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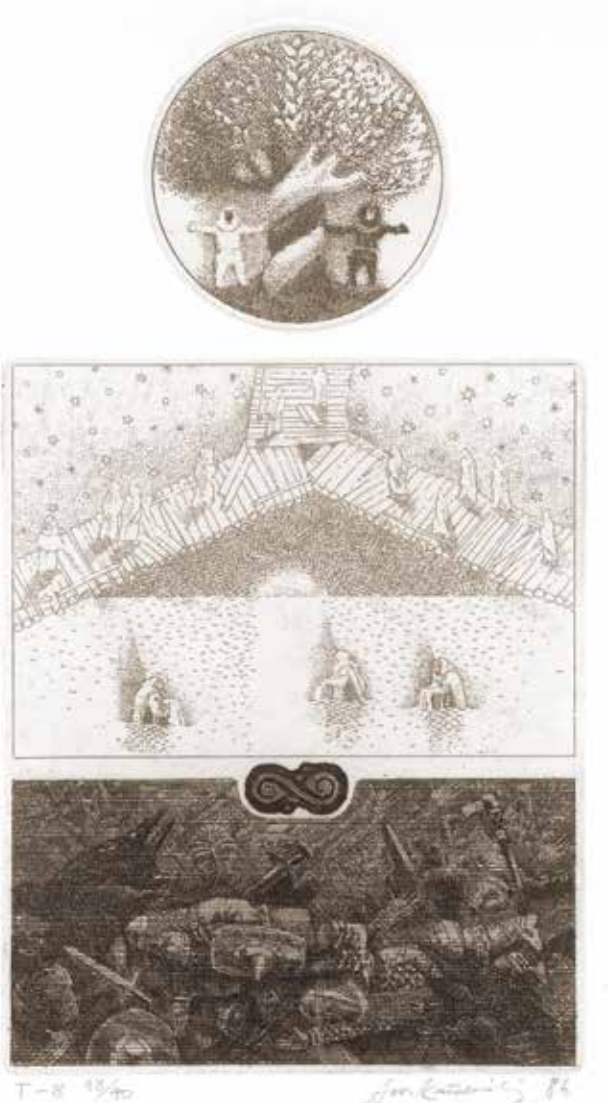

Arvydas Každailis. *Gėris ir blogis,* 1986, ofortas, 21 × 12

Religious Tensions in the Early *phyi dar* Period: Monastic or Tantric?

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The article examines the religious landscape of Tibet during the early *phyi dar* period (11th-12th centuries), focusing on the tensions between the monastic and tantric strands of Buddhism. It argues that this period saw a resurgence of the monastic tradition, which had declined during the preceding "dark period", and a reaction against the proliferation of tantric practices. The article is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses the instrumental figures in the revival of Buddhism during this period. The second section examines the debates surrounding Buddhist orthodoxy during this period. The analysis suggests that the early *phyi dar* period was characterized by a complex interplay between the monastic and tantric strands of Buddhism, with the monastic strand seeking to reassert itself against the perceived excesses of the tantric tradition. However, the tantric strand was able to defend its legitimacy and eventually find a place within Tibetan Buddhism.

Keywords: Tibetan Buddhism, *phyi dar*, monasticism, tantra, authenticity.

1) Introduction

This paper tackles two questions related to the so-called *phyi dar*, the period of later dissemination of Buddhist teachings in Tibetan history. The first part of the paper addresses the question: Who were the instrumental figures in this latter period? The second part examines: In what sense Buddhist orthodoxy was a topic of debate during this period? In addressing both questions, I argue that during the early phase of *phyi dar*, two Buddhist strands[1] emerged in conflict with each other. These strands, traceable to the introduction of Buddhism during the period of imperial Tibet[2], were the monastic-celibate, sūtra-oriented strand, and the mostly lay tantric-yogic strand.

2) Instrumental Figures in the Revival of Buddhism

The term "later dissemination of teachings" (*bstan pa phyi dar*) appears in indigenous

1 By distinguishing these two strands, I am partially inspired by Richardson and Snellgrove (2003: 114–115).

2 Both of these differing yet complementary strands could be represented by Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava, who were invited to Tibet in the 8th century by Khri srong lde btsan. Complementing each other, Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava each contributed in their own ways to sow the seeds of Buddhism during the early imperial period. These seeds would develop into two growing strands that would sometimes be in conflict and at other times in harmony.

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Tibetan sources as early as the 12th century[3] and serves as a temporal marker in Tibetan history. It presupposes a division of Buddhist history in Tibet into distinct phases: an initial period of introduction (*bstan pa snga dar*), an intermediary period of decline (*bar dar*), and a subsequent period of renewed propagation (*bstan pa phyi dar*).[4]

The first period marks the nascent introduction of Buddhism by the kings of the Tibetan Empire (7th-9th centuries). This period is said to have ended with the Buddhist persecution attributed to the last king of the Tibetan Empire, Glang dar ma (?-842). From that time onward, until roughly the end of the 10th century or the beginning of the 11th century, a so-called intermediary or "dark period" ensued, traditionally characterized by political disintegration and a decline in Buddhism. Finally, from the 11th century onward, Buddhism in Tibet is said to have begun its revival[5], and as a religion, it has continued unabated to the present day.

There is no consensus on the periodization of the *phyi dar*. However, for convenience in this article, I will limit the discussion to developments no later than the middle of the 13th century[6], with an exceptional focus on the end of the 10th and 11th centuries. The latter period, which I refer to as the early *phyi dar*, is when the most significant events occurred that defined the course of the rest of this era.

Although the notions of *snga dar* and *phyi dar* are widely accepted, various aspects could be questioned when invoking this historical division, as it reflects a one-sided, emic Buddhist perspective on Tibetan history, disregarding other possible narratives, for example, the Bon one. Even within the Buddhist framework alone, some scholars have argumentatively questioned whether Glang dar ma really persecuted Buddhists and to what extent Buddhism declined after that[7]. For instance, the Rnying ma pas were content to trace their lineages back to the imperial period and downplayed the revival narrative.

Following scholars who critically question the decline of Buddhism during an intermediary period, I maintain that it was not Buddhism as a whole that declined, but rather only the monastic strand which depended on central political power. Thus, the overall narrative of *phyi dar* is largely the history of re-establishing the former order of imperial times, reacting against the proliferation of the tantric-yogic strand. However, the voice of the latter strand did not disappear but continued in a reformed manner.

3 Cuevas 2013: 52–53. Although Cuevas claims that this term and the associated division of Buddhist history in Tibet can be found in some anonymous "old Tibetan chronicles unearthed from Dunhuang" – implying a date up to the beginning of the 11th century – the earliest author he actually names as presupposing this historical division is Sa skya grags pa rgyal mtshan (12–13th c.).

4 Ibid. Sometimes the three-phase division of Tibetan Buddhist history is expanded to four to include the earliest pre-Buddhist "savage" state, or reduced to two by excluding the intermediary period.

5 Following G. Tucci and other subsequent authors, R. Davidson also refers to the *phyi dar* period as the "Renaissance", drawing parallels with the European Renaissance (Davidson 2004: 18-21). A better Tibetan equivalent to capture the idea of a renaissance for this period could be the "Era of Lamps" (*sgron ma'i bskal pa*), as suggested by Hatchell (2014: 2).

6 A turning point when the alliance of the Sa skya school with the Mongols brought about renewed political unity and new realities in Tibet.

7 Dalton 2011: 45.

Next, I will briefly examine three smaller constituent narratives and the individuals[8] associated with them who feature in the revival of Buddhism during *phyi dar*: 1) The Eastern Vinaya[9] monks (second half of the 9th to the 11th century); 2) The narrative about the lama-king of the Guge kingdom – Ye shes 'od (mid-10th to early 11th century), Rin chen bzang po (958–1055), and Atiśa (982–1054); 3) A discourse about Mar pa (1000–1085), and 'Brog mi (992–1072), founders of the lineages that would later be called the Bka' brgyud and Sa skya schools, respectively. I argue that the first two narratives represent the monastic strand attempting to reassert itself against the tantric-yogic strand, while the third is the voice of the reformed tantric-yogic strand which, as Tibetan history has shown, has managed to find its place and restore harmony between the two strands.

The discourse about the Eastern Vinaya monks begins the section on *phyi dar* in most of traditional Tibetan histories. The story goes that when Glang dar ma started persecuting Buddhism, three monks named Dmar sha kya mu ne, G.yo dge 'byung, and Gtsang rab gsal – collectively sometimes referred to as the "three wise men from Tibet" (*bod kyi mkhas pa mi sum*) – managed to escape the persecution and fled from Central Tibet to Amdo, where Glang dar ma's power didn't reach. After settling there, they encountered a young Bon po who became a strong Buddhist devotee. However, the "three wise men" were unable to grant him full ordination because at least five monks were required. To accomplish this, the "wise men" seeked assistance from two Chinese monks. Together, they carried out the ordination, and the former Bon po would later be remembered with the Buddhist name Dgongs pa rab gsal.[10]

Later on, Dgongs pa rab gsal, along with the aforementioned monks, ordained ten more men (though the numbers vary in different sources) from Dbus and Gtsang. These ten men ultimately returned to Central Tibet to restore the interrupted Buddhist monasticism.[11] They accomplished this by restoring old monasteries or constructing new ones and ordaining their own disciples, thereby reviving Buddhism in Central Tibet. What little we know about the textual curriculum of these renewed monastics in their monasteries is consistent with the premise that they focused entirely on non-tantric Mahāyāna texts, studying Abhidharma, *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures, as well as Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra treatises.[12]

8 An additional feature to note, as S. Bretfeld rightly observed, is that Tibetan histories, tend to focus on individuals as heroes and downplay the roles of average lay Buddhists. "Even ordinary monks appear in these sources only as numerical factors or as role-specific walk-ons", not to mention the lack of discussion on broader social factors and processes (Bretfeld 2007: 342).

9 In Tibetan, the Eastern Vinaya lineages are referred to as the "Lower Vinaya" (*smad 'dul*), in contrast to the "Higher Vinaya" (*stod 'dul*) lineages from Western Tibet. The Western Vinaya lineages were likely active in the Guge kingdom. However, curiously enough, in contrast to the Eastern Vinaya lineages, we know much less about the lineages from Western Tibet.

10 Tucci 1980: 17–18; Davidson 2004: 88.

11 Ibid. 92–103.

12 Ibid. 104–105.

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As Davidson notes in his study of the *phyi dar* period, modern Tibetan scholars – and even many Tibetan histories from the 15th century – largely downplay the importance of Eastern Vinaya monks, instead placing much greater emphasis on the narrative of Atiśa.[13] According to Davidson, some of the reasons include the subsequent popularity of Bka' gdams pa doctrinal teachings and the rewriting of histories by Dge lugs pas, who regard Atiśa as one of their main precursors. Another reason relates to the different political powers associated with the fact that the successors of Glang dar ma's two sons, 'Od srung and Yum brtan, divided the lands of the former empire.

Although it can hardly be proven, the narrative of the Eastern Vinaya monks might represent the official stance of *phyi dar* among the many fragmented successors of Yum brtan in the eastern territories of the former empire. Some political figures may have looked to China as a potential source for Buddhist revival – hence the mention of Chinese monks having helped to restore the ordination lineage. Conversely, the successors of 'Od srung, with Ye shes 'od as a prominent example, promoted a revival narrative that clearly favored the Indian perspective. Ultimately, both monastic reform movements converged with the arrival of Atiśa and the efforts of his principal disciple, 'Brom ston, and subsequently, his disciples.

Let's now turn to the second discourse, featuring Ye shes 'od, Rin chen bzang po, and Atiśa. I group them as belonging to one narrative not only because traditional stories suggest a connection among them, but also because each of them made efforts to rectify the pre-existing forms of Buddhism related to the tantric-yogic strand. In doing so, they each represent the conservative monastic strand of Tibetan culture.

In contrast to the narrative of the Eastern Vinaya monks, the second one features highly famed Tibetan historical figures, beginning with king Ye shes 'od. As a distant descendant of Glang dar ma, he managed to consolidate his rule (inherited from his father) in the Guge kingdom of Western Tibet. However, in contrast to other powerful figures in Tibet of his time, as the traditional storyline goes, he was not that much concerned with secular political affairs but rather more focused on the religious situation in his domain.

His concern is most evidently manifested in his ordinance (*bka' shog* – about which a bit more is told in the second section of the paper) where he denounces detrimental practices performed by the widely spread mantrins/tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*) who falsely call themselves Buddhists. To correct this trend and find out which teachings are really valid, according to a well-known story, Ye shes 'od sent 21 men to India[14] to study Buddhism. Of the people sent, practically only Rin chen bzang po succeeded in surviving the journey[15] to

13 Ibid. 113–15.

14 For Ye shes 'od, and for many others of that time in Tibet, India signified the source of ultimate authority when it came to Buddhist teachings.

15 Some sources claim that Rin chen bzang po went to India for the first time on his own initiative, rather than being dispatched. It was only on his second visit later in life that he went to India on the King's commission.

India and subsequently exerted great influence in Tibet as a translator (*lo tsa ba*), teacher (with many influential disciples of his own), and temple builder.[16] Among other famed deeds of Ye shes 'od, is his lavish Buddhist patronage of translations, commissioning temples and monasteries, and of course, the story of his heroic attempt to invite Atiśa to come to Tibet even at the expense of himself dying in prison.[17]

I assume that Ye shes 'od's historical role lies in his unique position as both a ruler and a monk.[18] Possessing power and being a conservatively oriented Buddhist, he was deeply concerned with rectifying practices within Buddhism that he perceived as detrimental, particularly antinomian tantric practices. In this way, he sought to harmonize monastic and certain tantric practices that were not overly transgressive. This approach blazed a trail that was followed by many later Tibetan monastic rulers.

Returning to Rin chen bzang po, his huge role in the early *phyi dar* is evidenced by the immense number of translations he and his Indian scholar companions completed; more than 150 works are attributed to them. Among these translations are not only sūtras from the *Prajñāpāramitā* family and influential treatises such as the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, but also *Anuttarayoga* tantras that contain antinomian practices.[19] One might argue that his translation of the latter tantras suggests he was not so conservative. However, indications exist that he did not engage in these practices, one being that he took full monastic ordination at some point in his life. Among the stories of Rin chen bzang po's life, there is also one detailing that, after returning from India with new knowledge and confidence, he defeated a false tantric teacher known as the "Buddha star king" (Sangs rgyas skar rgyal).[20] This story, along with evidence that he translated tantric texts without becoming renowned for passing on his teachings, suggests that he did not see himself as destined to be a tantric master. His work in translating tantric materials must have been more aligned with the agenda of the Guge kings to maintain state control over tantric materials, thereby not leaving them open to personal interpretation.

Atiśa's role in the second Buddhism dissemination in Tibet during his relatively short time of stay in Tibet (1042–1054) is said to be according to the Tibetan tradition as enormously influential. However, the earliest known biographies of Atiśa, as Davidson and Roesler point out[21], reveal Atiśa's much less limited role than the Tibetan tradition attributes to him. Firstly, Atiśa wasn't allowed to ordain monks, participate in the ordination ceremonies, or teach his vinaya, because he followed different Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya than Tibetan monks who employed Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. Secondly, there are indications that in contrast to his warm reception in the Guge kingdom, during Atiśa's sojourns in Central Tibet (1046–1054), the local monk communities and

16 Ibid. 108.

17 Despite the fame of this story, it is historically inaccurate, stemming from the conflation of Ye shes 'od with his nephew, Lha lde (Cook 2018).

18 At some point in his reign, he was ordained as a monk.

19 Tucci 1988: 40–49.

20 Dalton 2011: 54.

21 Davidson 2004: 110–112; Roesler 2019.

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secular patrons were much more weary of Atiśa's presence, deeming him as a potential threat to already established or restored communities by the Eastern Vinaya monks.

Atiśa's travels in Central Tibet likely depended on his companion, 'Brom ston (1004– 1064), who organized the material base and the hosts for Atiśa's stays, and was retrospectively recognized as one of his most important Tibetan disciples.[22] After Atiśa's death, 'Brom ston founded the Rwa sgreng monastery and shaped the teaching curriculum to focus more on Mahāyāna sūtras and *śāstras* rather than on tantric teachings.[23] Over time, other monasteries – not necessarily established by 'Brom ston's disciples, as well as the tantric lineages of Bka' brgyud and Sa skya in their efforts to formalize institutionally – either adopted a similar educational approach or, in some other other way, were influenced by the Atiśa and 'Brom ston monastic tradition – Bka' gdams

Finally, let us consider the third piece of narrative about Mar pa and 'Brog mi. I group them together not only because Mar pa, in his youth, studied with 'Brog mi for three years, but also because both represent the new unorthodox, tantric-minded spirit among Tibetans during the *phyi dar* period. They were bold enough to travel to India to learn new tantric-yogic practices and disseminate them among Tibetans.[24] In doing so, they managed to defend the tantric-yogic tradition from the attacks by the monastic establishment by securing both Indian sanction of their validity and material support from minor political patrons who saw an opportunity to increase their power.

'Brog mi accepted ordination from the Eastern Vinaya monks' lineages and became a monk early in his life. He was one of only two individuals chosen from his monastery to go to India. According to the original plan of his Tibetan teachers, he was intended to study Vinaya and Prajñāpāramitā texts in India, rather than pursue the tantric path. However, during his stay in India, he found himself more drawn to tantric masters, although he also studied with non-tantric masters. After spending more than ten years abroad, he returned to Tibet and settled in the Mu gu lung area, south of Lha rtse, where he eventually renounced his monastic vows to marry.

Mu gu lung became a center of activity where 'Brog mi, along with tantric teachers from India, the most notable being Gayadhāra, worked on the translations of Indian tantric texts.[25] In total, nearly 70 works are credited to 'Brog mi in the Bka' 'gyur and Bstan 'gyur.[26] Although it is often impossible to verify whether these texts are true translations or what Davidson refers to as "gray texts" (discussed in the second section), 'Brog mi is remembered in Tibetan history as one of the greatest translators of tantric texts and as a key figure in transmitting the *lam 'bras* teachings that would become foundational to the Sakya school. 'Brog mi's public image, from the monastic perspective, may have been tarnished

22 Rai 2006: 165–167.

23 A conservative and restrained attitude towards tantra as understood by 'Brom ston is discussed by Rai (Ibid, p. 170–173).

24 Although Rin chen bzang po also travelled to India before them, he might have visited only Kashmir and not the main monasteries of Gangetic plain.

25 Davidson 2004: 163–183.

26 Zhāng 2015: 10–11.

by the fact that one of his teachers was the master Dmar po, also known as Prajñāgupta (Gayadhāra's public reputation was similarly unimpressive). He is criticized in Bka' gdams literature as one of the notorious tantric teachers, which prompted the Guge kings to invite Atiśa to Tibet.[27]

Mar pa is one of the most renowned Tibetan figures who features prominently not only in the *phyi dar* narrative but also in almost any discussion of Tibetan thought in general. He was responsible for introducing key tantric practices from India to Tibet that were previously unknown in the region but would later become very popular and characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism.

According to popular tradition, Mar pa made three extended visits to India, traveling through Nepal where he also spent considerable time. In total, he was outside Tibet for about twenty years. In India, he primarily studied under the guidance of tantric masters/yogis, most notably Nāropa and Maitrīpa. From Nāropa, he received teachings on the Highest Yoga Tantras, especially Hevajra and Guhyasamāja, as well as the practices known as the six dharmas of Nāropa (*na ro chos drug*). From Maitrīpa, he learned the Mahāmudrā (*phyag chen*) practice. Back in Tibet, Mar pa gathered many disciples and established himself as an authoritative Buddhist figure.[28] His authority stemmed not from monastic status or adherence to widely accepted institutional Buddhist practices, but from his enthusiastic embrace of the powerful Indian Buddhist tantric/yogic tradition.

A concluding note might be that, in Tibetan history, both 'Brog mi and Marpa are trailblazers for managing to leverage their authority as native Tibetan Buddhist masters independently of the central state support, which was the norm during the imperial period or even in the Guge kingdom. By traveling to India and then returning to Tibet, they secured material support for their teachings from local aristocracies, thereby creating lineages where secular and religious powers were intertwined.

3) Buddhist Orthodoxy as a Topic of Debate

Contrary to the early period of Buddhism's dissemination in Tibet, when it was under the aegis of the Tibetan kings who could influence which texts and practices would be normative, the later spread of Buddhism during the 11th-12th centuries occurred more haphazardly. In the *bar dar* and early *phyi dar*, many areas of Tibet experienced a power vacuum, which allowed for the emergence of divergent Buddhist practices.

In this section, I touch upon two concerns that had been among certain Buddhists of this period. First, I briefly look at the contested relationship between tantric practices, primarily the antinomian ones belonging to the *Anuttarayoga* tantras, and the monastic standards Mahāyāna morality. A subsidiary question is related to the first concern: Can a monastic who adheres to the vinaya also engage in those tantric practices? Secondly, I glimpse at the question of the legitimacy and authenticity of tantric Buddhist texts. Amidst the substantial influx of new texts into Tibet during

27 Davidson 2002: 216–217.

28 Ducher 2021.

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this period, discussions began concerning their authenticity and the criteria for determining genuine Buddhist scriptures.

With the collapse of the central government in Tibet, the form of Buddhism propagated by the Tibetan imperial court could no longer continue as before. Traditional Buddhist histories suggest that monasteries were shut down and monks were forced to renounce their monastic status and return to lay life. However, Buddhism extends beyond monasticism and monastics. What of the lay practitioners and the yogis/tantrics who do not necessarily adhere to a celibate lifestyle?

As hinted at by certain Tibetan texts from later times and contemporary texts from the early *phyi dar* period found in Dunhuang, Buddhism remained active at the popular lay level. It is known that during this time, there were active practitioners such as Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (9th-10th c.) who are associated with the Rnying ma tradition in later histories.[29] However, not rarely individuals mentioned in the sources about the "dark period" are portrayed negatively. For instance, there are mentions of a group led by the teacher Dmar po engaging in the practice of "drop of the path of passion" (*chags lam thig le*), or a group called *'ba' ji ba* that took control of some temples to perform their practices after the expulsion of the monks.[30] To illuminate the situation at the end of the 10th century, the classic reference is the ordinance (*bka' shog*) by King Ye shes 'od addressed to mantrins/tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*).

In this decree, the king denounces widespread antinomian tantric practices that contradict what is proper for Mahāyāna. Among the practices mentioned are "deliverance" (*sgrol*), which likely involved the sacrifice of animals or even humans; "sexual intercourse" (*sbyor*); rituals involving corpses (*bam sgrub*); and offerings to deities of feces and urine, among others. Another ordinance, issued by Ye shes 'od's successor, Zhi ba 'od, cautions his subjects by providing a list of spurious tantric texts – including those from Mar pa's transmission – allegedly forged by Tibetans.[31] It thus discourages trust in these texts and in tantric practices. Both ordinances demonstrate a reaction against the Mantrayāna path, aiming to keep its practice under stricter control.

Another almost contemporary historical witness that complements the historical picture, and in a way casts a shadow on the higher yoga tantras, is Atiśa's work, the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, along with its commentary. Commissioned by Ye shes 'od's grand-nephew, Byang chub 'od, Atiśa outlined three levels of Buddhist practice in his work. Most pertinently for our discussion, Atiśa advises that monastics who maintain their vows should avoid seeking initiations into the higher yoga tantras (referred to in the text as secret and insight initiations) because such initiations could seriously compromise a monk's celibacy. Although Atiśa does not dismiss the tantric path as a potential route for certain individuals, some passages in his text suggest that he clearly favors the monastic path

29 Dalton 2011: 52–54.

30 Karmay 1998: 6–7.

31 Ibid, p. 9–12; Karmay 1998b: 31–38.

and, in a spirit similar to that of the Guge kings, denounces the detrimental effects of higher yoga tantric practices[32].

Both ordinances and the work of Atiśa, one could argue, were peculiarities of Western Tibet and influenced by the royal court there (reflecting our second discourse). But what about the attitude of Central Tibetan monks toward tantra? There are indications that similar views existed among the Eastern Vinaya monks; however, the situation in Central Tibet was more complicated due to the absence of a single secular power center capable of imposing a uniform order. This political landscape allowed tantric practitioners and celibate monks to coexist. Nevertheless, in the "Pillar Testament" (allegedly discovered by Atiśa in Lhasa), there is a supposed prophecy by Srong btsan sgam po predicting times when monks would be persecuted and killed by tantric groups. Additionally, some later Tibetan histories hint at confrontations between the Eastern Vinaya monks and local tantric mantrins[33].

The thread of discourse that I have been unwinding thus far represents only the conservative monastic strand of Tibetan Buddhist culture. However, the voice of the tantric strand in the early times can be partially heard through an extant document called the "Charter of the Mantrins" (*Sngags pa'i bca' yig*) by the 11th-century Rnying ma master Rong zom chos kyi bzang po. In his text, where the rules of tantric morality are laid out, Rong zom draws a boundary between permissible conduct and actions that fall outside the scope of genuine tantric practitioners. Namely, mantrins do not engage in killing people, prostitution, or impure actions such as butchery, hunting, and banditry.[34] His work, along with other texts like *Dam tshig mdo rgyas*, paved the way in Tibet for what is known as the notion of "three vows" (*sdom gsum*). In other words, there was an effort to reconcile the possibility of adhering simultaneously not only to the monastic vows and the bodhisattva vows but also to the tantric commitments (even of *anuttarayoga* tantras). The writings on *sdom gsum* and the subsequent developments in Tibetan Buddhist schools, where tantra and monasticism become intricately intertwined, attest to at least a partial reconciliation of the two strands.[35]

The second point of contention between the monastic and tantric traditions pertains to the authenticity of certain Buddhist texts. As Davidson notes, there was an implicit expectation[36] in Tibet (one I would attribute to the monastic strand) that foundational Buddhist texts must originate from India to be deemed legitimate. Furthermore, these texts were expected to be transmitted to Tibet by Indian scholars who, in collaboration with Tibetan translators, would deeply engage with the text's ideas to ensure an accurate translation.[37]

However, the reality for many tantric texts was completely different from these expectations. Namely, many tantric scriptures from India are deliberately vague about

32 Sherburne 2000: 295, 301.

33 Davidson 2004: 105–107.

34 Sur 2017.

35 Sobisch 2002: 9–15.

36 Following standards that were already laid down in India.

37 Davidson 2002: 204–206.

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their place of composition and author. Often, these scriptures are portrayed as having been transmitted in mythical locations by legendary beings during primordial times. Consequently, determining precisely which tantras (and sometimes even sūtras) were forgeries and which were of Indian origin was an extremely difficult task.[38] Nonetheless, suspicions regarding the authenticity of tantric texts can be seen as early as the ordinance by Zhi ba ʻod. There, the tantric scriptures – most importantly, those of *rdzogs chen* belonging to the Rnying ma tradition – are allegedly stripped of their authority because they were authored by Tibetans.

Although no specific argument is provided in the ordinance regarding why the texts are considered forgeries, a written passage attributed to Rong zom presents an early Rnying ma response to common forgery accusations. First, he claims that Rnying ma tantric texts do not originate from his own time but from the Tibetan imperial period, when the great Tibetan kings, translators, and scholars operated at a completely different level of quality. Therefore, comparing them to the texts that were being translated from India during his time is inappropriate.

Secondly, he highlights that the material support for these translations and translators during imperial times was much more lavish, suggesting that, from this material perspective, the translations are trustworthy. Finally, he presents an ace up the sleeve: an argument challenging the primacy of India. Rong zom asserts that it is entirely normal for some Rnying ma tantras to have been unknown in India, as they were brought to Tibet directly by bodhisattvas, ḍākinīs, and other advanced masters from pure lands or other remote regions of Jambudvīpa.[39] Rong zom's response not only defends against the monastic establishment's critique but also counters the efforts of new tantric translators such as ʻBrog mi.

Finally, it is necessary to mention another category of texts that could further complicate the authenticity of *phyi dar* transmissions. Davidson refers to these as "grey texts." They cannot be classified as either authentic or inauthentic because they were composed by Indian masters in collaboration with Tibetan translators. These translators, to some extent, dictated to the Indian masters what was needed for a Tibetan audience. For instance, texts such as the B*odhipathapradīpa* and most of the works attributed to ʻBrog mi within the *Lam skor dgu* are technically "grey texts".[40] It is conceivable that Atiśa might have emphasized certain doctrinal points differently if not for the requests and pressure from Byang chub ʻod. Similarly, the *lam ʻbras* texts might have been different if ʻBrog mi had not so insistently sought teachings from Gayadhāra, compensating him with substantial amounts of gold.

Conclusions

Having examined the questions concerning the instrumental figures of the early *phyi dar* and the debates surrounding Buddhist

38 Ibid.

39 Schaeffer, K., Kapstein, M. and Tuttle, G. 2013: 187–188.

40 Davidson 2002: 211–218.

orthodoxy during the same period, one can draw the following conclusions:

1) The overall narrative of the early *phyi dar* period can be broken down into three main sub-narratives, representing the attitudes of the monastic-celibate, sūtra-oriented strand on one hand, and the lay tantric-yogic strand on the other, within Tibetan Buddhism.

The Eastern Vinaya monk narrative, together with the narrative about the lama-king of the Guge kingdom – Ye shes 'od, Rin chen bzang po and Atiśa– represent the monastic strand. The historical figures from both narratives seem to have been involved in reinvigorating and introducing order into what they perceived as the disarrayed religious situation in Tibet. Their efforts included restoring or consolidating monasticism and/or suppressing or moderating the previously rampant tantric-yogic teachings.

The narrative surrounding Mar pa and 'Brog mi, on the other hand, represents the tantric-yogic strand reasserting itself against the attacks from the monastic side. Both teachers imported various tantric practices from India that solidified the role of tantra in the future of Tibetan Buddhism.

2) The debates surrounding Buddhist orthodoxy during this period hinged on the same divide between the monastic and tantric strands. The monastic strand criticized the antinomian practices associated with the higher yoga tantras and sought to restrict their use to a supplementary role.

On the other hand, representatives of the tantric strand, such as Rong zom, attempted to defend the legitimacy of tantric practices by distancing themselves from the more extreme practitioners and defining their practices with clearer ethical guidelines. Over time, this led to a discourse about "three vows" (*sdom gsum*) becoming prevalent in Tibet, suggesting that even monastics could engage in higher tantra without violating their vows.

The authenticity of many tantric texts was also challenged due to suspicions of forgery. The responses from the tantric strand to these challenges included assertions that these texts did not necessarily need a clear Indian origin to be considered legitimate. Texts could attain legitimacy simply by being transmitted and endorsed by authoritative figures and translators, one example being the genre of "grey texts".

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