Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism

This series was conceived to provide a forum for publishing outstanding new contributions to scholarship on Indian and Tibetan Buddhism and also to make accessible seminal research not widely known outside a narrow specialist audience, including translations of appropriate monographs and collections of articles from other languages. The series strives to shed light on the Indic Buddhist traditions by exposing them to historical-critical inquiry, illuminating through contextualization and analysis these traditions’ unique heritage and the significance of their contribution to the world’s religious and philosophical achievements.

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Contents

Preface ix
Introduction 1

1. Places and Pilgrimage

Lowo Khchenchen (1456–1532) and the Buddhist Pilgrimage to the Arya Wati Zangpo 15
Franz-Karl Ehrhard

The Mural Paintings of the Svayambhūpurāṇa at the Shrine of Śāntipur and Their Origins with Pratāpā Malla 45
Alexander von Rospatt

Redacting Sacred Landscape in Nepal: The Vicissitudes of Yolmo’s Tiger Cave Lion Fortress 69
Andrew Quintman

When Vehicles Collide: A Tibetan in Sri Lanka, 1941 97
Donald S. Lopez Jr.

2. Texts and Manuscripts

Some Text-Historical Issues with the Bodhicittavivarana by a Nāgārjuna and the Tibetan Commentarial Literature 117
Leonard W. J. van der Kuijff

Lha luṅ dPal rdo’s “Soul Stone” at Yer pa—in Full View 143
Ernst Steinkeßner

Preliminary Remarks on a Newly Discovered Biography of Nupchen Sangye Yeshé 145
Jacob P. Dalton
3. Ritual and Visual Traditions

Envisioning Durjayacandra's Saptākṣarasādhana: On the Sources and Sponsors of a Twelfth-Century Painting of Seven-Syllabled Śaṇvāra

Iain Sinclair 205

Representing Mahaćaitya Svayambhū in Painting

Anne Vergati 251

Gods and Superheroes: Some Thoughts on Contemporary Tibetan Art

Kabir Mani Singh Hersath 263

4. Histories and transmissions

Vanaratna and His Activities in Fifteenth-Century Nepal

Punya Prasad Parajuli 289

Epistles of Interdependence: Preliminary Reflections on the Fifth Dalai Lama’s Letters to Terdak Lingpa

Dominique Townsend 301

The Red and Yellow War: Dispatches from the Field

Benjamin Bogin 319

Contributors 343
Lha luṅ dPal rdor’s “Soul Stone” at Yer pa—in Full View
Ernst Steinkellner

Looking at plate 4 of the 2009 publication of Old Tibetan Inscriptions (OTI), a photo of “The Yer pa tablet” provided by Brandon Dotson, I was disappointed with the incompleteness of the documentation: only two sides of the stone have been reproduced. Although the text of all four sides is duly transliterated on page 54, the chance for comprehensiveness was missed in this first documentation of this hitherto unknown epigraphic monument.

Moreover, this small monument cannot really be called a “tablet.” In all likelihood it is rather the base of a column that presumably had been made of wood. The plinth has a lower section with vines carved in relief that is separated by a flat carved band from a cube-shaped upper section, which has two lines of inscription on all four sides. One edge of the upper section is broken off, which has caused a bit of damage to the beginning and end of inscriptions D and C respectively.

On May 29, 1994, I visited the hermitage in the cliffs of Brag Yer pa together with Heather Stoddard and Pasang Wangdu. When we inspected the meditation cave traditionally known as the cave of Lha luṅ dPal gyi rdö rje, we discovered this stone relic. The discovery was reported to the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences, and a photo of side A was subsequently published. I assumed that the stone was later transferred to the new Tibet

1. This contribution to celebrating Hubert Decleer’s efforts in bringing the Himalayan past alive again is but a modest gesture of my sincere admiration of his work and humanity.
2. I follow the OTI’s identification of the inscriptions as A, B, C, and D.
3. Cf. de Rossi Filibek 1984 for a survey of the Yer pa’s ḏkar chag.
Museum in Lhasa, but Pasang Wángdu recently informed me (email October 1, 2010) that the relic is still kept in its place in the meditation cave at Brag Yet pa.

The four sides of the stone contain four names, respectively. Except for the well-known dPal gyi rdo rje, we were unable to find more information about the other three persons named on the stone, despite my own weak efforts and Stoddard's expert investigations. Although the names are now known from OTI's edition, for whatever reason Brandon Dotson did not provide the photos of the stone's remaining two sides. In order to fill this gap of documentation, as well as to honor the memory of all four persons once respected for mostly still unknown reasons by transmitting their names to posterity, I here present the photos of all four sides taken on the occasion of our visit (plates 13–16).

Bibliography


Preliminary Remarks on a Newly Discovered Biography of Nupchen Sangye Yeshe

Jacob P. Dalton

HUBERT DECLEER has imparted to me many things, foremost a sense of his romantic approach to scholarship. His storytelling brings Tibetan history to life and has left me and many others eager to discover what new secrets the texts of Tibetan Buddhism might hold. Hubert can always transform what might otherwise seem dry historical research into a case worthy of Sherlock Holmes. With many thanks for all his inspiration over the years, I dedicate this paper to Hubert. opportunely, it is a paper that touches on several topics relevant to his own "work," from Tibetans' biographical accounts of their visits to Nepal, to the ritual traditions of Yamantaka.

Introduction to the Text

The late ninth to early tenth-century master Nupchen Sangye Yeshe (Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes) has played a significant role in the Tibetan imagination.1 Accused by some of charlatanry and faking Indian texts, he has been

1. My translation of, and some further accompanying notes on, the (auto)biography discussed herein is forthcoming.

2. Gnubs chen's dates have been the cause of some debate. Karmay 1998, 99–103, and Vitali 1996, 546–47, provide good discussions of some of the key sources. Against the common view within the tradition that Gnubs chen was a student of Padmasambhava and therefore born in the eighth century, Karmay concludes that Gnubs chen's Bsam gtsan mig gron should be dated to the late tenth century. Vitali, however, arrives at somewhat earlier dates, with a birth date of 844, which in turn would give an early-tenth-century date for the Bsam gtsan mig gron. Vitali calculates his date on the basis of Padma 'phrin las's seventeenth-century biography, which (as we shall see) is largely based on the Rigya bo che that is the subject of the