

Kālacakra-mūla-tantra Section Rediscovered

A large section of the otherwise lost *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra* has now been rediscovered. It is approximately three times as large as the only other section known, the *Sekoddeśa*. It is the *Para-guru-guṇa-dhara* section, the section on “the good qualities possessed by the best guru.” This text is itself called a tantra in the one manuscript we now have, the *Para-guru-guṇa-dhara-nāma-tantra*, since the tantra it comes from is not extant. Perhaps this title is the reason why it does not yet seem to have been noticed as a section of the *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra*, although it became available in 2014. It had been out of circulation for centuries. What led me to it was a quoted verse that for long I could not trace.

An intriguing verse from the *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra* was quoted by the 16th-century Kagyu writer Dakpo Tashi Namgyal (dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal) in his well-known text on meditation, *Phyag chen zla ba'i 'od zer*, “Mahāmudrā, the Moonlight,” or “Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā.” This text was translated into English by Lobsang P. Lhalugpa and published in 1986 as *Mahāmudrā: The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation*, by Takpo Tashi Namgyal (second edition published in 2006 as *Mahāmudrā, The Moonlight: Quintessence of Mind and Meditation*, by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal). The verse is there introduced as “The *Kālacakra-mūlatantra* states:” and is translated as follows (p. 181; 2nd ed. p. 183):

The innate mind of sentient beings is luminous clarity;
From the beginning it is detached
From the absolute attributes of arising, ceasing, and settling.
Since beginningless time it has been the primordial supreme Buddha,
Because it has been unmodulated by cause and condition.

The “innate mind” is equated with “luminous clarity” (which obviously translates the Tibetan *'od gsal*, Sanskrit *prabhāsvara*) and with the “primordial supreme Buddha” (which is obviously the *ādi-buddha* or *paramādi-buddha*). What is the Tibetan or Sanskrit term for this “innate mind” that is also luminosity (or the clear light) and the *ādi-buddha*, I wondered. Is it also in the extant shorter (*laghu*) *Kālacakra-tantra* or its *Vimala-prabhā* commentary? The Tibetan text of this verse could be found in the 1978 publication, *Nes don phyag rgya chen po'i sgom rim gsal bar byed pa'i legs bsad zla ba'i 'od zer*, or in short, *Phyag chen zla ba'i 'od zer*, by Dwags-po Pan-chen Bkra-śis-rnam-rgyal, “reproduced from rare prints from the Dwags-lha Sgam-po blocks” (published at Bir, H.P., by D. Tsondu Senghe), folio side 169, lines 2-3:

dus 'khor rtsa rgyud las |
sems can sems nyid 'od gsal zhing |
gdod nas skye 'gag gnas bral te |
thog ma med pa'i sngon rol nas |
dang po mchog gi sangs rgyas te |
rgyu med rkyen gyis ma bslad pa |

Having the Tibetan text of this verse meant that it was possible to try to locate its source. So I checked the only known section of the *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra*, the *Sekoddeśa*, which consists of 174 verses, all of the *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra* quotations found in the *Vimala-prabhā* commentary, and in the other two texts of the so-called *bodhisattva-piṭaka* written by the bodhisattva kings of Sambhala, the *Laghu-tantra-ṭīkā* and the *Hevajra-piṇḍārtha-ṭīkā*, and also in Nāropā's *Sekoddeśa-ṭīkā*. I then asked the late Edward Henning to check the large database of Tibetan Kālacakra texts that he had assembled. I even checked the extant (*laghu*) *Kālacakra-tantra* for good measure, even though the meter is quite different. No results in any of these sources. Yet I knew that Dakpo Tashi Namgyal would not just make up this verse. It had to exist somewhere.

In recent years the former Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, now the Buddhist Digital Resource Center, has been assembling a very large database of electronically searchable Tibetan texts, including the entire Kangyur and Tengyur. A contact regarding the *ādi-buddha* at the 2017 Translation and Transmission Conference reminded me of my old search, so after I returned home I searched the BDRC database for this verse. It was nowhere found in the Kangyur or Tengyur, but it appeared in the collected writings (*gsung 'bum*) of Gampopa (sgam po pa, 1079-1153), founding father of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. It was quoted twice by Gampopa in his *Bstan bcos lung gi nyi 'od*, “Sunshine of Treatises and Scriptures,” first as from the *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra* (*dus 'khor rtsa rgyud* du), and then (with two additional preceding lines) as from the *Bla ma'i yon tan yongs su bzung ba'i rgyud*. With this latter title, the text could be traced.

The *Bla ma'i yon tan yongs su bzung ba'i rgyud* is found in the collection of Kālacakra texts called *Dus 'khor phyogs bsgrigs chen mo*, volume 4, pages 583-639. This set was published in Lhasa in 2012, although it did not become available until 2014. The first seven volumes of this set consist of Tibetan translations of Sanskrit texts, being either different translations than the ones found in the Kangyur and Tengyur, or in a few cases (such as this one) different texts that are not found there. Most of these texts (including this one) had been gathered from other monasteries and sealed away in the Nechu temple at

Drepung Monastery around the 1650s under the direction of the Fifth Dalai Lama. They remained sealed away there until very recently (see the “Drepung catalogue,” 2 vols., 2004, where the *Bla ma'i yon tan yongs su bzung ba'i rgyud* is no. 944, vol. 1, p. 105).

The opening page of the *Bla ma'i yon tan yongs su bzung ba'i rgyud* gives the original Sanskrit title, which as slightly corrected by me is *Para-guru-guṇa-dhara-nāma-tantra*. This is followed by a Tibetan title, differing somewhat from the one found on the title page, that more closely matches the Sanskrit title: *Gtso bo[r] bla ma'i yon tan bzung pa zhes bya ba'i rgyud*. Still nothing tells us that this text is from the *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra*. Although this volume had been on my shelf since 2015, I had never checked the colophon.

The colophon on the last page (folio side 639, lines 3-4) tells us that this text, there titled *Gtso bor bla ma'i yon tan bzung pa*, was extracted from the *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra* (whose proper name is the *Paramādi-buddha*): *dpal dang po mchog gi sangs rgyas rtsa ba'i rgyud chen po nas 'byung pa*. It also tells us that this text is a separate section of the tantra: *bkol ba dum bu'i rgyud*. The verse quoted from it first by Gampopa when this text was still available in Tibet, and then probably quoted from him by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal four centuries later when this text was no longer available there, is found near the beginning on folio sides 584-585. At last the verse quoted from the *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra* that I had long ago seen in Lobsang Lhalungpa's translation of Dakpo Tashi Namgyal's text had been traced to its source. The source turned out to be a long lost section of the *Kālacakra-mūla-tantra*, and it has recently become available again.

by David Reigle

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