

Early Teachings on the Four Phurpas in the Light *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*) Revelation of Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124-1192), and the Relationship between the Revelatory (*gter ma* Transmitted (*bka' ma*) Textual Traditions

ABSTRACT: Myang ral's twelfth century revealed corpus of the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*) became a template for Rnying ma practice focusing on the tradition's eight central tantric deities. In a previous article (2020a), I have suggested that the entire *'phrin las phur pa* *Eightfold Buddha Word* is likely to pre-date Myang ral,

which relate to the teachings on the Four Phurpas, or the Four Phurpa Materials (*phur pa'i rgyu bzhi bka' ma*) which were also part of Myang ral's heritage. The centrality of the Four Phurpa teachings in these texts may have influenced the later Vajrak laya traditions, which generally put considerable emphasis on these teachings. I assess how the specific teachings on the Four Phurpas passed on by Myang ral in the revealed (*gter ma*

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bka' ma

Eightfold Buddha Word

The Fortress and Precipice rdzong 'phrang

historical Padmasambhava. Moreover, it draws upon an authoritative source which seems also to have made its way into texts within Myang ral's *Embodying the Sugatas*

Finally, in considering the framing of Myang ral's *Embodying the Sugatas* as revelation, one effect of the new presentation is that King Khri srong lde'u btsan,

The Fortress and Precipice

into centre stage in the transmission. For Myang ral was his rebirth, and key texts of the *Embodying the Sugatas* revelation are said to have come from the King's manuscripts.

Preamble

In both the Rnying ma and Sa skya Vajrak laya traditions, the Four Phurpas, such terms as the Four Phurpa Materials (*phur pa'i rgyu bzhi*) or the Four Types of Enlightened *phur pa thal 'byin gyi dgongs pa rnam pa bzhi*

a central teaching. They are generally elaborated upon in oral teachings accompanying empowerment rites or introductions to Vajrak laya, and often feature prominently within written Vajrak laya commentaries. They are considered to sum up the crucial aspects of the necessary

extant Vajrak laya root tantras, so the question arises as to how they developed and became so firmly established within the tradition. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence from early

2 Note that here I use the spelling Khri srong lde'u btsan rather than the apparently more archaic Khri srong lde btsan in deference to my sources which consistently use this spelling, in contrast to the spelling of Myang ral, where

phur pa

transliterate Tibetan names/terms — phurpa is an exception to this rule, although of course, transliteration is used where the term is included within a longer Tibetan phrase or citation. Note also that the terms, *phur pa* *phur bu* are used virtually interchangeably in Tibetan sources. Again, I have simplified by using *phurpa*

phur bu

4 The Tibetan term *thal 'byin*

the penetration of the phurpa into its object, but the object's total disintegration or transformation. In using the *perforation s* *perforate*

Bod

rgya tshig mdzod chen mo *thal byung*

seek to situate the Four Phurpa teachings contained in Myang ral's corpus in the light of the emergent Vajrak laya tradition.

First, to introduce briefly the Four Phurpas, the standard set consists of:

1. The Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa (*rig pa ye shes kyi phur pa*);
2. The Compassion Emanation Phurpa (*thugs rje sprul pa'i phur pa*);
3. The Secret Bodhicitta Phurpa (*gsang ba byang chub sems kyi phur pa*);
4. The Symbolic Material Phurpa (*mtshan ma rdzas kyi phur pa*)

There are some variations in the list. In particular, the Compassion Emanation Phurpa is *tshad med snying rje'i phur pa*. The Secret Bodhicitta Phurpa is often given as, the Superior Bodhicitta Phurpa (*lhag pa byang chub sems kyi phur pa*). There is also some variation in the ordering of the set, in some cases apparently depending on the context for usage — but generally, simply a matter of which textual sources are being referenced in a particular tradition. The order given here can be considered to embody the structure of the path. The first gives the atiyoga view, in the light of which the practice is to be performed throughout. The second consists of the *bskyed rim*) practices, with an emphasis on mah yoga, while the third *rdzogs rim*) practices, and an emphasis on anuyoga. These three together comprise the Primary Ritual (*stod las*), while the fourth and final phurpa relates to the Secondary Ritual (*smad las*). As we shall see, this order is given in the influential *Black Collection 'bum nag*

listed above in reverse order. This ordering creates correspondences for the first three with the three k yas in their usual order, with the sequence of the Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa corresponding to the dharmak ya; the Secret or Superior Bodhicitta Phurpa relating to the sambhogak ya; and the Compassion Emanation Phurpa or Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa relating to the nirm ak ya.

through different stages of the path. From this perspective, the main tantric practice consists of two aspects, first, engagement in the Primary Ritual through the Compassion Emanation Phurpa, and second, the Secondary Ritual (*smad las*)

5 A myes zhabs notes (1973: 142.4) *tshad med snying rje'i*

thugs

rje sprul pa'i

Rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa (142.6-143.1) on the categories.

6 This is made explicit in Shechen Gyaltzab's (1871-1926) Commentary (*The Concise Quintessential Commentary on the Saadhana, The Utterly Secret Razor Knife Vajrakilaya*): 13; for the Tibetan, see Zhe chen rgyal tshab 'gyur med padma rnam rgyal, Volume 9: 381-6. Note that Khenpo Namdrol (1995: 45-7), and Gyatrul Rinpoche (1996: 254-260) also use this order.

Material Phurpa.

Precedents for the Four Phurpas in the root tantras, and the early development of the set

Even the dating of the Vajrak laya root tantras is uncertain: it is probable that they were mostly compiled or redacted in Tibet rather than representing direct translations of complete texts from *snga dar* or soon afterwards during the post-imperial period. There is little direct evidence for the Vajrak laya root tantras during Imperial times, since the official translation projects seem to have excluded the Inner tantras as inappropriate for public distribution. Nonetheless, the Inner tantras were certainly well-established by the *phyi dar* period: this much is clear from the works of early Rnying ma masters such as the ninth to tenth century Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes and the eleventh century scholar, Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po. Specific Vajrak laya tantras are mentioned or cited in early Vajrak laya commentaries. These early tantras often contain apparently disordered or obscure materials, and it is perhaps improbable that they were ever a self-sufficient textual basis for practice — these tantras represent at least part of the earliest strata of Vajrak laya materials.

in any extant Vajrak laya root tantra. The set are elaborated upon in verses said to derive from two root tantras — the *Root Tantra, Vajra Wrath rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa* *Phurbu Fierce Mantra Teachings Tantra phur bu ngan sngags gtsug lag gi rgyud*

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- stod las* *smad las* as Primary and Secondary Ritual respectively, since in Rnying ma practice, *smad las* rites for benefitting others dependent *stod las*, which develops one's own understanding. The *smad las* *not* *l tshogs*), even if — like many Dharma practices — they may have beneficial worldly effects. See Cantwell 2020c: 110.
- 8 Dudjom Rinpoche uses this ordering in his Aspiration verses which he wrote for the *Meteoric Iron Razor gnam lcags spu gri* Ritual Manual (*Collected Works* Volume Tha: 148-149). In the title to his commentary on the verses (Volume Da: 489-499) he notes that this presentation represents the set in terms of a graduated path (*lam rim*)
- 9 Cantwell and Mayer 2007: 79-82.
- Robert Mayer and I have produced detailed textual studies of three Vajrak laya tantras, see Mayer 1996, and Cantwell and Mayer 2007. During the course of the Oxford research project on the two tantras, I had browsed through the other Vajrak laya root tantras found in the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*

passages are found repeated in many Vajrak laya commentaries, apparently on the basis of the
Black Collection 'bum nag

mentioned, this refers to the different ritual phurpas used for each of the ritual actions: a white round phurpa for pacifying; a yellow square phurpa for enriching; a red semi-circular phurpa for controlling; and a black triangular phurpa for destroying. This set of phurpas for the four ritual actions persists in the Vajrak laya tradition — such a group of phurpas may be included in the periphery of the main deity's mañāla, and they may feature in supplementary rites connected with the four actions. The fact that this set of four occurs in the root tantras does not

such phurpa rites in the Mahāyoga root tantra literature may imply soteriological interpretations of what may seem to be mundane rituals — there is no doubt that the thrust of the Mahāyoga approach embodied in the Inner Tantras is precisely to develop pure vision of the sameness of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and of the tantric deities and the associated rituals as expressions of this pure vision. Thus, an early commentary on the *Thabs kyi zhags pa* offers an entirely

The *Thabs kyi zhags pa* features amongst the list of the Eighteen Tantras of Mahāyoga and was considered to elucidate Mahāyoga in general.

As well as these four types of phurpa, the root Vajrak laya tantras

the standard classification of Four Phurpas in the tradition. Thus, one finds references to the
Bodhicitta Phurpa *Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa*

of different types of phurpa are tantalisingly close to standard exegesis, although never fully explicit. Thus, in the context of a stabbing ritual, the *Vajra Wrath Root Tantra rdo rje khros pa*

Boord 2002: 259 f, 282 f; see below for more on the *Black Collection*
Cantwell and Mayer 2012: 78-81, 319, 327, 333, 338.

Cantwell and Mayer 2012: 4.

In fact, the specifically Vajrak laya tantras rarely discuss the four phurpas associated with the four rituals, although
Twelve-fold K laya Tantra phur pa bcu gnyis's Chapter 10
gting skyes vol. Dza 106; *sde dge* *gting skyes* vol. Dza 183-186; *sde dge*
246r-247r).

K laya Nirvāṇa Tantra; see Cantwell and Mayer
2007: 37, 168-70.

rtsa ba'i rgyud)'s Chapter 7 refers briefly to three of the four categories in familiar terms, and

What is clear throughout the Vajrak laya root tantras is the principle that the phurpa forces into a buddha field, or pinning protective spirits in a circle around the sacred site, but it

that even if the extant Vajrak laya root tantras appear to omit any reference to the set of Four Phurpas, the new classification most probably came out of the same environment and ethos in which these Mah yoga tantras were being established.

The shift from an earlier pre-Mah yoga understanding of a ritual phurpa is sometimes explicitly broached in early Vajrak laya sources. In later tradition, the topic is so established

explanation may be necessary. Thus, the longer commentary section of the Action Phurpa (*'phrin las phur pa*) text within Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*

phurpa

it be called, phurpa? The answer is given that this enlightened heart is called phurpa since it

Black Collection 'bum nag

raises objections that the first three phurpa categories do not appear to correspond to the phurpas of the four ritual actions. The objection is not articulated in relation to the fourth

the discrepancy between the first three and a conventional notion of a phurpa is stark. Thus, in

asks whether these actions are fulfilled in the inseparability of the spatial field and primordial wisdom. The response is that this is the pacifying phurpa since the affections are pacified by

rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa

(see Cantwell and Mayer 2007: 5-7).

Cantwell and Mayer 2007: 34, 259.

Bka' ma

derive from the same historical era as the time when the Mah yoga root tantras were being redacted in Tibet.

(KA 89-90, TSH383-4, PH254,1, X694-5, Y728-9). See also Cantwell 2020a: 54.

Boord 2002: 260-5.

it; it is the enriching phurpa since it expands the buddhas' primordial wisdom; the controlling phurpa since it brings one's own mind under control; and the destructive phurpa since it effects liberation from saṣṣa. Similar responses are given for the other two categories. Thus, the Compassion Emanation Phurpa is the pacifying phurpa since clarity in the deity's form pacifies outer and inner hindrances; it is the enriching phurpa since it increases siddhis; the controlling phurpa since it brings appearances under control; and the destructive phurpa since hostile forces and obstacles are released by it. The Secret Bodhicitta Phurpa is the pacifying phurpa since it pacifies self-centred passion; it is the enriching phurpa since it increases bliss; the controlling phurpa since it brings the channels and airs under control; and the destructive phurpa since it liberates from saṣṣa.

Early Commentarial Traditions: The Vajrakāya Black Collection ()

The extensive early *Black Collection*

of the Vajrakāya traditions. Long passages are cited either with acknowledgment or silently

read widely today by Vajrakāya scholars and practitioners. It presents itself as a single work

cāryas

Newari (lāmañju), transmitted to Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and recorded by Ngam 'bre (cārya

enough evidence for confidence that such a long work, containing many root tantra citations and so forth, is likely to derive in full from the early ninth century. Moreover, the section on the transmission of the teaching, which follows the account of Guru Padma's activities, takes

Bka' ma, Volume Tha: 437)

Bka' ma, Volume Tha: 439, 441)

This includes the Ameyes zhab's commentary for the Saṣṣya Vajrakāya tradition, and Kong sprul's widely read *Vajrakāya Root Tantra Fragment* rdo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi dum bu

c rya Gsal le is said to have increased his life-span,

Rwa lo ts ba Rdo rje grags, who lived in the eleventh century. The gurus given in the further lineage lists are mostly not easy to identify, but one at the end of the first list, Zur chung Shes rab grags pa (1014-1074) was a famous figure of the Zur clan. The early Zur masters were known for their work in preserving and codifying the Rnying ma Transmitted teachings.

sa bcad). In fact, some of the sections seem to re-

The framing in terms of the instructions of the three *c rya*s

This section would seem to cohere

ma ala are given through a series of instructions with each of the three *c rya*s own reflections.

The *Black Collection* supplies two teachings on the Four Phurpas, the first of which

See Boord 2002: 126-29. Here, we find a long account of Lang lab's exploits, and even the list following this gives

text, a later editor's addition might have been suspected, but in this case, it would seem improbable that this whole

The *Black Collection* does not give any account of this encounter in its relation of Lang lab's demonstration of his mastery, but the story is well-known in the Vajrak laya traditions. See, for example, Dudjom 1991 Volume 1: 713-4.

Here, I concur wholeheartedly with Martin Boord's assessment of the materials as archaic and of great historical significance. I differ only in being more cautious in not assuming the entire work (apart from the lineage list) in something like its present form to derive from c rya Gsal le's transcription in the ninth century (Boord 2002: xxv-xxviii). That said, as will be seen from the rest of this article, I think that modern scholarship should be careful

Black Collection

There are, however, rare cross-references, such as the statement at the beginning of *The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement* (Boord 2002: 252) that the first point relating to the introductory basis has been dealt with above in the first major section. There are also occasionally apparent links between topics in different sections (see the discussion on the two sections which discuss the Four Phurpas below). These limited connections between different discrete sections would seem to demonstrate *either*

or

Boord 2002: 143-249.

Boord 2002: 257-66.

from the final part of point two through the whole of point three in a section called, *The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement* (rgyud kyi them sbyor bcu). The second teaching is an independent *The Four Phurpa Materials* (phur bu'i rgyu bzhi)

This article is not the place to review these teachings in detail.

The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement (rgyud kyi them sbyor bcu). This text or section constitutes the third main part of the *Black Collection* following first, the account of the history and transmission of Vajrak laya, and

The Six Tantric Bonds (rgyud kyi chings drug). The second step of *The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement* consists of three sets of characteristics, of the mañālas, of the mantras, and of the materials. The first three Phurpas are mentioned in relation to three of the mañāla types,

person; the nature of the phurpa; the object to strike; the method; evaluating it; the faults of not striking; the necessity for striking; objections; how the practice is absorbed. The separate

The Four Phurpa Materials

is more extensive. Each of the four is subdivided into: the practitioner; the purpose of the practice; the methods; and the result. This subdivision corresponds to the final subdivision of

in the first three cases, illustrated with an appropriate cited root tantra verse. It soon becomes clear that the notion of different persons really implies different approaches appropriate to each

phurpas with specific lines in the Vajrak laya liturgy for generating the mañāla, visualising the

Bka' ma, Volume Tha: 486,

Martin Boord's study includes a full translation with reference to the two printed versions then available, and noting meaningful variants. Since that time, further copies have come to light in Tibet, which have now been scanned by TBRC (W3PD894, W2PD17514). It will be for future research to assess whether these additional sources add anything to the picture. Unfortunately, TBRC: W3PD894 has restricted access. TBRC: W2PD17514

Boord 2002: 251-72.

Boord 2002: 257-8.

Boord 2002: 259-66.

Boord 2002: 282-93.

tantric deity and performing the rituals. The third phurpa includes instructions relating to sexual

Other Early Commentarial Traditions

The Glorious Vajrak laya Commentary, Light rays from the Sun *dpal rdo rje phur pa'i ka nyi ma'i 'od zer*), composed by Mi bskyod rdo rje, which is *Rog lugs* Vajrak laya tradition. Like the *Black Collection* and read widely, beyond its specific tradition. Mi bskyod rdo rje is a common name, but it

The *Light rays from the Sun*

Each of the four are subdivided into the nature of the phurpa; the object to strike; evaluating it; and the necessity for striking. This list is rather similar to that given in *Black Collection*

The most striking aspect of this presentation is its framing: the section is given not as a general mañala of material phurpas. One is therefore left with the sense that here, the categories retain

Black Collection.

Of other early transmitted Vajrak laya traditions, I have not found any clear discussion

For example, the first introductory part of the commentary on the Dudjom Meteoric Iron Razor (*bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri*) by Mkhan po A chung (1918-1998) contains copious citations of both the *Black Collection* *Light rays from the Sun*.

of the Four Phurpas in the surviving early materials of the Sa skya 'Khon lugs tradition.
the Rong lugs tradition, the Dudjom *Bka' ma*

gzhung

by the eleventh century scholar, Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po. These notes do not include

Unfortunately, apart from the short sections by Rong zom, it is hard to be sure which if any of the other sections represent genuinely old writings. Lengthy sections are from the works of a later authoritative lama of the tradition, Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624), but this source collection also includes many short — like the sections by Rong zom — may well have been passed

is said to represent a teaching of the Indian c rya, Dhanasa sk ta, which was taught in Tibet
slob dpon padma thod phreng) and given to the King, Khri srong lde'u

The problem with all texts said to derive from Padmasambhava is the uncertainty of the

gter ma

bka' ma

teachings — as indeed also with the *Black Collection* — as I have suggested above (see note

This section also works through a list of points, such as the characteristics of each of the

The works of Grags pa Rgyal mtshan contain important teachings, both notes of his own composition, and works on the Vajrak laya practice which represent the teachings of his father, Sa chen Kun dga' snying po. These are clearly seminal for the Sa skya Phur pa tradition, but it is in the works of later masters — and especially the commentary by A myes zhabs — that the more extensive explanations can be found. It is worth adding that the Sa skya Phur pa tradition not only relies on a number of Rnying ma root tantras (see, for example, A myes zhabs 1973: 20-2) and other transmitted sources, such as the *Black Collection*

of the earliest transmission from Padmasambhava to 'Khon Klu'i dbang po, and records that Grags pa Rgyal mtshan's notes on the Vajrak laya practice are based on a textual source, *dkyil chog rdo rje las rim*. Padmasambhava (see the introduction to the popular s dhana, *dpal rdo rje phur pa'i bsnyen sgrub gsal byed bdud rsi'i 'od can* *Sgrub thabs kun btus* *dkyil chog rdo rje las rim*

dpal rdo rje phur pa'i sgrub skor la/ rong zom lugs kyi phur pa'i gzhung pod bstan pa rgya mtsho'i snying bcud *Bka' ma* Volume Nya: 5-553. The sections attributed to Rong zom include Volume Nya: 216-30, 230-233, and possibly the following section which ends p.241, but that is less certain; 290-301, 319-38.

I have also browsed through other works by Rong zom (such as one of the versions of his *Collected Works*, TBRC: W21617) without finding obvious Vajrak laya texts, but I might have missed some materials. It is to be hoped that future research will accomplish studies of Rong zom's tantric practice texts.

The section is entitled, *dpal rdo rje phur pa'i spyi thabs bsdu pa'i man ngag gyi sgra bzhi'i bshad pa* *Bka' ma* Volume Nya: 393-413).

be understood in an integrated manner throughout. The discussion also covers the symbolism of different features of the maññala, the various ritual actions involved in the destructive rites, and specific samayas appropriate for each of the four.

Rong lugs

Padmasambhava's teaching), it may be that by Myang ral's era, various teachings on the Four Phurpas were circulating amongst Vajrakāya practitioners. But the caveat must be added that

The Four Phurpas in the Root Vajrakāya Tantra within Myang ral's revealed corpus of the ()

Myang ral's *Eightfold Buddha Word*

seem to lack explicit discussion of the Four Phurpas. In fact, Myang ral's root Vajrakāya

Perhaps Myang ral's revealed root tantras should be considered in a slightly different category from the transmitted tantras. After all, they post-date them, at least in the versions presented as part of Myang ral's revelation, although they doubtless incorporate old materials, and some sections of the Vajrakāya tantra

Eightfold Buddha Word

Rnying ma rgyud 'bum

phurpas. The passage gives a short statement relating to each of the four, apparently using the

See Cantwell 2020: 4-5 for background on the collection and the *Eightfold Buddha Word*

I am grateful to Dylan Esler's philological analysis of this root tantra in our University of Bochum DFG project (2017-2018); see Dylan Esler 2020.

Esler 2020: 26-9.

The Four Phurpas within other sections of Myang ral's revealed corpus of the ()

The multi-volume collections of the *Eightfold Buddha Word* that the first volumes contain historical and background materials, as well as the root tantras, and also many texts which present integrated teachings on all eight tantric deities. The later volumes contain sections devoted to the eight deities in turn. The specific Vajrak laya teachings

Action Phurpa

This is clearly an archaic text which it appears that Myang ral inherited — the second section of the text is witnessed amongst the Dunhuang materials which pre-date Myang ral's time by at least a century, and here, the entire text is integrated as a single work transmitted by Myang ral. This text differs in some respects from the mainstream or standard works on Vajrak laya. It says

In contrast, the materials relating to Vajrak laya in the first volumes where the eight tantric deities are considered as a group, are entirely consistent with the Vajrak laya traditions — including established features of the deity and the mañāla of deity emanations.

Subsequent Tantra (*phyi ma'i rgyud*) found in Volume 1 of the Mtshams brag thirteen volume

lta ba

phur pa 'phrin las

mi 'gyur

byang chub sems kyi phur pa); the phurpa of Samantabhadra's display (*kun bzang rol pa'i phur pa*); the self-arisen king of means phurpa (*rang byung thabs kyi rgyal po'i phur pa*);

Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement *Black Collection* (Boord 2002: 257), and in Shechen Gyaltap's Commentary (nd: 14; for the Tibetan, see *zhe chen rgyal tshab 'gyur med padma rnam rgyal gyi gsung 'bum* Volume 9: 384). These two sets have items in common with the set here, but all three are rather different.

Action Phurpa

rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po (TSH vol. 1: 68-70); and the *'byed pa lde'u mig gi rgyud* (TSH vol. 2: 130-1). This is discussed also in Cantwell 2020a: 10.

TSH vol. 1: 151-82. Note that here I refer primarily to the Mtshams brag collection, not because I privilege this

versions, especially the Ka thog thirteen volume collection. In this case, the Ka thog edition does not appear to

the phurpa of resting effortlessly in sameness (*ma brtsal mnyam par gzhas pa'i phur pa*); the dharma phurpa (*chos nyid phur pa*); the nature of mind phurpa (*sems nyid phur pa*); the sky
nam mkha'i phur pa

Vajrakāya is seen in much the same terms as found in teachings on this phurpa.

The fourfold list is unpacked in three texts found in Volume 4. These texts cover a range of topics relating to the eight deity system secret mantra practice. The first and most extensive supplies a substantial section (pp.293-304) on the Four Phurpas. Mi pham's

Eightfold Buddha Word

it is from Örgyan gling pa's revelations and therefore a good deal later than Myang ral. However, it claims to accord with Myang ral's writing, and to restore Myang ral's tradition.

gter ma

we have a statement suggesting a restoration of Myang ral, it has to be said that it is possible

gter mas a text of Myang ral's which had been lost

Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas

sgrub pa lung gi bka' mgo As elsewhere in Myang ral's revelation when the Four Phurpas

third place. Both texts cover a list consisting of the objects for each phurpa to strike; the signs of striking; the faults of not striking; and the companions which effect the successful strike. The points are dealt with in almost identical terms, although the order is different. The first text

The second text includes additional points on its list, although the first two of these — the — are largely repetitive of the other points.

with the results of striking, in terms of the attainment of the buddha k yas, and although the treatment is brief in the case of the first three phurpas, there is elaboration of different types of material phurpas, and the different rituals to accomplish with them.

The list of points is reminiscent of that given in the *Black Collection's*
Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement

Black Collection

grogs

accompanying the Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa; conjoined means and wisdom accompanying the Superior Bodhicitta Phurpa; the four Immeasurables accompanying the Immeasurable Compassion/Compassion Emanation Phurpa; and the four sections of the ritual approach and accomplishment accompanying the Symbolic Material Phurpa.

TSH vol. 4: 501-565; Ka vol.4: 473-552. In this case, both TSH and Ka give *bka' mgo* this to be a non-standard or incorrect spelling of *bka' bsgo*

Note that the first text refers to the Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa, while the second mostly speaks of the

The sections given in the *Light rays from the Sun*

Rog lugs

Rong lugs source texts (see p.139-140 above).

A rather different set of companions is found within the *Rong lugs*

Bka' ma

An Instruction on the Four Phurpas within the Transmitted cycle of

(), said to be written by Padma Thod phreng rgyal po and transmitted by Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes' student, Gnubs Yon tan rgya mtsho, preserved through copying a manuscript handwritten by Myang ral

In the final section of this exploration of early teachings on the Four Phurpas and Myang ral's contribution to this topic, I turn to an instruction preserved within the transmitted cycle

Eightfold Buddha Word

The Fortress and Precipice

rdzong 'phrang). Although Myang ral's revelation was the first major compilation of the

Fortress and Precipice cycle pre-dated

gurus, Grub thob Dngos grub, to him. Traditional accounts describe the coming together of the revealed and transmitted texts as a confluence of two streams within Myang ral, when he

The Fortress and Precipice

confluence was already witnessed in the previous generation, since Grub thob Dngos grub was also a revealer and apparently had a major role in passing on or bringing Myang ral's revelation

In any case, the point here is that Myang ral is at the fount of both the collections

Eightfold Buddha Word

Here, a limited exploration of what such a confluence might mean is made by looking at this

This instruction is found within an early compilation of *Fortress and Precipice* said to have been copied from a manuscript in Myang ral's own hand. There would seem

Here, I would like to acknowledge the advice of Changling Tulku. In the planning stages of our research project at the University of Bochum, Robert Mayer had a discussion with Changling Tulku, who pointed out that *The Fortress and Precipice rdzong 'phrang*) teachings on the eight tantric deities pre-date Myang ral's *Eightfold Buddha Word*

The Fortress and Precipice

schedule. The initial work on that survey was conducted through a reading of the texts with the project's lama consultant, Lopon P. Ogyan Tanzin, during his visit to Bochum in May 2018. Most of *The Fortress and Precipice* — and all those in the Dudjom *Bka' ma* — represent compilations by later figures, but fortunately, a very

Bka' ma. This is the work I am considering

I have written at greater length on this topic in Cantwell 2020b: 63-4. See also Dudjom Rinpoche 1991 Volume 1: 757; Dudjom Rinpoche *Collected Writings*

Hirshberg 2016: 104-5, 129; and TSH Volume 2: 341-2, and 349-50.

It is to be hoped that future research will be able to study this question more comprehensively. Significant overlaps between the two groups of texts are not obvious at first glance.

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa

but many give further information — for example, some are noted to have been a teaching of Myang ral's guru Grub thob Dngos grub.

making up a core of key teachings within this compilation, add that Rdo rje Yang dbang gter entrusted the instruction to Gter bzhad rtsal. There is no doubt here that these names refer

and his student are early figures in the *Fortress and Precipice* lineage list; and Rdo rje Yang dbang gter and Gter bzhad rtsal are their special tantric names. Mi pham confirms that Gter bzhad rtsal is the secret name for Gnubs Yon tan rgya mtsho.

Fortress and Precipice

Gnyags Jñ nakumara, who received them from the Four Wise Humans (*mkhas pa mi bzhi*)

Fortress and Precipice

presented in the voice of Padma Thod phreng rgyal po, in other words, of Padmasambhava.

Specifically, the colophon (425/426) mentions Mnga' ris pa chen (1487-1542); Gter bdag gling pa (1646-1714); his son, Padma 'Gyur med rgya mtsho (1686-1718); Padma Mdo sngags bstan 'dzin of Dpal yul (1830-1892); Ka thog Lcam sprul (according to TBRC, he seems to be Lcam sprul Dkon mchog chos 'phel, a nineteenth century teacher of Ka thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho, 1880-1923); Dpal sprul mDo sngags bstan pa'i nyi ma.

A large number repeat pertinent points of the final colophon, noting for example, Mnga' ris pa chen, Gter bdag gling pa and his son, or simply noting Gter bdag gling pa's son (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*)

the final colophon might refer only to the very final instruction. However, this would seem extremely unlikely, especially since the final colophon is extensive — while the final instruction only takes five sides of Tibetan. None of the previous comments at the ends of sections contradict the final colophon — they simply provide partial

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ha: 122-42, 176-286, 290-319, 324-47, 362-425.

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ye: 614. It is clear, then, that Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes's secret name is Rdo rje Yang dbang gter, and this was confirmed by Dylan Esler, who specialises in the study of Gnubs chen

Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, Gnubs nam mkha'i snying po, and Vairocana (Gter bdag gling pa's *rdo rje phreng ba* *Bka' ma* Volume Pa: 683; Mi pham, *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ye: 612; see

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa

It seems that the appellations, Padma rgyal po, and/or Padma Thod phreng, are used in some early sources when the Guru is being presented — or presents himself — as the tantric master. The name Padmasambhava or

The first point to make about this instruction is that it is not simply one among many relating to the Vajrak laya teachings, but it represents the section on the correct view for Phurpa

Fortress and Precipice

the compilation said to have been given by Slob dpon Grub thob Dngos grub at Myang ral's specifies a series of *Enlightened Attentions dgongs pa*

Enlightened Attention to the

Phurpa Perforations phur pa thal 'byin gyi dgongs pa

section. This point is repeated (p.177) within an instruction of Sangs rgyas ye shes. The group of instructions transmitted from Yang dbang gter to Gter bzhad rtsal contains a consecutive

Enlightened Attentions for each of the first six deities in turn. Thus,

Eightfold Buddha Word,

Embodying the Sugatas (see p.141-143 above).

The instruction itself is entitled, *Perfecting Phurpa in entirety through Enlightened Attention to the Phurpa Perforations phur pa thams cad phur pa thal 'byin gyi dgongs par rdzogs pa*. It is framed by Padma Thod phreng rgyal po announcing at the beginning his identity with Vajrak laya and intention to teach the concise Four Phurpas to liberate all evils

Enlightened Attention to the Sovereign Yoga rnal 'byor dbang phyug gi dgongs pa, Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ha: 361-5), is given in the voice of Padma Thod phreng. Also,

Concise teaching on Enlightened Attention to the Great Subjugator Neighing Everywhere Three Times dbang chen thams cad rta skad thengs gsum du 'dus pa'i dgongs pa, Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ha: 214-8). This is said to be a summary by Padma Thod phreng from the root tantra relating to Hayagr va, the *Tantra of the Supreme Horse Display rta mchog rol pa'i rgyud*). There are also two further instructions which are, however, *pad 'byung gi man ngag,*

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ha: 195-8), and another pith instruction says at the beginning that the teaching was given by Slob dpon Padmasambhava in the Yer ba zla ba cave, to the lady from 'Brom (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 264-9). An additional instruction is said to derive from Padmasambhava (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 286-9), but it does not record the transmission through Gnubs chen and his student, so perhaps here

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ha: 59-63.

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ha: 176-9. Here, Gnubs chen's secret name is not used, but his student is given under the name of Gter bzhed (*sic*)

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ha: 209-37.

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa 230-4.

The opening section

implanted in the spatial field, while the condition of their non-dual sameness is the enlightened mind phurpa. The Four Phurpa materials (*phur pa'i rgyu bzhi* explained in turn, covering each phurpa's object and its purpose. A citation which epitomises each phurpa's function is then given from the "buddha word" (*bka'*

from the perspective of this study is that in the case of the first three of these four citations, they
Eightfold Buddha

Word, Embodying the Sugatas (see p.141-143 above). Thus, "realising vividly is the striking" of the Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa; and when the Superior Bodhicitta Phurpa strikes in the consort's *space* "(their) non-duality is union". The Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa strikes sentient beings, "in order that those who have been cast adrift should be seized

Here, then, Padma Thod phreng rgyal po is quoting an authoritative textual source which, it appears, seems closely to share points found later in Myang ral's revelation. I might add that in the case of the first two, similar turns of phrase are found in other early

Black Collection's Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement

Yet the imagery here connected with the Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa seizing with it expressed exactly in this manner in other early sources. Moreover, the point made about

rgyas pa

Bka' ma shin tu

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ha: 231). The first of the texts in the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas*

(TSH volume 4: 491).

Space mkha'

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa Volume Ha: 231). The second of the texts in the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* *space, there is non-dual union"* (TSH

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa

Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas. The first gives: (TSH

(TSH volume 4: 528).

Root Tantra, Vajra Wrath rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa

(Boord 2002: 260; Dudjom *Bka' ma*, Volume Tha: 438).

Black Collection

This is reiterated in the longer text concerning the Four Phurpas which is included
Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas
gling pa's revelations, but claiming to restore the Myang tradition, where it states that the

The two shorter texts from the
Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas
although do not make it quite so explicitly. The second text is clearer, stating that the purpose
is to consecrate one's own and others' children.

Bodhicitta Phurpa as the cutting of of the ma āla, in the case of the first text, the ma āla of
sugatas is specified, while the second text refers to the samaya ma āla.

sngags pa
traditions amongst the Rnying ma pa, which of course have the principle of patrilineal descent,

The next part of the instruction elaborates further on qualities of the material phurpa in
physically perfecting the wisdom ma āla, the upper part the wrathful deity with three faces
and six arms, and the lower body an iron phurpa, with a three-sided blade. The final section
emphasises the importance of continually abiding in the condition of the unified three k yas,

from the described enlightened attentions. With buddha qualities and actions, one's own

The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement

self-centred passion and generates a vermin in the womb (

Bka'
ma, Volume Tha: 441; Boord 2002: 262). In the separate section on the Four Phurpas, the summary specifies that

Bka' ma, Volume Tha: 479; Boord 2002:

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa

(TSH volume 4: 295).

(TSH volume 4: 528).

(TSH volume 4: 491);

(TSH volume 4: 528).

Conclusions

(1) The Four Phurpas

hypothesis — knowing that there is little explicit discussion of the set in the root tantras —

Vajrak laya teachings were systematised in Tibet. It now seems clear that this hypothesis has been disproven, and that on the contrary, the teaching derives in Tibet from Padmasambhava himself, or from the very earliest generations of Vajrak laya masters. Thus, rather than a sequential development, perhaps the root Vajrak laya tantras and the Four Phurpa teachings

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latter part of the text. The *Light rays from the Sun* commentary confines the teaching to the *Eightfold Buddha Word* texts transmitted by Myang ral may have helped to draw attention to the Four

introductions to the tradition, and also as part of advanced teachings. Similarly, in Vajrak laya

A myes zhabs' commentary discusses the Four Phurpas (142-143) after his extensive account of the different transmissions of the Vajrak laya traditions, along with his short introduction to the maññala deities and the four "rivers", respectively of empowerment, textual explanations, absorbing the spiritual instructions, and the key pith instructions. The commentary by the eighteenth to nineteenth century commentator from Reb kong, Mag gsar Pañita Kun bzang stobs ldan dbang po, first gives the transmissional histories and background to Vajrak laya, and then presents general Vajrak laya teachings, starting *ngo bo* and Definitions (*nges tshig*). These are followed by a section on Classification (*dbye ba*

Padmasambhava is considered to have played a part in establishing the Vajrak laya tantras. Numerous accounts of his role in bringing the Vajrak laya teachings to Tibet note his collection of the texts of the *Vidyotamala 'bum sde* the source for the Vajrak laya tantras. Some of the root Vajrak laya tantras are considered to indicate the presence in the maññala's periphery of the guardian goddesses tamed by Padmasambhava, see Mayer 1996: 128-31. Mag gsar 2003: 13-4.

The first few pages of Shechen Gyaltsap's (Zhe chen rgyal tshab) Commentary (1-11; Tibetan 373-81) deal with an overview of the significance of Vajrak laya, along with an introduction to the ground, path and fruit Vajrakum ra, the three sam dhis, the ma alas and visualisations, empowerment, the samayas, and the fruit. At this point, he turns to the Four Phurpas. Dudjom Rinpoche begins his commentary on *Meteoric Iron Razor bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri*) Vajrak laya tradition by listing the

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up in the four Phurpa Materials, which he then discusses.

in other sections of Dudjom Rinpoche's works on Vajrak laya. I have mentioned above (note 8) his Aspiration verses and his commentary on those verses. The verses are now commonly

Meteoric Iron Razor Ritual Manual, but also together with that for his *Razor Disintegration-on-Touch spu gri reg phung*). Moreover, the root source text

of the four into the empowerment text he wrote for Zil gnon Nam mkha'i rdo rje's Vajrak laya

Perhaps, then, the Vajrak laya tradition picked up on the central placement of the were part of Myang ral's inheritance. The particular content is not always followed by later

Eightfold Buddha Word materials. Amongst those mentioned above, Mag gsar's explanation consists almost entirely of citations from two revelatory sources, O rgyan gling pa's *Bka' thang sde lnga gter gzhung*

for Mag gsar's own tradition of the Stag tshang Vajrak laya. Hardly surprisingly given that O rgyan gling pa had revealed a text apparently restoring Myang ral's tradition (see p.142 above)

Bka' thang sde lnga

Eightfold Buddha Word texts. The approach is

Mag gsar 2003: 14-6.

Collected Works Volume Da: 73-4. Dudjom Rinpoche wrote a separate text on the history and *lo rgyus*, Volume Tha: 11-75), so had no need to reiterate that background in his commentary.

Collected Works Volume Ba: 464-9.

Collected Works Volume Pha: 63-70.

Mag gsar 2003: 14-16.

Very helpfully, and unusually for this kind of Tibetan literature, Mag gsar tells us the exact section — Chapter 19 *lo pa bka'i thang yig bka' thang sde lnga* 378-81 of TBRC's pdf).

moreover reiterated in the revelation source citation added by Mag gsar.

(2) Myang ral's heritage, and Relations between the Revealed and Transmitted Sources

The case study of the Four Phurpas has illustrated that there would seem to be some overlaps or

above is that the final words make use of closing statements and secret seals associated with Treasure revelation, adding that the teachings were buried or hidden as Treasure (*gter du sbas*), generally either by or for Gter bzhad rtsal. However, following a close examination simply that these tantric teachings were sealed and protected within Gter bzhad rtsal's mind.

gter ma traditions and later confined to them. In fact, some years ago, I had come across a similar example of such wording in a ritual compendium by Ba ri Lo ts ba (1040-1112) and had been puzzled about the status of the text concerned,

gter ma bka' ma

sharply differentiated as they were later.

The classic contrast between the categories of *bka' ma*

gter ma

stark than the distinction appears to be later. The inclusion of a number of root tantras from Myang ral's *Eightfold Buddha Word*

Rnying ma rgyud 'bum

Rnying ma rgyud 'bum

gter ma

hermetically sealed. One significant aspect of Robert Mayer's work on early Tibetan tantric

gter ma

snga' 'gyur rnying ma

have appeared in Tibet a few generations before the era of the early *gter stons*

may reference the Tibetan context. The assumption of an opposition between the anonymous *gter mas* may be too simplistic. Mayer, in his 2019 article discussing the work of Ben Williams, points out that tantric *saivism* in ninth

The same applies to some Buddhist tantras linked with O *ri* na,

Many of the statements are brief, but a few give more detail. At the start of one text, we find the early lineage list, with each of the figures said to bury the text within the heart/wisdom of the disciple recipient (

gter ma like burial. Sometimes there is a suggestion that Gter bzhad rtsal

Cantwell 2017: 149 note 19; Ba ri lo ts ba 1974: 231-42.

Mayer 1996: 64-90.

Mayer 2019: 173-5.

such as the mid to late eighth century Vajramahābhairava Tantra, revealed by Lalitavajra.

Thabs kyi Zhags pa

To return to the *Eightfold Buddha Word*

gter ma? Why frame them as such? Of course, we have to understand the matter against a background of an already vibrant culture of textual revelation — Myang ral's mentors were also apparently revealers — but I found myself asking whether there might be something about this

gter ma

hands of the King, Khri strong lde'u btsan, the eighth century Tibetan emperor who became central to the Rnying ma pa's self identity as spiritual representatives of the glorious days of the Tibetan Empire. All four versions of the *Action Phurpa* *Eightfold Buddha Word* give a colophon after the last section, saying that Khri strong lde'u btsan's manuscript copy of

gter ma

Eightfold Buddha Word

The Commands of the Scriptural Authorities for the Tantric Practice sgrub pa lung gi bka' mgo When we consider Myang ral's root tantras we find another formulation which again associates the manuscript copies recovered by Myang ral as the King's. In this case, the colophons refer to Master Padma 'byung gnas and the Tibetan Vairocana as translators and editors of the root tantras, adding that the text is the King's manuscript copy (*bla dpe*

gter ma

The different versions, including the various

Rnying ma rgyud 'bum

Cantwell and Mayer 2012: 91-8.

KA 221, TSH502-503, X828, Y864-865.

(KA version; minor variants in other versions)

I have not fully reviewed enough individual texts to be sure how frequent such colophons are, but this text's

destined revealer would find it (

KA 552, TSH565).

KA Volume 3: 373, TSH Volume 3: 387, X Volume 2: 762, Y Volume 2: 789-90.

(KA

version; minor variants in other versions)

Eightfold Buddha Word

In short, we have a situation in which King Khri song lde'u btsan is linked to these tantras and their associated teachings — at least the associated teachings relating to Phurpa — not been hidden. Myang ral himself is considered a rebirth of King Khri song lde'u btsan, so there

bka' ma

Eightfold Buddha Word,

The Fortress and Precipice

mkhas pa mi bzhi

transmission. Since he failed to transmit the teachings, it fell to Jñ nakum ra to receive the teachings from the four masters and to pass them on. Thus, the *Fortress and Precipice* runs from Jñ nakum ra to Sog po Lha dpal and Gnubs Sangs rgyas ye shes; to Gnubs Yon tan

For example, in Volume 3 of the Mtshams brag edition of the *Eightfold Buddha Word*

zhi ba 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud, 65; *che mchog 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 133; *dpal khrag 'thung 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, ; *bcom ldan 'das gshin rje gshed 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 258; *dpal dbang chen 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* 320; *'phrin las 'dus pa phur pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 387; *ma mo 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 445; *rig 'dzin 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 498; *dregs pa 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* *drag sngags 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*

In Volume of the Rig 'dzin edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*

de bzhin gshegs pa

zhi ba thams cad 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud, 22r; *dpal che mchog 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 41r; *dpal khrag 'thung 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 57r; *gshin rje gshed rab 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 72v; *dpal bcom ldan 'das dbang chen 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 87r; *bde bar gshegs pa thams cad kyi 'phrin las 'dus pa phur pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 105r; *ma mo 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 120v; *rig pa 'dzin pa 'dus pa'i rgyud*, the reference to the King's *bla dpe*

presumably, the omission is a scribal error in this branch of the transmission; the Gting skyes edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, Volume : 338, also omits it, but it is found in the Mtshams brag edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, Volume Ya: 882; *'jig rten mchod bstod bsgrub pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 154r; *drag sngags 'dus pa rdo rje rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 170r; *mdo rgyud rtogs pa bsdu pa'i sgron ma*

Mi pham's account (in the *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* TBRC: W25983 Volume Ye: 438) says that the King requested all the tantras and teachings from Master Padma, and then they were buried as *ger ma*

Vairocana image in Kho mthing temple and elsewhere), where his rebirth, Myang ral, would later discover them

Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, Gnubs nam mkha'i snying po, and Vairocana (Gter bdag gling pa's *rdo rje'i phreng ba* *Bka' ma* Volume Pa: 683; Mi pham, *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ye: 612; see

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa

Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa

rgya mtsho, and down to Grub thob Dngos grub, and to his student Myang ral. gling pa's Vajra Rosary (*rdo rje phreng ba*) empowerment text, we find the statement:

The four streams of empowerment flowing together in Tibet were bestowed upon King Khri srong lde btsan by Master Padma 'byung gnas; Master Vimalamitra; Pagor Vairocana; and Gnubs Nam mkha'i snying po. The four streams of empowerment of India and Tibet flowed together and went to the King, but he did not bestow empowerment on anyone else, so the stream of empowerment was broken off.

In other words, we have an explicit recognition that the transmission was cut off due to the King not passing it on; but that fortunately, Jñānakumāra was able to transmit the stream of

gter ma *Eightfold Buddha Word*

into the line, since the teachings are given to him, hidden, and recovered by Myang ral. It

gter ma

restoring the King to the lineage of transmission, yet it is interesting that one effect of the *gter ma* narrative in this case is to bring the King back as a central figure in the transmission.

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Mi pham, *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* TBRC: W25983 Volume Ye: 613. Dudjom Rinpoche adds the intermediate figures after the two Gnubs: Padma dbang rgyal, Tshul khri ms rgyal mtshan, Ldan brtson, Ye shes dbang phyug, *Bka' ma* Volume Pa: 591). These figures are elaborated further in Gter bdag gling pa's *rdo rje'i phreng ba* *Bka' ma*

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