

LETTER FROM BUDDHAGUHYA

rJe 'bangs dang bod btsun rnam la spring yig

Bhotasvāmidālekha

INTRODUCTION

Buddhaguhya was an Indian master, known in Tibetan as Sangs rgyas gsang ba. Based in Varanasi, he was invited by Tri Song Detsen (Khri srong lde'u btsan) to go to Tibet, but was unable to do so, so he wrote the king a letter, known as the *Bhoṭasvāmidāsālekha*. This letter is addressed to the king, his people, and the Tibetan clerics, with instructions about how to behave and descriptions of ideal models for the king, ministers, and different levels of monks. It was apparently composed between 780 and 790, after the ordination of the first Tibetan monks but before the Samye debate (Dietz 1984). A version has been preserved in the Tibetan Tenjur (bsTan 'gyur) scripture commentaries, although it is also generally acknowledged that some parts of this text must have been composed later (Karmay 1998: 25; Davidson 2005: 22, n.1)

The text can be divided into 76 stanzas of four to five lines of nine syllables each.

The Prologue addresses Tri Song Detsen and praises his ancestry. It attributes the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet to Khri rje thog bstan, father of the fifth-century Lha tho tho ri.

Sources

bsTan 'gyur (Tenjur), Dpe bsdur ma edition. 1994–2008. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, Vol. 96, pp. 943–55.

TBRC: W1PD95844

[Modern edition]

bsTan 'gyur (Tenjur), sDe dge edition (18th century), Vol. 173 (*nge*), folios 135r–139r.

TOH 4194.

TBRC: W23703, vol. 173, pp.271–79.

[Xylograph edition]

References

Davidson, Ronald M. 2005. *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*.

New York: Columbia University Press.

Dietz, Siglinde. 1984. *Die Buddhistische Briefliteratur Indiens*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, pp. 79–

85, 358–99.

Karmay, Samten. 1988. *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals, and Beliefs in Tibet*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.

Stein, R.A. 1986. *Tibetica Antiqua IV: La Tradition Relative au Début du Bouddhisme au Tibet*. *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient*. 74: 169–196 (at p. 185).

OUTLINE

- 1 Prologue (10 stanzas)
- 2 Instructions to kings (26 stanzas)
- 3 Instructions to ministers (14 stanzas)
- 4 Instructions to high ranking monks (6 stanzas)
- 5 Instructions to lower ranking monks (20 stanzas).

EXTRACTS

Prologue

[Tenjur Modern ed, vol. 96, p. 943; Tenjur Xylograph ed, vol. 173, fol. 135r.]

།འཕགས་པ་འཇམ་དབལ་ལ་ཕྱག་འཚམ་ལོ།

I offer my respects to 'Phags pa 'jam dpal (Ārya Mañjuśrī)

།བོད་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་བུ་མགོ་ནག་ཡོངས་ཀྱི་རྗེ།

།ཁྱི་སྟོང་ལྷུང་བཙན་མག་ཚམ་མེས་ཀྱི་སྲས།

།རྒྱུང་ནམ་འཕམ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་པོའི་དཔོན་པོ་ཡི།

།སྟོང་བཙན་སྐམ་པོ་སྐྱེན་རས་གཟིགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ།

།བྱང་རྒྱལ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུད་གསུང་མ་ཚད།

O Tibetan sPu rgyal, lord of the black-haired ones,

Khri srong lde'u btsan, son of Ag mes,

Grandson of King rLung nam 'phrul,

Srong btsan sgam po, with the form of sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara),

Bodhisattva of an unbroken lineage.

།འཕྱོ་རྒྱལ་ནང་ན་ཤེས་རིག་ཆེ་བའི་མི།

།དུག་ལྷ་སྟོང་པོ་རྒྱུད་རྒྱལ་ཀུན་གྱི་གཞི།

།ཁྱི་རྗེ་སྟོང་བཙན་མན་ཚད་བརྒྱུད་མ་ཡིན།

།དགེ་བཅུ་ཐང་ཁྲིམས་བཅུགས་ནས་དུལ་བར་མཛད།།

You, with superior knowledge among the six types of beings,
The trunk of the five poisons and the basis of all six realms of existence,
Of the lineage of Khri rje thog btsan,
Having established the laws of the ten virtues (*dge bcu thang khrim*s) [the realm] has been
pacified [or, ‘all have been tamed’].

The text continues by relating how Śākyamuni went to Bodhgaya and taught the three Piṭakas, which eventually enabled Tri Song Detsen to open a window onto the darkness. Subsequently a number of wise men were converted to Buddhism and the influence of the religion grew. In order to effect further conversions, the king sent a number of scholars to learn the Indian language.

[Tenjur Modern ed, vol. 96, p. 944; Tenjur Xylograph ed, vol. 173, fol. 135v.]

མིང་གྱི་ཚབ་སྲིད་མངའ་ཐང་དགུང་ལ་རྟེན།།

།བུ་རྒྱ་གུ་བདག་དངོས་ལྷོ་བ་དགའ།།

།ཚབ་སྲིད་ཡོ་བ་ཀུན་གྱི་གཞུང་སྲོང་ཞིང་།།

།སྤུལ་པའི་རྒྱུད་མ་ཚད་པའི་ནང་ན་ལྷེ།།

Since you have achieved the height of worldly power in the kingdom,
Buddhaguhya is truly delighted.
You have corrected [the behaviour of] all deceitful people in the realm,
You are from an unbroken line of incarnations.

།ཁྲི་སྲོང་ལྷེ་འཕེལ་བཅོན་མངའ་བདག་ཞལ་ལྷ་ནས།།

།མི་ཚོས་ལྷ་ཚོས་མངའ་ཐང་ལྷེ་རྩ་ཚེབས།།

།རིན་ཆེན་འབར་བའི་སྤྱི་ཡི་ཡུང་པོ་ལ།།

།རྒྱུང་མཁྲིས་བད་ཀན་འདུས་པའི་ནང་ཆེན་དང་།།

།སྟོང་ཕྱག་བརྒྱད་ཅུའི་བཤེགས་ཀྱིས་མ་བཅོལ་བར།།

།འཇམ་དབལ་དང་ནི་སྤྱི་རི་ཏ་ལ་ཁུམས།།

Lord Khri srong lde’u bstan, you have said,
“Ride to the supreme authority of the worldly and divine customs (*mi chos lha chos*),
Whose richly resplendent body,
Is not afflicted by the great illnesses caused by the combination of wind, bile, and phlegm,
Or by the 80,000 obstructive demons”,
To ’Jam dpal (Mañjuśrī) and Mu ri ta (Murita).

This section concludes with Buddhaghya lamenting that he does not have the strength to travel to Tibet, in response to the invitation of Tri Song Detsen.