas pa*, 30b1–5). It becomes clear that the two shared a previous life building a stūpa (*mchod rten*) in Magadha/Ma ku ta (with Śāntarakṣita; *Padma bka' chems brgyas pa*, 36a3–37a5) and making aspirational prayers to spread Buddhism in Tibet. Here, Padmasambhava replaces the minister, Dba' gSas/l snang, from the *Testimony of Ba* triad who made similar prayers at the time of Buddha Kāśyapa (Wangdu & Diemberger, 2000, 8a4–5; Doney, 2017, 316–317). Padmasambhava then converts the deity Pe har into a Dharma protector (→Worldly Protector Deities in Tibetan Buddhism) and places him in charge of Bsam yas monastery, increases the life span of his new royal disciple, Khri Srong lde btsan, and initiates him into various tantric practices (*Padma bka' chems brgyas pa*, 68b1–79a3). He also buries treasure texts around Tibet, and prophesies that the king will retrieve them after 17 lifetimes. Details of this 17th life make it clear that this future treasure revealer will be Nyang ral, the compiler of the *Zangs gling ma* itself (*Padma bka' chems brgyas pa*, 79a3–85a5).

Finally, Khri Srong lde btsan dies and the master leaves Tibet, traveling to Laṅka to convert its bloodthirsty *rākṣasa* (*srin po*) inhabitants to the Dharma (although this taming is not recounted). His parting words of advice and advocacy of devotion to Mahākaruṇā Avalokiteśvara take up more than a quarter of the text (*Padma bka' chems brgyas pa*, 89b1–122b3), in a manner that corresponds with Śākyamuni entering *parinirvāṇa* with parting words for his disciples. Furthermore, the homage paid to him at the beginning of the work suggests that he is still approachable, and so never died. This is also analogous to the depiction of Śākyamuni in later devotional works, but is a new move in the depiction of Padmasambhava.

Here, and increasingly in later ritual narratives especially of the Rnying ma school, the life stories of the tantric consorts and 25 disciples of Padmasambhava, as well as the spirits he tames and converts to Buddhism, become narrativized in relation to Padmasambhava. As Kapstein (2000, 162) asserts, it is in such works of Nyang ral "that we find the clearest blueprint for the later Tibetan religiopolitical construction" of society, increasingly central to which is Padmasambhava.

Ritual and Bon po Variants of the Narrative

From the beginning, Padmasambhava's *mythos* seems tied up with ritual efficacy (Mayer, 2007; Cantwell & Mayer 2008b). Among the multitudinous ritual works attributed to him are many on the figure of Kīla (Phur pa) or Vajrakīla (Rdo rje phur pa), who is the deified ritual *kīlaya* dagger envisioned as a meditational deity. As reflected even in Dunhuang documents, the *kīlaya* itself is used not only to purify ritual spaces and convert dangerous

local spirits into Dharma protectors, but also to reach enlightenment oneself through meditational identification with the deity Kīla (Cantwell & Mayer, 2008a, 32–35). Padmasambhava is intimately connected with Kīla rituals to this day, especially as he takes the form of the horse-headed →Hayagrīva (Rta mgrin) or wrathful Rdo rje gro lod (see below), and practitioners often visualize themselves as him in these forms during such rituals (Huntington, 1975, 7–10; 66–68).

If earlier rituals form the template for tales told about Padmasambhava, then reciprocally some later ritual texts expand early Padmasambhava narratives, including that given in P. tib. 44 (see above), to recount his birth and elaborate upon his religious practices. Blondeau, in her groundbreaking account of Padmasambhava biography, distinguishes between narratives that describe Padmasambhava being born from a lotus, the so-called "miraculous birth" (*rdzus skyes*) version, and those that recount a "womb birth" (*mngal skyes*) narrative instead (Blondeau, 1980, 46). She further shows that the former version is found more often in treasure texts while the latter is more prevalent in conventionally transmitted works (*bka' ma*).

The accounts given in the ritual text, the *Phur 'grel 'bum nag* (Black Kīla-Commentary Collection; trans. Boord, 2002), as the name suggests, are collected and placed side by side rather than unified by authorial intervention (apparently quite early, but exactly when and by whom is still uncertain). The first tradition tells of Padmasambhava's birth from the womb of Queen Jalendra, wife of King Śakra of Uḍḍiyāna, to the west of India. He is no less miraculous for being born "naturally," since he displays on his body auspicious marks of a wrathful subjugator of demons, and so is named Rdo rje bdud 'dul ("Vajra Demon-Subjugator;" Boord, 2002, 113–114). The second tradition's narrative, also set in Uḍḍiyāna, recounts how an unnamed pious king adopts a child found emanated within a large lotus, and names him "Lotus-Born" (Padma 'byung gnas; Boord, 2002, 115–116). There is no sense of tension on display in the results of this compilation process. Instead, the opening praise to Padmasambhava addresses him as one possessing two different equally amazing traditions concerning his life story (Boord, 2002, 109). This work later describes these traditions from the perspective of ritual practice, as the partial perspectives of Buddhist practitioners rather than two conflicting accounts of "reality" (Boord, 2002, 113). Such works conform to a general continuity between Dunhuang *kīlaya* documents and later texts, yet within Blondeau's analysis, they represent a younger intersection of two traditions of Padmasambhava narrative apparently popular at the time.

Just as Padmasambhava is granted a vision of Vajrakumāra (Vajrakīla) as a result and sign of his tantric accomplishments in P. tib. 44, Tibetan masters from at least the 12th century are recorded to have had visions of a fully deified Padmasambhava. Nyang ral's purported first encounter occurred during a dream at ten years old (1134), when from among a great multitude of men, women, and riders Padmasambhava appeared "bearing a jeweled vase filled with *amṛta* nectar" (trans. Hirshberg, 2016, 49). Such visions are often feasts for the senses, other-worldly displays of the majesty of the guru and proof that he is not only present but also capable of passing on empowerments (symbolized in Nyang ral's vision by the presence of a nectar-filled vase). This vision awakens Nyang ral's faith and, as the continuing account details, galvanizes him to deeper practice and thereby greater heights of awakening himself. It also foreshadows his career as a treasure revealer through his early connection with the spiritual source of this treasure (Hirshberg, 2016, 50) – this claimed dream vision in part justifies his revision of Padmasambhava *mythos* itself.

Gu ru Chos kyi dbang phyug (or Gu ru Chos dbang; 1212–1270) was a slightly later treasure revealer who practiced Nyang ral's teachings, was born in the same region of southern Tibet and claimed to be his reincarnation (Phillips, 2004, 158–179). Some of his visions (Phillips, 2004, 172) merge with another genre: "replies to questions" (*zhus lan*), which in this case Padmasambhava gives to his 8th-century disciples and his consort, Ye shes mtsho rgyal (Kunsang, 1990). Such visions bolster the biographical representations and validity of the tradition of treasure revelation, add extra detail not provided in those texts, and (like the aforementioned treasure texts) collapse the boundaries between the imperial period and the present in which these visions occur.

Bon po histories contain many similar and yet mirror image depictions of Padmasambhava to those above, reflecting the unique perspective of the "other" religion of Tibet. However, the earliest of these portrayals have yet to be securely dated. Martin (1997, 28–29) dates the *Grags pa rin chen gling grag* (full title: *Bon chos dar nub gi lo rgyus grags pa rin chen gling grag ces bya ba rmongs pa blo'i gsal*

byed) to the "mid-1100's?"; Blezer (2010, 11) puts the *Bsgrags byang* tradition, to which the aforementioned text belongs, somewhere between the late 10th century and the 12th century. One exemplar that appears to contain an early version of this tradition (Kvaerne, 1993, 18–23) portrays Padmasambhava's introduction of Buddhism into Tibet as having negative consequences for the Bon religion (*Grags pa rin chen gling grag,* 46b2–80a6).

The text first tells us that Khri Srong lde btsan's invitation of the great Indian masters, Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita, is due to the power of their previous aspirational prayers together as three beggars building Ri bo Bya ri Kha shor in "India" (*Grags pa rin chen gling grag*, 46b2–48b1). Yet it differs from the *Testimony of Ba* and *Zangs gling ma* narrative of building the similarly named Bya rung kha shor Stūpa – today identified with the Boudhanath Stūpa in the Kathmandu valley – in giving the three Indian beggars an ulterior motive: fulfilling promises to the kings of India and China to conquer the king of Tibet by spreading Buddhism there in a future life. Eventually, Khri Srong lde btsan is born and brought up knowing only Bon and a prosperous and happy kingdom based on its practice. The hero of this half of the narrative, the great Bon master named Dran pa nam mkha', then dreams that Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita will come to Tibet and destroy the dominion of Bon (*Grags pa rin chen gling grag*, 52a4–b3). Padmasambhava's depiction in the dream is as a monk like Śāntarakṣita, dressed in saffron robes, though also antinomian in character with a *vajra* scepter, a *ḍamaru* drum, and a *kapāla* skull cup from which he pours human and horse's blood. They then actually arrive and persuade Khri Srong lde btsan to abandon Bon and practice Buddhism, causing the diminution of Tibet's empire on the field of battle (*Grags pa rin chen gling grag,* 52b4–54b4). The king begins to have doubts, which are confirmed by divination, and he expels Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita with the full support of the people and to the immediate benefit of Bon and Tibet (*Grags pa rin chen gling grag,* 54b4–55a6).

The two masters return and are banished repeatedly, remaining largely indistinguishable in that they are generally referred to as a pair, whose combined efforts ensure that Buddhism eventually gains a foothold in Tibet (*Grags pa rin chen gling grag*, 80a3–6). When Padmasambhava acts alone, he only succeeds in losing two magical contests against a Bon minister (*Grags pa rin chen gling grag,* 60b2–62b3). He then fails to reverse the actions of Bon protector deities such as Yar lha sham po, Thang lha, and Pom ra (*Grags pa rin chen gling grag*, 78b6–79a1), the text here seemingly intentionally denying his powers as the quintessential tamer of these forces. Padmasambhava could evidently not be ignored by historians of Bon, yet he is depicted in the *Grags pa rin chen gling grag* as a less powerful and unworthy opponent of the idealized Bon heroes and gods of the narrative. Yet this negative representation is mitigated when it states that Padmasambhava hid many Bon treasure texts in addition to Buddhist treasure (*Grags pa rin chen gling grag*, 76a2–3), although this may be a mere interpolation into an older narrative.

Given the problems surrounding dating the earliest works of the Bsgrags byang tradition, its relation with the Buddhist works discussed above remains to be assessed. It is interesting to note, however, that the *Zangs gling ma* contains no description of debate or tension between Buddhism and Bon *qua* Bon, whether intentionally due to a fondness for Bon or out of ignorance of the existence of such a narrative on the part of the compiler. Later Rnying-ma treasure revealers also held a more charitable view of Bon. Buddhists such as Rdo rje gling pa (1346–1405?) and 'Jam dbyangs Mkhyen rtse'i dbang po (1820–1892), for example, took on Bon po names and under these aliases wrote historiography that represents both the Bon religion and Padmasambhava positively. Further, some later Bon po biographies of Padmasambhava more closely approach this positive appraisal of Padmasambhava (despite the controversy that these works caused in the 19th and 20th cents.; Blondeau, 1985, 1988; Ngawang Zangpo, 2002, 183–205).

Fourteenth-Century Codification and Expansion

The *Zangs gling ma* was redacted and expanded into new biographies by successive generations of Tibetan masters and scholars, to suit not only the changing requirements of readership but also Padmasambhava's new place in Buddhist practices such as art, relic worship, pilgrimage, and other constituents of material culture. The views ascribed to him also began to express the more mature, cutting-edge Madhyamaka and Atiyoga formulations being debated in Tibet at the time. His growing popularity in the 13th century had some negative consequences. These include the rise of polemics,

less against Padmasambhava himself than against the treasure discovered and described by Gu ru Chos dbang, and allegations of fraud against people claiming to actually *be* "Padma" (Martin, 2001, 113–114). In the 14th century, after the fall of Mongol imperial and Sa skya monastic hegemony in Tibet, several much longer biographies of Padmasambhava reenvisioned Tibetan history in an enduring way, following the lead of the treasure revealer, O rgyan gling pa (b. 1323).

O rgyan gling pa, another great Rnying ma figure born in southern Tibet and active in central Tibet, possessed a unique literary style and vision of Padmasambhava. He expressed these in, *inter alia*, his *bka' thang* ("testament") treasure texts. His *Lha 'dre bka' thang* (Deities and Spirits' Testament) contains a unique description of Padmasambhava taming autochthonous deities on his way to central Tibet (*Bka' thang sde lnga*, 1997, 3–84; Blondeau, 1971). The opening folios of his *Blon po bka' thang* (Minister's Testament), which describes imperial administration and court culture from a Buddhist perspective, list the 11 most famous deeds of Padmasambhava (*Bka' thang sde lnga*, 1997, 505.21–506.3). A number of these deeds are not included in any earlier biographies, and the list instead seems to represent a new restructuring of Padmasambhava's life story according to the model of Buddha Śākyamuni. The latter's life is often arranged into 12 deeds in Tibetan literature, most notably in the famous *Chos 'byung* (religious history) of O rgyan gling pa's older contemporary, Bu ston (1290–1364; trans. Obermiller, 1931; ed. Szerb, 1990; the 12 deeds are discussed in Luczanits, 1993). The 11 deeds of Padmasambhava in the *Blon po bka' thang* are:

1. Intending to tame beings (*'gro 'dul dgongs mdzad*),
2. Entering the lotus "womb" (*padma lhums zhugs mdzad*),
3. Taking birth miraculously (*rang byung bltams mdzad*),
4. Enjoying the recreational life of a prince (*rgyal sras rol rtsed mdzad*),
5. Receiving ordination (*rab tu byung mdzad*),
6. Demonstrating various austerities (*dka' thub sna tshogs mdzad*),
7. Defeating the forces of Māra (*bdud dpung 'joms mdzad*),
8. Attaining Enlightenment as a buddha (*sangs rgyas byang chub mdzad*),
9. Turning the Wheel of the Dharma (*chos 'khor bskor mdzad*),
10. Practicing yogic discipline (*brtul zhugs spyod pa mdzad*), and
11. Concealing treasure [ensuring] a great increase rather than decline of the teachings (*bstan pa mthar rgyas mi nub gter sbed mdzad*).

The focus of this list lies on Padmasambhava's time in India prior to being invited to Tibet, even though his time in Tibet usually forms the bulk of most of his biographies. The *Blon po bka' thang* goes on to claim that these 11 deeds are written down so that anyone copying or teaching them will be reborn in the paradise of Sukhāvatī (Bde ba can) and, on the basis of faith in and emulation of this path, one is assured unsurpassable enlightened buddhahood (*Bka' thang sde lnga*, 1997, 506.3–6). Unlike Śākyamuni, however, any mention of Padmasambhava's own *parinirvāṇa* is noticeably absent from this list, perhaps because he remains in the world like a bodhisattva (though the *Lalitavistara* also does not extend its narrative to Buddha Śākyamuni's *parinirvāṇa*; Luczanits, 1993, 94 n9).

O rgyan gling pa narrates all these 11 deeds in order in his *Padma bka' thang* (Lotus Testament), also known as the *Bka' thang shel brag ma* (1352). This is a treasure text devoted to the life story of Padmasambhava, written in verse (Martin, 1997, 56, no. 87). There exist many editions of the same basic recension, which was translated into French (Toussaint, 1933) and from this into English (Douglas & Bays, 1978). However, a newly photographed manuscript from Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, differs from those editions in a way that suggests another recension of the *Padma bka' thang* (Doney, 2016). All versions agree on the basic narrative, which is structured not into 11 deeds but as a much expanded version of the earliest attested *Zangs gling ma* (Blondeau, 1980, 49; Doney, 2014, 33–38).

The *Padma bka' thang* is especially extensive in its description of the timeless, cosmic antecedents to Padmasambhava's emanation onto a lotus on Dhanakośa lake in Uḍḍiyāna. In this biography, Padmasambhava receives ordination under Ānanda, a disciple of the Buddha, and then travels to a wide array of locations surrounding Tibet where he tames local demons and teaches esoteric Buddhism to the inhabitants. The work includes numerous references to Padmasambhava as the "second Buddha" (*sangs rgyas gnyis pa*), both as part of the third-person narrative and in the mouths of his converted devotees. Finally, Padmasambhava prophesies in detail the depredations and indignities caused

by Mongol rule over Tibet, and the postimperial hope for the degenerated Dharma of this period by means of treasure and treasure revealers such as O rgyan gling pa. He promises to also be present himself, returning on the tenth day of every month. This has become enshrined in the Rnying ma and later pan-Tibetan devotional calendar as the celebration of a different event from Padmasambhava's life, as recorded in the *Padma bka' thang*, on the tenth day of each lunar month (Schwieger, 1997).

These details stand in contrast to the earlier *Zangs gling ma*, which lacks the cosmological framework, wide geographical knowledge, and specific historical prophecies of the *Padma bka' thang*. This suggests that a mature historiographical awareness among 14th-century Tibetans is reflected in the latter biography of Padmasambhava, which now emulates the scope of the religious history (*chos 'byung*) genre or the *Bka' chems ka khol ma* biography of the emanated bodhisattva, Emperor Srong btsan sgam po. In contrast, many histories covering the imperial period take the *Testimony of Ba* as their primary source on the reign of Khri Srong lde brtsan (e.g. the aforementioned *Chos 'byung* of Bu ston). In these works, Padmasambhava plays a less prominent role in establishing Tibetan Buddhism. The Jo nang scholar, Tāranātha (1575–1634?), also provided a so-called "Indian tradition" (*rgya gar lugs*) of the life story of Padmasambhava (*Rin chen gter mdzod, ka*, 245–289; Ngawang Zangpo, 2002, 151–181; De Falco, 2011). Apart from minor details of unknown provenance, this blends a standard *bka' thang* narrative of abandoning the realm of Uḍḍiyāna for yogic travel around India with the *Testimony of Ba* version of his time in Tibet – although it also provides a short account of his final taming of the *rākṣasa* island.

Later Tibetan scholars explain the apparent discrepancies between the different biographies by pointing out Padmasambhava's status as a "*dharmakāya*" (*chos sku*), whose emanation could have been perceived in many different ways (e.g. Rtse le Na tshogs rang grol Rin po che [b. 1608]; trans. Kunsang, 1999, 7–25). Some also identify Nyang ral, Gu ru Chos dbang, O rgyan gling pa, and others as emanations of Padmasambhava's body, speech, mind, and so on (Ehrhard, 2009, 499). This completes Padmasambhava's transformation from an 8th-century emanation of Amitābha into a "primordial buddha" (*ādibuddha*), capable of being emanated from himself. However, perhaps this representation had an antecedent in those figures who considered themselves reincarnations (*sprul sku*), and not emanations, of a more human Padmasambhava.

Prayers

The life story of Padmasambhava has at various points in history formed the basis of devotional works praising him, which could shed light on the expansion of these narratives and their structuring according to various rubrics in the future. Three important examples of prayers to Padmasambhava are found in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, a monumental compendium of treasure texts and related works collected and compiled by 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899). The first prayer is attributed to Nyang ral in some sources (*Rin chen gter mdzod, ka*, 204:1–211:3; trans. Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche & Low, 2008, 299–320), although some events are omitted in the *Zangs gling ma* and seem to reflect a later stage of Padma-*vita* tradition. The repeated last line of each verse states that the petitioner thinks of Lord Padmasambhava of Uḍḍiyāna and requests him to empower and bless him or her and all beings. Although the details of the prayer are biographical, this refrain brings the reciter back to the present and Padmasambhava's continued presence, empowerments, and blessings – like the visions, above.

The second prayer is attributed at the end to the treasure revealer, Ratna gling pa (1403–1476; *Rin chen gter mdzod, ka*, 211:3–219:1). The name of the prayer suggests that it should follow the 11 deeds of Padmasambhava, but only a few of its 22 stanzas conform to the classic formulation of the 11 deeds. Nonetheless, the presence of some form of the 11 deeds in the prayer shows this way of structuring of the narrative influenced the genres of both biography and also devotional literature.

The third prayer (*Rin chen gter mdzod, ka*, 221–243) is written by 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas himself, based on an earlier work compiled by Smin gling lo chen Dharma shrī (1654–1717/18). This long prayer almost resembles a short versified biography of Padmasambhava, containing the expanded vision of his life following the *bka' thang* genre. It suggests that the devotional genre eventually exerted influence on the structure of the Padma-*vita*.

Further examples of this tendency include the very popular *Le'u bdun ma* prayer in seven chapters (see Schwieger, 1988, 35; trans. Ngawang Zangpo, 2002, 217–245; ed. and trans. Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche & Low, 2008, 28–213). This work, whose colophon states that Sprul sku Bzang po grags pa revealed it in 1362 and bestowed it upon Rig 'dzin Rgod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1408), soon became one of the most recited prayers throughout the

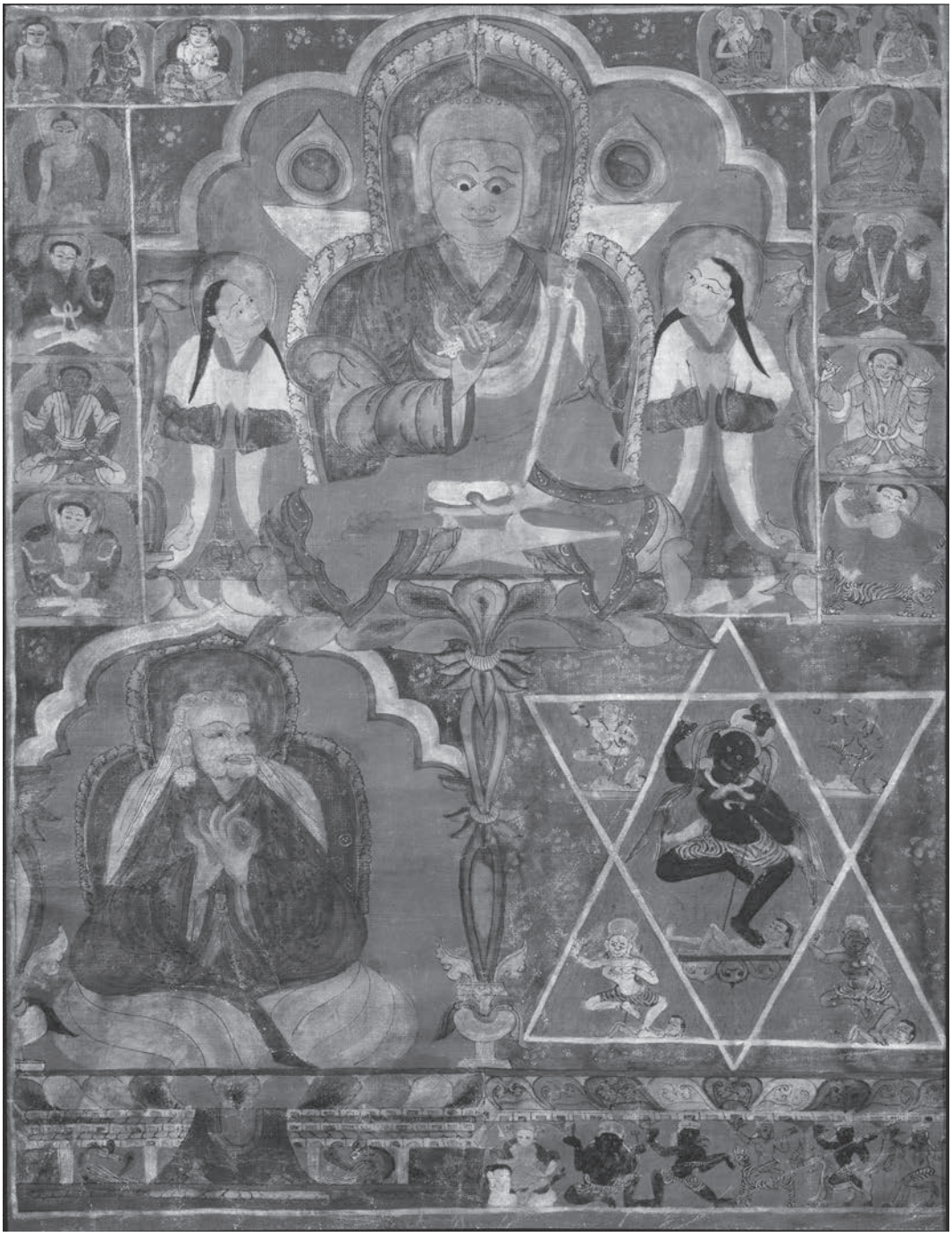

Fig. 1: Main image of Padmasambhava, flanked by his tantric consorts Mandāravā (l.) and Ye shes mtsho rgyal (r.), perhaps in emulation of Avalokiteśvara with two Tāras. Below him are a teaching layman (l.) and Khrodhakāli Vajrayoginī *maṇḍala* (r.) (1200–1299, Rnying ma; Donald & Shelly Rubin; HAR item no. 160).

Tibetan-speaking world. Its descriptions of Padmasambhava accord with the *Padma bka' thang*, and also include a potted biography (chapter 5) from the mouth of the master himself. The extensive corpus of devotional literature surrounding Padmasambhava blends biography and praise in different ways, but equally portrays him as remaining in the world for the benefit of all beings.

Later Literary Trends

The myths surrounding Padmasambhava steadily grew in length, variety, and influence from the politically charged 14th century to the more philologically critical milieu of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang Blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682; Ahmad, 1995). This Dalai Lama was born in 'Phyongs rgyas, the burial place of the Tibetan emperors, which is surrounded by many of the pilgrimage sites associated with Padmasambhava's meditation, taming, and treasure burial activities (Dowman, 1996, 171–204). He calls Padmasambhava the "second Buddha" while discussing the *Zangs gling ma* in the *List of Teachings Received* by him (*Thob yig gangā'i chu rgyun*, *kha*, 521:5) and emphasizes his eight names elsewhere in the same work (*Thob yig gangā'i chu rgyun*, *ga*, 113:5–115:4 and 119:5–122:2; Ehrhard, 2009, 501, 501n13). As a result of his positive attitude to Padmasambhava, the weakened Rnying ma school not only survived the, in part, bloody rise to power of the Dalai Lama's regime (the Dga' ldan pho brang), but also exerted cultural influence throughout Tibet and in other Buddhist schools. In fact, one of the images reproduced here is from the personal collection of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama (fig. 4 discussed below).

In the far north, a 16th- or 17th-century Mongolian Buddhist biography of Altan Khan and his descendants, titled *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur* (Jewel Translucent Sūtra; trans. Elverskog, 2003), shows the part that a Buddha-esque Padmasambhava played in justifying the religio-political situation there (Kapstein, 2015, 172–174). It describes the authority of the Third Dalai Lama with regard to the Khan as warranted by the vows they took together in a previous existence, in the presence of Padmasambhava (Elverskog, 2003, 143–145, 258–260, verses 670–697). The meeting at which they forge this karmic bond takes place at Padmasambhava's celestial paradise, named Zangs mdog dpal ri (Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain; Essen & Tsering Tashi Thingo, 1991, 125–135; Lamsam & Kesang Choden Tashi Wangchuck, 2012; Bogin, 2014). Here, Padmasambhava takes over the role of Buddha Kāśyapa from the *Testimony of Ba*, and Zangs mdog dpal ri replaces the stūpa in Maghada/Ma ku ta from the *Zangs gling ma*.

The importance of Padmasambhava in Bhutan is undeniable (Lamsam & Kesang Choden Tashi Wangchuck, 2012), based in part on the account of his patronage by Sindhu Rāja in Bumthang (Aris, 1979, 46–59). He is still lavishly praised in his eight forms during the Bhutanese "tenth day" celebrations, (Huntington, 1986; Essen & Tsering Tashi Thingo, 1991, 136–140). Padmasambhava has even returned symbolically to northwestern India, through the many pilgrimage sites associated with his travels there (Huber, 2008, 232–247). The countless local narratives surrounding Padmasambhava's purported presence at one time almost everywhere within the Tibetan cultural world reminds us of all the unattributable depictions lying below the surface of the literary accounts discussed above.

Artistic Depiction

Another important sphere of generally anonymous representation of Padmasambhava is found within material culture, including some objects said to have been created and buried by the master himself. His portrayals in unsigned paintings (*thang kha*) date from at least the 13th century, where he is recognizable by a combination of a distinctively brimmed hat, multicolored robes, his *khaṭvāṅga* staff, *vajra*, and skull cup (*thod phor*), which also feature in the narratives discussed above (Watt, 2013a). During this period, Padmasambhava is depicted not only as the main image (fig. 1) but also as a minor figure in paintings devoted to deities whom he propitiates (fig. 2), or in one of his many incarnations (figs. 3–4).

One of the main shifts from the early to later period of representing Padmasambhava is from a triad comprising Padmasambhava, Śākyamuni Buddha, and Avalokiteśvara in his four-armed (*caturbhuja*) aspect to one where the *ādibuddha*, Amitābha, takes the place of the historical Buddha (Watt, 2013a). Perhaps this shifting allegiance is connected to the move from early identifications of Padmasambhava as an emanation of Śākyamuni (e.g. in the *Bka' chems ka khol ma*) to identifications of the "second Buddha" with Amitābha. Both triads include the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara, from whom Padmasambhava is emanated both within historiographical narratives and the logic of his iconography (Blondeau, 1977–1978).

Narrative paintings seemingly appeared during the 16th and 17th centuries, together with the serial editions of the most popular recension of the *Padma bka' thang* (Kapstein, 2015). They reflect the 14th-century reenvisioning of Padmasambhava also

Fig. 2: Padmasambhava, detail of a Che mchog Heruka *maṇḍala* containing the eight *Bka' brgyad* deities worshipped by Nyang ral and Guru Chos dbang, in which he is placed at the top left as source of the tradition (1200–1299, Rnying ma; private collection; HAR item no. 89981).

expressed in the *bka' thang*s, and depict most of those events of his life generally in clockwise order (fig. 3; Watt, 2006). At the center, sits the, by this time, familiar central image of Padmasambhava as Padma 'byung gnas, the "Lotus-Born," during this period increasingly holding a combined skull cup and vase of longevity. His other manifestations are represented playing out certain events from his *vita* around him.

The "Eight Names"

The manifestations of Padmasambhava are held to be codified under "eight names" (*mtshan brgyad*), sometimes "eight forms," "eight aspects," or "eight manifestations" (early, introductory studies are found in Govinda, 1974; Essen & Tsering Tashi Thingo, 1991). The oldest *strata* of Tibetan literature contain no fixed list, but include a number of these as proper names or epithets, for example Pad ma sam ba ba (P. tib. 44) or Padma rgyal po (IOL Tib J 321). Eleven names are bestowed on Padmasambhava in narrative contexts spread throughout the first quarter of the earliest recension of the *Zangs gling ma* (Doney, 2014, 95, col. i). Different lists of eight names and literary descriptions of their portrayal have appeared since (Klaus, 1982, for examples from the *Rin chen gter mdzod*). Perhaps this specific number offered a correlative to Nyang ral and Gu ru Chos dbang's *Bka' brgyad* (Eight Pronouncement Deities), or to the eight archetypal aspects or events (Skt. *aṣṭalakṣaṇa*) of the Buddha's life.

Stable sets of the eight manifestations are portrayed in masked dances (*'cham*s) performed to this day – said to have been scripted by Gu ru Chos dbang and O rgyan gling pa, among others (Cantwell, 1995, on the dances performed in Rewalsar, Himachal Pradesh; Ricard, 2003, for Kathmandu). Production of sets of these eight aspects (Klohe & Russell-Smith, 2013) increased dramatically with the establishment of the six large Rnying ma "mother monasteries" from the 17th century onwards (Watt, 2013b), as well as single images depicting them all. In such a painting from the late 20th century (fig. 4; Mullin & Weber, 1996, 76–77), the eight names of the manifestations surrounding a central Padma 'byung gnas are written below each figure as follows (counting clockwise from the top, which may not reflect the intended order):

1. Gu ru Padma sambha wa ("Venerable Lotus-Born"), the Rnying ma pa;
2. Gu ru Shākya sengge ("Venerable Lion of the Śākya [Clan]"), the Buddha;
3. Padma rgyal po ("Lotus King"), the royal ritualist;
4. Gu ru Sengge sgra sgrog ("Venerable Lion's Roar"), wrathful black form;
5. Mtsho skyes rdo rje ("Lotus [lit. "lake-born"] Vajra"), with tantric consort;
6. Gu ru Rdo rje gro lod ("Venerable Liberated/Wrathful [?] Vajra"), fierce red form;
7. Blo ldan mchog sred ("Craving Wisdom"), the prince;
8. Gu ru Nyi ma 'od zer ("Venerable Sun-Ray"), the Indian *mahāsiddha*.

Apparently, an earlier depiction of Padmasambhava wearing more conventional headwear (e.g. fig. 2) is incorporated into the eight forms as Gu ru Padma sambha wa (fig. 4, center top). Through these manifestations, Padmasambhava comes to embody almost all of the major ideals of Tibetan Buddhism, encompassing its 8th-century form (the Rnying ma pa), final enlightenment (the Buddha), mundane and esoteric power (the royal ritualist), and so forth.

Works of art and literature cannot reflect all the cultural valences of a figure as rich in symbolism as

Fig. 3: Padmasambhava narrative painting incorporating his many manifestations, beginning with birth at the top right and proceeding roughly clockwise around a central image of Padma 'byung gnas (1600–1699, Rnying ma; private collection; HAR item no. 90161).

Fig. 4: Padmasambhava surrounded by his eight manifestations. Late 1900s, northern Indian; Private Collection of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama (published in Mullin & Weber, 1996, 77); HAR item no. 59002.

Padmasambhava. Scholars are furthermore aware that they lack even a representative collection of all the written and artistic works created by Tibetans over the centuries. Some extant works speak of earlier Rnying ma sources on the imperial period that were not recopied into the present or have not yet come to light. These include the *Chos 'byung* of Rong zom pa Chos kyi bzang po (11th cent.), the original recension of the *Lo rgyus chen mo* (Great History) by Zhang ston Bkra shis rdo rje (1097–1167; Martin, 1997, 25 and 28, respectively), and Gu ru Chos dbang's Padmasambhava biography structured around his 11 deeds (Blondeau, 1980, 48, 52 n24). Many old texts and fine works of art held in Rnying ma monasteries were also destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Nonetheless, the central position of Padmasambhava in the changing historiography and mythology of Tibet and its Buddhism is clear. Nyang ral's works gained extraordinary popularity, and their shared narratives provided the archetypes for later Tibetan historians writing on Tibet's place in the world and its predestined relationship to Buddhism. Tibetan historians drew on these narratives in the 14th century, following the fall of the Yuan dynasty in China. Later on, the Dalai Lamas deployed the same fundamental myths, during the time of Tibetan state making in the 17th century. In this sense, Nyang ral may be seen as forging the earlier elements of a local southern Tibetan myth of Padmasambhava into an enduring and influential narrative, one that was redacted by successive generations of Tibetan scholars to suit the changing requirements of its readership. The earlier *strata* revealed in the Dunhuang material and the *Testimony of Ba* were partially retained in the later ritual tradition and histories' quotations, respectively. However, they form a quieter counterpoint to the main melody praising the fully enlightened and eternal second Buddha.

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