

Article

Himalayan Encounter: The Teaching Lineage of the *Marmopadeśa*

Studies in the Vanaratna Codex 1 • Harunaga Isaacson | Hamburg

Among the collections of Nepalese Sanskrit manuscripts held outside of Asia, the Hodgson Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, is one which, despite the publication of a catalogue as early as 1876, has not received attention commensurate to its significance.¹ Although the collection comprises, according to its catalogue, ‘only’ 79 items, and although many of these are recent manuscripts of texts that are already plentifully represented (and often by much better MSS) in other collections, for the study of tantric Buddhism—that still largely neglected final frontier of South Asian Buddhism—it is of particular value.

To mention just a few of the precious manuscripts of Buddhist tantric texts in this collection: Hodgson 68 is the *codex unicus* (to the best of our present knowledge) of the *Guṇabharanī*, a commentary by Raviśrījñāna on the *Śaḍaṅgayoga* of Anupamarakṣita, a central text of the Kālacakra system;² Hodgson 69, dated *Nepāla Samvat* 218, corresponding to CE 1098, transmits a rare and valuable manual for the practice of new initiates into the religion, Anupamavajra’s *Ādikarmapradīpa*;³ Hodgson 34 is a manuscript of an otherwise apparently unknown, and so far completely unstudied, commentary on the *Āryamañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*; and Hodgson 46, a manuscript of the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra*,

as I shall demonstrate elsewhere, of even greater importance than it was realized to be by Christopher George, for it is not only the oldest manuscript of this tantra that is known to be extant, but also is the direct ancestor of the second-oldest known manuscript (George’s B).⁴

Among these riches, the manuscript Hodgson 35 stands out, however, as a unique treasure. Some years ago, already, in the remarks prefacing an edition of one of the texts preserved in this manuscript, I wrote the following.⁵

For a description of the manuscript, a ‘Sammelhandschrift’ containing a large number of Buddhist tantric works, see Cowell and Eggeling 1876, 26–28. Though this description is in need of correction on many points, it may suffice here merely to add to it that the manuscript is palm-leaf; that it was a ‘religious gift’ (*deyadharmā*),⁶ and probably an autograph,⁷ of

¹ One factor which may have played a role in this is the difficulty which scholars have—regrettably—sometimes experienced in obtaining microfilm or other types of reproduction from the Royal Asiatic Society. My own studies of manuscripts from this collection were mainly conducted during a series of visits to the Royal Asiatic Society in the late 1990s. I take this opportunity to thank the Royal Asiatic Society, and in particular its then librarian, Michael Pollock, for allowing me to examine and read manuscripts in the premises at 60 Queens Gardens (which have since then been left by the Society). I would also like to thank Dr Lalita du Perron, with whose help I was able to acquire a microfilm of Hodgson 35 in early 2001.

² For an edition of the *Guṇabharanī* see Sferra 2000. Prof Sferra informs me that he intends to publish a revised edition in the near future.

³ Edited first, on the basis of this manuscript, in de La Vallée Poussin 1898; a more recent edition, can be found in Takahashi 1993. In this case too a new edition is a desideratum (and one must hope that it will not again take nearly a hundred years in coming), in part because although Takahashi has used a manuscript of this work (the only other manuscript to be discovered so far: Tokyo University Library, MS 57), he was not able to use Hodgson 69 directly, but had to rely on de La Vallée Poussin’s reporting of the manuscript.

⁴ On the manuscripts of the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra* and their relationship see the discussion in George 1974, 5–12. George’s failure to realize that his manuscript A is the direct ancestor of B—his interesting analysis of the relationships of the manuscripts seems to conclude that the three oldest manuscripts (A, B and C) are all independent of each other (cf. e.g. George 1974, 12, Table 3)—was caused mainly by the fact that he evidently collated the sources only for the first eight chapters of the text, the portion which he edited. The testimony of Hodgson 46 is, however, lacking for the greater part of these chapters (from 2.41 to 6.6 of George’s edition), so that George had too small a sample to assess accurately the importance of this manuscript and its place in the transmission.

⁵ Isaacson 2002, 460–461. Footnotes 6–9 here reproduce without change footnotes 9–12 of the original publication.

⁶ After the colophon of the *Hevajrasahasadyoga*, there is a further colophon, which I transcribe (without emendation or normalization) thus: *deyadharmmo ’yam pravaramahāyānāyāyinām* [here 5–6 *akṣaras* have been rubbed out, the last of which possibly was *śrī*] *ya* [perhaps this *akṣara* was intended to be cancelled too?] *śākyabhikṣumahāsthaviraśrīvanaratnapādānām yad atra puṇyan tad bhavatu* [the *akṣara dbha* has been squeezed in, possibly by a later hand] *ācāryopadhyaṃyāmātipiṭṭrabhṛtisamastatvānām iti* (f. 45v10). One expects that this would have been originally intended to be the end of the codex, but if so, the scribe changed his mind, for there follow further folios, numbered continuously and in the same hand.

⁷ Or if not an autograph certainly prepared under close supervision of Vanaratna. The manuscript contains a verse that refers to Vanaratna in the first person (*mayā śrīvanaratnena* f. 50v8), and gives for several of the works/teachings that it contains guru-lineages that all end with the name

Vanaratna; and that the date of its copying therefore probably lies between AD 1426 and AD 1468,⁸ rather than some time in the late eighteenth century.⁹

These few sentences,¹⁰ and the accompanying rather compressed footnotes, only scratched the surface of the interest and importance of a manuscript that is one of a kind. In the present paper, the first of a series of shorter publications on what I shall call the Vanaratna Codex,¹¹ I draw attention to a few more references to Tibetan scholars found in this important document,¹² and consider some of the remarkable implications of those references.

The following lineage of teachers is given at f. 76r10–76v1, after the text of a *Marmopadeśa*.¹³

of Vanaratna (ff. 50v9–10, 55v6–7, 68r2–4, 76r10–76v1, 77r3–5). Some of the evidently ‘scribal’ material emphasizes the secrecy of these teachings; at one place, for instance, we read that the scribe has ‘written this special teaching so that I may not forget it; may the *dākas*, *dākinīs* etc., [and] all the wrathful deities forgive [me for putting so secret a teaching down in writing]’ (*ayaṃ viśiṣṭopadeśo ‘vismaraṇahetor mayā likhitaṃ* (sic for *likhito*) *dākaḍākinīyādayaḥ sarvā* (sic for *sarvāḥ*) *krodhadēvatāḥ kṣamantām iti* f. 52v10).

⁸ Assuming the commonly given dates for Vanaratna’s first trip to Tibet and for his death. For these dates, and for a biography of Vanaratna, see *Blue Annals* II, 797–805. The reason for placing the *terminus post quem* at the date of Vanaratna’s first visit to Tibet is that the manuscript contains several references to celebrated Tibetan teachers such as Milarepa (Mi la ras pa; written *mileraspa* at f. 68r3) and Ko brag pa (*kobraḥpādena* f. 75v10), and to the Tibetan language (*sambhoṭabhāṣānuḡaṃ* f. 73v7).

⁹ As Cowell and Eggeling suggest when they write ‘Very minutely written about the end of the last century’ (1876, 26). Although I am not an expert in palaeography, the East Indian hand in which the manuscript is written seems more likely to me to be of the fifteenth than the eighteenth century.

¹⁰ Since they were written, important contributions to our knowledge of Vanaratna’s life and career have been made by Franz-Karl Ehrhard; see Ehrhard 2002 and 2004.

¹¹ In the future I hope to be able to devote a monograph to the codex. Though I would not claim to have proved that the Vanaratna Codex is an autograph of Vanaratna himself, as I do myself regard as extremely probable, the evidence, of which part was presented in Isaacson 2002 and quoted just above, seems to me to be sufficient to establish that, if it is not his autograph, it was copied at his instigation, and that its contents are a direct reflection of the texts and teachings studied by the famous pandit.

¹² In the case of some Tibetan authors and works referred to below, I add references to the Resource ID of the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre (TBRC); such references are not given in the case of particularly famous individuals (nor, of course, where I could not locate the individual concerned with any certainty in the TBRC database).

¹³ This work has yet to be identified; it is not identical with the *Marmopadeśa* (*Gnad kyi ḡdams pa*) attributed to a rNon pa ba chen po (?) that is found in the Tanjur (Tōhoku 2447 = Ōtani 3275); it remains to be tested whether it is a Sanskrit translation of a Tibetan work such as the *Mgon po leam dral sgrub thabs kyi ḡdams pa* (TBRC W1551), also known as i.a. *Sku rags ma’i gnad kyi ḡdams pa*, of the Sa skya pa author rDo rje rgyal po (TBRC

idānīm gurupāramparyaṃ likhyate|| virūpākṣaḥ|
ḍombīherukaḥ| alalavajraḥ| garbharīpādaḥ|jayaśrījñānaḥ|ap
rāptacandraḥ| siṃha[f. 76v]|vajraḥ| vīravajraḥ|gaṅgādharāḥ|
śākyajñānaḥ| śilālpagrhaḥ| mātulakāntāraḥ| ānandagarbhaḥ|
panyāgraḥ| kīrtidhvajaḥ| ānandadhvajaḥ| āryadharmmarājaḥ|
ratnaśrīḥ| vastraśilāḡuḡaḥ| puṇyadhvajaḥ| ānandaśrīḥ|
gurusiddhaḥ| ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadraḥ| śrīvanaratnaḥ||

This list of names contains several surprises for a Sanskritist. Aprāptacandra, literally ‘Not-obtained moon’, is no normal name; and when we come to a name like Śilālpagrha, ‘Stone small house’, anyone with a little familiarity with Sanskrit onomastics will smell a rat, even though it might not necessarily be immediately apparent (if the Sanskritist has but small Tibetological experience) just where the rodent is. I must admit that when I first encountered the list, more than ten years ago, I simply filed these oddities away among many questions raised by the codex to be clarified later. It was not till quite a few years later, when my colleague Prof Jan-Ulrich Sobisch (Copenhagen), to whom I owe many thanks, kindly sent me a draft of his work on *Hevajra and Lam ’bras Literature of India and Tibet Seen Through the Eyes of Ames-zhabs* (now just recently published: Sobisch 2008) that the penny dropped, and I realized that what we have here is an Indo-Tibetan teaching lineage very close indeed to some of the Sa skya Lam ’bras lineages, culminating in transmission back to an Indian, Vanaratna.

The subject of the Sa skya lineages of their central tantric teaching, the Lam ’bras (‘Path with its Fruit’), is a complex one; for information on it I refer to Sobisch’s monograph of 2008 and his papers of 2002 and 2003.¹⁴ Rather than a detailed comparison, I shall here comment in brief on the list of the Vanaratna Codex.

Virūpākṣa, Ḍombīheruka

The list begins with two famous *siddha*-names: Virūpākṣa¹⁵ and Ḍombīheruka. The text of the *Marmopadeśa* itself makes it explicit that the teaching it contains is attributed

P127); the ‘Lam ’bras connection’ which will become apparent below lends such a preliminary hypothesis some prima facie plausibility. Although the *Marmopadeśa* is mentioned in the description of Hodgson 35 in Cowell and Eggeling (1876, 28), unlike some other texts in the codex, it has not found its way into the standard bibliography of Buddhist tantric works surviving in Sanskrit (Tsukamoto, Matsunaga and Isoda 1989).

¹⁴ For an online database of Sa skya lineage records, the result of a collaboration between the Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität München (LMU) and the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre (TBRC), see http://www.indologie.lmu.de/tibetan_lineages/index.htm.

¹⁵ Also known as Virūpa; but the Vanaratna Codex always uses the longer form of the name of this *siddha*.

to Ḍombīheruka.¹⁶ It is thus not surprising that, of the Sa skya lineages included in the online database of the LMU and TBRC, one of the closest to that of the *Marmopadeśa* is LORKL303, which is the lineage of initiation of the ‘Dombhi’ tradition (*dombhi lugs*), i.e. the practice and teaching lineage of Ḍombīheruka, as given by A mes žabs (CE 1597–1659).¹⁷ In that lineage Virūpa/Virūpākṣa is preceded by Vajradhara and Nairātmyā.

Alalavajra, Garbharīpāda, Jayaśrījñāna

In LORKL303, and commonly in similar Sa skya pa lineages, the name Nags khrod pa is inserted between Alalavajra and Garbharīpa (= Garbharīpāda; this variation is certainly non-substantive). I cannot determine at present whether the omission of a Sanskrit equivalent for this name in the *Marmopadeśa* lineage is an error of some kind, or whether we have here a genuine variant; nor is it clear what Sanskrit name may underlie Nags khrod pa (‘Forest hermit’: Aranyavāsin or Vanavāsin?).

Aprāptacandra

As mentioned above, this is a name likely to raise a Sanskritist’s eyebrows. It provides us, in fact, with an important clue as to the nature of the list in the Vanaratna Codex. For Aprāptacandra can be nothing but a wrong back-translation into Sanskrit of Mi thub zla ba, the normal Tibetan translation, found also in LORKL303, of Durjayacandra,¹⁸ the name of an Indian teacher who played a key role in systematizing the Ḍombīheruka tradition of Hevajra-practice.¹⁹ When the Tibetan master from whom Vanaratna received the *Marmopadeśa* recited the lineage of the teaching, the Indian

¹⁶ The opening verse runs:

ādināthaṃ namaskṛtvā śūnyāśūnyasvabhāvakaṃ
ḍombīheruka-āmnāyaṃ (!) likhyate ’kṣarasādhanaṃ||

¹⁷ Also A myes žabs; I follow the orthography (though, simply as a matter of my own conventions, not the Wylie transliteration system) used by Sobisch in his publications on this theme.

¹⁸ It has recently been suggested that the Sanskrit name that is rendered usually into Tibetan as Mi thub zla ba was not Durjayacandra but Durgacandra (Stearns 2001, 212 n. 34). In itself it is not very implausible that *mi thub* should be a reflex of Sanskrit *durga* (although I am not aware of any certain attestation of this). But the form Durjayacandra is not merely a reconstruction, as Stearns apparently thought, but is well attested in sources which survive in their original Sanskrit. Most of these sources are at present unpublished; these include one of the central works pertaining to the Ḍombīheruka-tradition of Hevajra practice, the *Ṣaḍaṅgasādhana*, which is contained in what I refer to as the *Hevajrasādhanaṣaṃgraha* codex, a unique manuscript photographed in Nor Monastery by Rāhula Sāṅkrīyāyana, on which see Isaacson 2002, 461–462 and Isaacson forthcoming *b*. A published source is the *Durjayacandrodhṛtaṃ Saptākṣarasādhanaṃ (Sādhanaṃālā* 250; see Tsukamoto, Matsunaga and Isoda 1989, 469).

¹⁹ Cf. Isaacson forthcoming *a*.

must have misheard Mi thub zla ba as Mi thob zla ba; and when he set the lineage down, translating the names into Sanskrit, he rendered this, reasonably enough, as Aprāptacandra. The error here clearly points to oral transmission of the names in Tibetan, for the change from *thub* to the phonetically very similar *thob* is unlikely in copying from a written source.

Siṃhavajra, Vīravajra, Gaṅgādhara

Of these names, Siṃhavajra has no equivalent in LORKL303, which therefore has Vīravajra (Dpa’ bo rdo rje) receiving the teaching directly from Durjayacandra.²⁰ Siṃhavajra is not unknown, however, in Sa skya pa Lam ’bras lineages; in LORKL249a,b,c,d,f,g (six alternative lineages of a transmission of the ‘three *Hevajratantras*’) Seṅ ge rdo rje (Siṃhavajra) together with Dpa’ bo rdo rje (Vīravajra) and Sgra can ’dzin (Rāhula) receives the teaching from Durjayacandra.

Gaṅgādhara obviously corresponds to Gayadhara, the famous Indian translator/teacher who played a key part in the transmission of the *Hevajratantra* and related teachings to Tibet.²¹ Gayadhara is however missing from the similar Ḍombīheruka and Hevajra-tantra lineages, which usually (as in e.g. LORKL303 and the various variants of LORKL249) have the transmission passing from Dpa’ bo rdo rje (Vīravajra) directly to ’Brog mi/Śākya ye śes (Śākyajñāna). It is hard to decide how we should evaluate Vanaratna’s ‘Gaṅgādhara’. In view of his Aprāptacandra above, one might well doubt whether it has any particular authority.

Śākyajñāna, Śilālpagrha, Mātulakāntāra

With Śākyajñāna the lineage moves to Tibetans, for this translates Śākya ye śes, the name of the great translator commonly known as ’Brog mi, ‘the nomad’. The bizarre sounding Śilālpagrha can now be recognized as a rendering in Sanskrit of Se mkhar chuñ ba, a name by which Se ston kun rig, one of the prominent students of ’Brog mi, is known; and the equally odd (to the Sanskritist) Mātulakāntāra (‘Maternal uncle’s wilderness’) is similarly an attempt to render Žaṅ dgon pa (ba), a designation of Žaṅ ston pa Chos ’bar.

²⁰ Thus also in the two closely related lineages LORKL230 (‘Dombhi ba’i ldan [i.e. lhan] cig skyes grub’ from a *gsan yig* of Kun dga’ bsod nams lhan grub recorded by A mes žabs) and LORKL393 (‘Dombhi lhan cig skyes grub’ from a *gsan yig* of A mes žabs).

²¹ For detailed recent treatments of Gayadhara’s life and visits to Tibet see Stearns 2001, esp. 47–55 and 91–99 (the latter section translating from the early biography of Lam ’bras masters, the *Žib mo rdo rje or Bla ma dam pa bod kyi lo rgyus* of Dmar ston Chos kyi rgyal po), and Davidson 2005, esp. 178–183 (Davidson consistently gives the name in the form Gayādhara).

Ānandagarbha, Paṇyāgra (sic!), Kīrtidhvaja, Ānandadhvaja, Āryadharmarāja

Here we come to a sequence with the names of the five Sa skya pa founding hierarchs, all famous teachers. There are no problems with identifications here. *paṇyāgraḥ* is, beyond doubt, simply a slip of Vanaratna's pen, for *puṇyāgraḥ*. With this obvious correction:

- Ānandagarbha = Kun dga' sñiñ po
- Puṇyāgra = bSod nams rtse mo
- Kīrtidhvaja = Grags pa rgyal mtshan
- Ānandadhvaja = Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (Sa skya Paṇḍita)
- Āryadharmarāja = Chos rgyal 'Phags pa ('Phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan)

Ratnaśrī, Vāstraśilāguha, Puṇyadhvaja, Ānandaśrī

The four teachers (the second of whom again is given a Sanskrit name which is hardly conceivable except as an attempt to literally render a Tibetan one) who follow the five great Sa skya hierarchs in this list can all be identified with certainty. They take the lineage up to the fifteenth century.

- Ratnaśrī = dKon mchog dpal [TBRC P1062]
- Vāstraśilāguha = Na bza' brag phug, a.k.a. Bsod nams dpal [TBRC P3092]
- Puṇyadhvaja = bSod nams rgyal mtshan [TBRC P1226]
- Ānandaśrī = Kun dga' dpal [TBRC P2010]

Gurusiddha, Ānandatidhvajaśrībhadra, Vanaratna

With the last two names of the lineage before Vanaratna, uncertainty increases slightly. I am not quite sure with whom Gurusiddha is to be identified; perhaps Man lung gu ru [TBRC P5291] might be a candidate. As for Ānandatidhvajaśrībhadra, whose name precedes Vanaratna's in all the lineages found in the Vanaratna Codex, he may tentatively be identified with the Kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal bzañ po (this name would give us, translated into Sanskrit, Ānandadhvajaśrībhadra) who is reported to have assisted Vanaratna in the transmission of the Cakrasaṃvara cycle at the court of the Phag mo gru pa rulers in AD 1453.²² This Kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal bzañ po in turn may possibly be identical with the Kun dga' rgyal mtshan from sNe'u

²² See Ehrhard 2004, 255; I am very grateful to Prof Dr Franz-Karl Ehrhard for discussing the possible identity of Vanaratna's Ānandatidhvajaśrībhadra with me, and for drawing my attention to this prime candidate.

gdoñ who was an important teacher of one of Vanaratna's Tibetan students, Lo chen bsod nams rgya mtsho.²³ A less plausible alternative candidate might be the Śar ka ba Kun dga' blo gros rgyal mtshan,²⁴ for whom van der Kuijp proposes as dates 1365?1430/43.²⁵ Of this figure little is yet known; it will be interesting to see whether the as yet unpublished ninety-six-folio handwritten biography of him by (a) Rin chen bzañ po²⁶ sheds any light on him and on the possibility that he might have interacted with the Indian pandit.

The two lines of the Vanaratna Codex which have been examined here show us, as I hope to have demonstrated above, something remarkable. They are part of a record of a unique encounter, during which the Indian, who was fêted during his visits to Tibet and imparted many teachings there to Tibetan students, in his turn received from a Tibetan lama a series of esoteric instructions handed down within Tibet though supposed to be (ultimately) of Indian provenance. The light shed on fifteenth-century Indo-Tibetan interactions in the Himalaya may, I hope, serve as a small illustration of the ways in which the often neglected 'metatexts' in Sanskrit manuscripts sometimes provide evidence that significantly enriches our picture of social or religious (or, not infrequently, political) history, and not only in South Asia 'proper'.

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²³ On Lo chen bsod nams rgya mtsho and his interactions with Vanaratna we have the fine monograph-study Ehrhard 2002; on the Kun dga' rgyal mtshan from sNe'u gdoñ see especially 39ff.

²⁴ Whose name is given in the TBRC record (P2463) simply as Kun dga' blo gros, with as name variants Grub chen kun blo and Kun blo, grub chen.

²⁵ See van der Kuijp 1994, 604

²⁶ Mentioned by van der Kuijp 1994, 604 n. 21; the manuscript is in the China Nationalities Library of the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing.

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