
The Imaginal Persistence of the Empire

*Even a man who is fond of myths is in a way a
philosopher, since a myth is made up of wonders.*

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.2.

The Truth of Myth

Throughout this book I have steered a shifting course, tacking between systematic and narrative thought,¹ or, to put it differently, between philosophy and myth. In this final section I shall follow the same route once again, beginning in this and the following chapter with some of the mythic aspects of the rediscovered treasures and related texts, but turning later to aspects of systematic thought which they embody as well.

The relationship between philosophical and mythic modes of thought often seems problematic, and one may feel that the question "What is the relationship between philosophy and myth?" if not actually ill formed, is somehow fishy.² That there does sometimes appear to be a peculiar relationship between myth and philosophical or scientific reason, however, is underscored when we turn to some now generally discredited theories of myth, for instance, Sir James Frazer's view that myth is "false science." Many, probably most, contemporary folklorists would insist that, regardless of the actual truth or falsehood of a myth, assuming that to be capable of determination even in principle, the community in which a myth is transmitted traditionally regards it to be in some sense true. Given Frazer's assumptions, we can only conclude that myths are false explanations that are nonetheless taken to be true, for if they were thought to be false they would no longer be myths. Indeed, this explains quite well a very common use of the term "myth" in contemporary English: for instance, if one says, "It's a myth that you can get AIDS from a handshake."³

While Frazer's view of myth as false explanation is no longer much adhered to by those who make it their business to specialize in the study of myth, there are nevertheless two points made in this connection that I think should be underscored here: first, that what we term "myth" may often have a special relationship to reason, above all to reasoned explanation, that neither legend nor folktale generally has; second, that we should attend carefully to the question of the truth-value of myths. An additional point that I shall seek to emphasize in this and the following chapters relates to the common characterization of myths as narratives concerned with sacred history.

In its explanatory dimension, myth engages reason by disclosing as intelligible what had otherwise seemed mysterious, and by motivating appropriate human behavior in the light of what is thus explained, at least whenever the proper ordering of human agency is part of the mystery to be made intelligible, as it is in many important myths. For example, what we may term the “myth of our technological hubris” tells a certain community of believers among us that the mystery of much human misery may be understood with reference to humanity’s overreaching itself and sacrificing an essential, vitalizing harmony with nature in the course of a self-defeating and obsessive drive to attain control of nature. Apart from the truth or falsehood of any particular claims advanced in this connection, the believer may assert that, in the light of this myth, much of human misery is revealed to be an intelligible phenomenon, and so he or she may be motivated to contribute to the alleviation of suffering by assisting in the effort to refrain from and limit our abuse of nature through technology. This, in turn, may or may not require that the believer master certain specific information about history or physical science.⁴

The same points might just as well be made with reference to traditional myth narratives. Consider, for example, one of the myths that is told in connection with the cult of Bhāṭbhaṭinī, a deified minstrel couple widely worshipped by the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal:

Bhaṭinī, like Hāritī, had a taste for human flesh. But Viṣṇu, by means of Garuḍa, seized one of Bhaṭinī’s own beloved brood, restoring it only on the ogress’ promise to fore-swear human flesh and to become instead a protector of children. It is apparently in this role that the blessing of Bhāṭbhaṭinī is invoked by parents of children thought to be bewitched or to be suffering from mental or physical disease.⁵

So long as there is a community affirming the authority of this myth, its members will continue to propitiate the minstrel couple to alleviate the illnesses of their children, and they will do so reasonably so long as the myth is not falsified for them in practice, as it might be if *they* were to conclude, for instance, that recovery of health was notably less likely for children of Bhāṭbhaṭinī worshipers than among the children of other Kathmandu Newars. But this would likely be the case only if their worship precluded their recourse to other treatment, whereas in fact it may just as well motivate the search for alternatives; the discovery of the right doctor may be taken as a token of the deity’s blessing no less than a miracle cure.

Reflection upon such relationships between mythic explanation and motivated action further calls into question the truth of myths. It may seem that in a certain sense this shows truth to be essentially irrelevant here, that the open-ended potentialities for artful interpretation render myth unfalsifiable. The myths that a given community considers authoritative need not be thought to be true in the sense that they convey demonstrably true “factual” information: mythic matters seem to be more subtle than the facts of the matter, so that the truth in myth may be thought to be expressed allegorically, metaphorically or approximatively; or myth may be thought just to orient us towards truth so buried in mystery that no human discourse can disclose it directly. The truth in myth is thus conceived as veiled and obscure truth, and this, of course, reinforces for some the conclusion that myths somehow stand outside of the domain of truth-value altogether.

That conclusion, however, I believe to be wrong. For myth-truth, while not factual truth, is perhaps allied to pragmatic truth in something approaching a Jamesian sense.⁶ A myth is felt to be true whenever it functions in the discourse of a community to ground action that is itself felt to bring about the success of that community, or of its individual members. It may thus be said to be true to the extent that it is felt by those who yield to its authority to promote ends that are not self-defeating. This is very well illustrated by some aspects of the recent disputes within the Tibetan community concerning the status of the protective divinity Dorje Shugden, whose cult the Dalai Lama in recent years has sought to ban.⁷

Among the members of the Tibetan business community in Kathmandu, Dorje Shugden is widely propitiated as a divine bestower of wealth. Because Tibetans in Kathmandu have in fact flourished during the past couple of decades, growing rich through success in the tourist and crafts-export trades, the Dalai Lama’s calls to abandon the Shugden cult have caused no small degree of consternation: the deity, after all, appears to be promoting the ends for which he is propitiated. The Dalai Lama, however, regarding matters from a clerical perspective, is more focused upon the role of Shugden as a militantly sectarian protector of the Gelukpa order, and the harm that has been done to Tibetan sectarian relations by the cult’s more vociferous proponents. As sectarian strife appears to undermine the interests of the Tibetan community at large, the Dalai Lama and those who perceive the issue as he does have concluded that the cult is now a self-defeating one, and that it should therefore be set aside. This, of course, leaves some of the businesspeople who are supporters of the Dalai Lama in a position of inner conflict: their loyalty to their leader requires them to obey him, but at the same time, because they have prospered while worshiping Shugden, they find it difficult to accept that this practice has been in any sense self-defeating.

Because it is probably impossible to remove the determination of human ends and their successful fulfillment entirely from the domain of appearances, myth-truth cannot itself be more than a matter of seeming, but to say this is not to say that truth-value is irrelevant here; for the possibility of self-defeat entails that a myth may be in the course of a community’s history revealed to be false to the very community that, at an earlier time, had affirmed it. And, as we have now seen, if differing factions within the same community arrive at opposing conclusions about this, the assessment of myth may become a cause for sharp division.

The truth of myth, then, is essentially tied to a community’s history, and successful mythmakers may be said to know this. For even when, as is the case of the materials we shall examine in chapters 9 and 10, the time in which the events narrated in myth stand outside of historical time, it is nonetheless historical and lived time—whether some of its particular features or the whole thereof—that is explained and interpreted through myth. Myth is in this respect metahistorical discourse and so may sometimes emerge as a powerful medium for philosophical and scientific thought: consider here the myths of the state of nature and the social contract in political philosophy since Hobbes, or that of the primal horde in the thought of Freud.⁸

Myths, therefore, engage our thinking in reason, truth, and history, and so they express and constitute the thinker’s vision of these domains, and of the manner in which they are related to one another. For this reason, it seems to me to be an

error to associate mythical thinking too strongly with the “primitive” or the “archaic.” Mythic discourse, as I understand it here, is part of the essential constitution of human discourse, though its precise role and value, and above all the specific manner of its articulation, may vary from one cultural-historical setting to another.

Of course, “myth,” as I am using the word here, refers not exclusively to a particular discourse genre, but rather to any discourse that performs functions closely similar to those of the paradigmatic myths that do represent a type of narrative. This is a derivative way of using the term “myth,” and one that I shall continue to employ from time to time, though it should not be conflated with the more primary signification of the term, which refers to a particular narrative category. In the two cases studied in the present chapter—the religious traditions that evolved in part from the earlier historical accounts of the great emperors Songtsen Gampo (c. 617–649/650) and Trhi Songdetsen (742–c. 797)—epic narratives buttressed a vast corpus of nonnarrative literature. These included works on morals, meditation, all sorts of ritual, and Buddhist doctrine, that in turn contributed to the ongoing elaborations of the mythic constructions to which they belonged.

The Most Compassionate King

The *Maṇi bka'-'bum* (Maṇi Kambum),⁹ a heterogeneous collection of texts ascribed to King Songtsen Gampo and primarily concerned with the cult of the bodhisattva Mahākāruṇika-Avalokiteśvara, the “Great Compassionate Avalokiteśvara,”¹⁰ has enjoyed a singularly long history of study in the West.¹¹ As early as 1801, P. S. Pallas had published an account of its first chapters, and, in 1838, the intrepid Magyar scholar Alexander Csoma de Kőrös mentioned it by name among Tibetan historical works, thereby creating the false impression that the Maṇi Kambum might be regarded as such.¹² A. I. Vostrikov, writing some one hundred years later, sought to provide a more accurate assessment of the Maṇi Kambum, saying that it

contains much interesting material from the point of view of literature and folklore. Its fairly frequent deviations from the dominant views of Tibetan Buddhism are of great interest. As a historical source, however, it is of absolutely no value and cannot be classed under historical works.¹³

More recently, Ariane Macdonald has reported briefly on her investigations concerning the contents and compilation of the Maṇi Kambum as a prelude to the study of the legendary biographies of Songtsen Gampo found therein, for, as she observes, it is the historico-legendary aspect of the Maṇi Kambum that has held the attention of occidental scholars.¹⁴ These aspects of the Maṇi Kambum have continued to be examined by Michael Aris and others, and traditions concerning one of the key figures involved in its early compilation, by Anne-Marie Blondeau.¹⁵ In the present survey of the Maṇi Kambum and its allied literature, I emphasize three aspects of this important body of material: the history of the Maṇi Kambum’s compilation; its significance for the development of a Tibetan worldview; and its peculiar approach to the problems of Buddhist theory and practice.

Compiling the Treasures

The Maṇi Kambum is usually divided into three “cycles” (*skor*):

1. *The Cycle of Sūtras* (*mdo-skor*), which includes various legendary accounts of the exploits of Avalokiteśvara and of King Songtsen Gampo;
2. *The Cycle of Attainment* (*sgrub-skor*), which contains the meditational “means for attainment” (*sgrub-thabs*, Skt. *sādhana*) of Avalokiteśvara in various aspects; and
3. *The Cycle of Precepts* (*zhal-gdams-kyi skor*), containing some 150 short texts treating a wide variety of topics, most of which are connected in some way with the systems of meditation focusing upon Mahākāruṇika.¹⁶

Further, there is a small collection of texts, sometimes referred to as the *Cycle of the Disclosure of the Hidden* (*gab-pa mngon-phyung gi skor*)—after the most renowned of the works found therein—which in some redactions of the Maṇi Kambum is appended to the *Cycle of Precepts*, and in others forms by itself a fourth cycle, an appendix to the entire collection.¹⁷

This entire mass of material—usually assembled in two volumes containing about 700 folios in all—was discovered as textual treasure (*gter-ma*) by some three treasure-revealers (*gter-ston*) over a period lasting approximately one century, beginning, it appears, in the middle of the twelfth. The Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lozang Gyatso (1617–1682), himself a great contributor to the tradition of revealed treasures,¹⁸ has summarized its compilation in these words:

The dharma-protecting king Songtsen Gampo taught the doctrinal cycles (*chos-skor*) of Mahākāruṇika to disciples endowed with [appropriate propensities owing to their own past] actions and fortunate circumstances¹⁹ and had the cycles set down in writing. The *Great Chronicle* (*Lo-rgyus chen-mo*), which comes from the *Cycle of Sūtras*, was concealed together with the *Cycle of Attainment* and the *Cycle of Precepts* beneath the feet of Hayagrīva, in the northern quarter of the central hall [in the Lhasa Jo-khang temple].²⁰ Some, including the *Disclosure of the Hidden* and [the remaining portions of] the *Cycle of Sūtras*, were concealed in the right thigh of the *yakṣa* Nāga-Kubera, beneath the hem of his gown.²¹ The glorious and great Orgyen [Padmasambhava] clearly revealed them to Lord Trhi Songdetsen, saying, “Your own ancestor Songtsen Gampo has concealed such treasures in Ra-sa [Lhasa].” Thereupon, [the king] gained faith and made the *Means for the Attainment of the Thousand-fold Mahākāruṇika*, the *Disclosure of the Hidden*, the *Creation and Consummation of the Thousand Buddhas*, the *Benefits of Beholding* [Songtsen Gampo’s] *Spiritual Bond* [that is, the Jowo Śākyamuni image of Lhasa], and *Songtsen’s Last Testament* into [his own] spiritual bonds.²²

Later, the *siddha* Ngödrup—a yogin who was taken into the following of Mahākāruṇika [by the deity himself],²³ and who lived in the human world for about 300 years—drew forth the *Cycle of Attainment* from beneath the feet of the Hayagrīva in the northern quarter of the central hall and transmitted it to Lord Nyang[rel Nyima Özer, 1124–1192],²⁴ the incarnation of Tshangpa Lheimetog [King Trhi Songdetsen]. Lord [Nyang] brought the *Cycle of Precepts* out from beneath the feet of Hayagrīva. Shākyawö, [who is also known as Shākya] Zangpo, a teacher from Lhasa in the central province, [later] brought forth the *Cycle of Sūtras*, as well as the *Disclosure of the Hidden* and so on, from the *yakṣa*-shrine. So it was that this doctrinal cycle had

three discoverers. Nonetheless, it is renowned as the treasure of the venerable siddha Ngödrup, for he was foremost [among them]. For that reason, I have not here written [about the Mañi Kambum] in the sections devoted to the doctrinal cycles of the other two treasure-discoverers but have placed [all their discoveries belonging to the Mañi Kambum] together at this juncture.²⁵

The Great Fifth later reinforces his case for insisting upon the preeminence of the siddha Ngödrup among the revealers of the Mañi Kambum. Speaking of the *Great Chronicle* he tells us that the location in which it was concealed (*gter-gnas*, that is, under the feet of the Hayagrīva image) suggests it to have been among the treasures discovered by Ngödrup.²⁶ The attribution of the *Cycle of Sūtras* to Shākyawö, then, must refer to only four of the remaining texts in that section.²⁷ The Dalai Lama does not mention that one of the texts forming the Mañi Kambum, the *Great Explanatory Commentary*, the colophon of which clearly attributes its discovery to Ngödrup and which belongs to the *Cycle of Attainment*, also refers explicitly to the *Great Chronicle*.²⁸ His hypothesis that the discovery of this latter text, or perhaps an earlier version thereof, preceded Shākyawö's discoveries may be cautiously accepted.

In sum, then, the siddha Ngödrup would seem to have discovered the original kernel of the Mañi Kambum, consisting of a version of the *Great Chronicle*, the *Great Explanatory Commentary*, and at least three other texts included in the *Cycle of Attainment*, which are explicitly referred to in the *Commentary*.²⁹ It is by no means improbable that this treasure-revealer also disclosed at least some of the remaining works of the *Cycle of Attainment* as well, though the evidence on this point is inconclusive.

There is perhaps no reason to contradict the tradition that Nyangrel Nyima Özer increased this original body of material with the discovery of the *Cycle of Precepts*.³⁰ More problematic, however, is the contribution of Shākyawö, who, as a student of Nyang's disciple Mikyö Dorje of Latö, probably belongs to the early or mid-thirteenth century.³¹ One text from the *Cycle of the Disclosure of the Hidden* is clearly attributed to him, the colophon of which states that it is but one of several works discovered together.³² The opinion of the Great Fifth concerning his contribution to the *Cycle of Sūtras* has already been referred to here. Beyond that, I can only note that I have so far found no evidence that would render it impossible to ascribe the entire *Cycle of the Disclosure of the Hidden*, as well as the four works in the *Cycle of Sūtras* mentioned by the Fifth Dalai Lama, to the age of Shākyawö. It is certainly possible that the great majority of the texts presently included in the Mañi Kambum were in existence by about 1250, though their present arrangement, in the form of a single collection, may still be the product of a later generation.³³

The tale of the recovery of the works forming the Mañi Kambum has few variations, reflecting the fact that most of the Tibetan historians who wrote on this topic probably did so with one and the same catalogue (*dkar-chag*) before them.³⁴ The most significant variation I have encountered is found in the writings of the learned Jonang Jetsün Tāranātha (1575–1634), who states:

The means for the attainment of the deity³⁵ [found in] the *Collected Works of the King* [*Rgyal-po bka'-bum*] and the roots of the precepts³⁶ appear, certainly, to have been composed by the religious-king Songtsen Gampo. Therefore, they are the actual words of Ārya Avalokita³⁷ and are really the ancient ancestral religion³⁸ of Tibet itself. It is

well known that they were concealed as treasures by master Padma[sambhava]. Moreover, the history and most of the ancillary texts were composed by the treasure-discoverer, siddha Ngödrup, by Nyangrel, and by others.³⁹

While this statement is of great interest for its critical, but not condemnatory, view of the Mañi Kambum as revealed treasure—as for its assertion that it was Padmasambhava, and not Songtsen Gampo, who concealed the portions Tāranātha regards as being indeed ancient—it does not otherwise alter our conception of the history of the Mañi Kambum's compilation as outlined earlier.⁴⁰

Finally, we should note that it is not exactly clear when it was that this collection received the name Mañi Kambum, save that it was universally known as such no later than the seventeenth century.⁴¹ Elsewhere, it is entitled the *Collected Works of the Dharma Protecting King Songtsen Gampo*,⁴² and even the *Doctrinal Cycle Concerning the Six-Syllable [mantra] of Mahākāruṇika*.⁴³ The meditational system it embodies is usually referred to as that of *Avalokiteśvara According to the System of the King*,⁴⁴ a phrase attested as early as the first half of the fourteenth century, when we find Karmapa III Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339) conferring its empowerment on the great Nyingmapa master, Longchen Rabjampa (1308–1363).⁴⁵

Cosmology and Myth

The mythical portions of the Mañi Kambum develop a distinctive view of Tibet, its history, and its place in the world. Three elements that inform this view are outstanding: the belief that Avalokiteśvara was the patron deity of Tibet; the legend of King Songtsen Gampo and his court, in which the king is represented as being the very embodiment of Avalokiteśvara, the founder of the Buddha's way in his formerly barbarian realm; and the cosmological vision of the Tibetan Avalokiteśvara cult, whereby the king's divinity, and the divinity's regard for Tibet, are seen not as matters of historic accident, but as matters grounded in the very nature of the world. Though all were, at least in rough versions, current by the time the Mañi Kambum made its appearance, they were much elaborated and achieved their definite articulation within the Mañi Kambum itself.

1. Following the Mañi Kambum and related sources, later Tibetan historians have tended to assign the inception of the Avalokiteśvara cult in Tibet to the reign of Songtsen Gampo.⁴⁶ Thus, for example, one of the Gelukpa masters we met in the preceding chapter, Thuken Chöki Nyima (1737–1802):

At first, the religious king Songtsen Gampo taught the *Creation and Consummation of Mahākāruṇika* (*Thugs-rje-chen-po'i bskyed-rdzogs*) and other precepts at length, and there were many who practiced them, too. It was at first from this, that [the custom] spread throughout Tibet and Kham of praying to Ārya Avalokita and reciting the six-syllable [mantra *Om Mañipadme Hūm*].⁴⁷

In addition to acting as a teacher in his own right, the king is said to have encouraged and sponsored the establishment of shrines and images, as well as the translation into Tibetan of the fundamental texts of the Indian Avalokiteśvara tradition. The spiritual activity begun by Songtsen Gampo was then continued on a vast scale by his descendant Trhi Songdetsen.⁴⁸

Contemporary Tibetanists have tended to be skeptical about such traditions. They point to the inconclusive evidence within the most ancient historical sources on the subject of Songtsen Gampo's actual commitment to Buddhism, and the near absence of manuscript evidence from Dunhuang of a widespread cult of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet prior to the eleventh century.⁴⁹ At the same time, the known history of the translation of Sanskrit and Chinese Buddhism into Tibetan does establish that canonical texts of fundamental importance for this cult were available in Tibetan by 812 or 824, the probable years of the compilation of the Denkar catalogue (*Ldan-kar-ma*) of Buddhist texts.⁵⁰ One may note, too, that the "oral precept" tradition (*Gsung bka'-ma*) of the Nyingmapa school, which purports to represent an unbroken lineage transmitting teachings that were introduced into Tibet primarily during the reign of Trhi Songdetsen and which likely does include some authentically ancient material, accords scant attention to Avalokiteśvara. It is, rather, with the recovery of the revealed treasure texts, above all the Mañi Kambum, that the great bodhisattva assumes a role of considerable importance for the Nyingmapas.⁵¹ Finally, we should remark that, even among those Tibetan historians who are inclined to accept the validity of the Mañi Kambum and related traditions, there are those who see evidence in it not of a flourishing Avalokiteśvara cult in ancient Tibet, but rather of a secret transmission from Songtsen Gampo to a small number of worthy adepts, family members, and courtiers, who did not, in turn, transmit the king's teachings to a subsequent generation.⁵² In short, the available evidence powerfully suggests that, while early medieval Tibet had some familiarity with the bodhisattva, the cult of Avalokiteśvara, as known to a later age, is a product not of the imperial period but of the "later spread of the doctrine" (*bstan-pa phyi-dar*) that began in the late tenth century.

There can be little doubt that the first great figure to actively promote the practice of meditational techniques focusing on Avalokiteśvara was Dīpaṃkara-Srījñāna, better known as Atiśa (982–1054, and in Tibet from 1042 onwards). Three major systems of instruction (*khrid*) on the rites and meditations of Avalokiteśvara may be traced back to this Bengali master.⁵³ During the latter part of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth, several other systems were propounded by Bari Lotsawa (b. 1040), by the siddhas Candradhvaja and Tshembupa, and by Milarepa's famous disciple Rechung Dorjetrak (b. 1084).⁵⁴ The works familiar to me that relate to these systems do not make it clear whether or not these masters regarded Tibet to be Avalokiteśvara's special field. But the following passage, attributed to the emanation of the Great Mother, Macik Labdrön (1055–1145 or 1153), and thus possibly belonging to the very period we are considering, is of much interest in this connection:

I have made both Avalokiteśvara and Bhaṭṭārikā-Tārā into special doctrines that are universally renowned. It also appears that the two are our common Tibetan ancestors, and in that they are certainly our "divine portion" (*lha-skal*), infants learn to recite the six syllables at the very same time that they are beginning to speak; this is a sign that the Exalted One has actually blessed their spirits. Thus, it is truly right for us all to make of the Exalted One our "divine portion."⁵⁵

The tone of advocacy here is noteworthy. Are we reading too much between the lines if we see here a slight suggestion that Tibetans during the early twelfth century still required arguments that they did, indeed, have a special relationship with

the ever compassionate Avalokiteśvara? During the later part of the same century, the *Great Chronicle* of the Mañi Kambum is able to state the case with far greater assurance—as in this passage, addressed to Avalokiteśvara by the dying Buddha Śākyamuni:

There are none left to be trained by me. Because there are none for me to train I will demonstrate the way of nirvāṇa to inspire those who are slothful to the doctrine and to demonstrate that what is compounded is impermanent. The snowy domain to the north [Tibet] is presently a domain of animals, so even the word "human being" does not exist there—it is a vast darkness. And all who die there turn not upwards but, like snowflakes falling on a lake, drop into the world of evil destinies. At some future time, when that doctrine declines, you, O bodhisattva, will train them. First, the incarnation of a bodhisattva will generate human beings who will require training. Then, they will be brought together [as disciples] by material goods [*zang-zing*]. After that, bring them together through the doctrine! It will be for the welfare of living beings!⁵⁶

So there can be no longer any doubt that the bodhisattva has been assigned to Tibet by the Buddha himself. To the assertion that the Snowy Land is Avalokiteśvara's special field, the Mañi Kambum has lent a semblance of canonical authority.

2. Let us turn now to the legend of King Songtsen Gampo's having been an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara. Ariane Macdonald, in her superb study of the royal religion of this king, has argued that his religion, based in large measure on indigenous Tibetan beliefs, was most certainly not Buddhism.⁵⁷ The belief that the king was, in fact, the bodhisattva seems then to reflect the opinion of a later age, no doubt one in which the growing community of Tibetan Buddhists sought to reinforce the precedent for its own presence in the Land of Snows.⁵⁸ In this, of course, it goes hand in hand with the myth of the bodhisattva's role as Tibet's spiritual patron. Like this latter myth, the time of the former's origin cannot be established with great precision; when it makes its first datable appearance in 1167—which is probably close to the time of its appearance in the *Great Chronicle* as well—it is presented without reservations as established history.⁵⁹

It is in the narrative portions of the Mañi Kambum that the simple tale of the incarnate king is richly developed, so that his court becomes a veritable Tibetan Camelot. Further, it is in the form of an elaborate romance that the legend of Songtsen Gampo is restated repeatedly, in works like the apocryphal *Bka'-chems ka-khol-ma* (The Testament Drawn from a Pillar) and the semihistorical *Rgyal-rabs gsal-ba'i me-long* (The Mirror Clarifying the Royal Genealogy).⁶⁰ In this literature, including the Mañi Kambum, in which the myth of Avalokiteśvara's guiding role throughout the course of Tibetan history is developed, a distinct unifying theme emerges: the bodhisattva now functions as a *deus ex machina* of sorts, making benign incursions onto the Tibetan landscape at various critical junctures. As such, he may be projected into present and future situations, too, whenever the need for his assistance becomes known. So it is that the *Great Chronicle* of the Mañi Kambum—looking back on the age of imperial greatness from the vantage point of twelfth century chaos and uncertainty—closes with this prophetic declaration concerning, one may safely assume, the era of its own discovery, when

demons (*bdud*) will enter the hearts of religious teachers (*ston-pa*) and cause them to blaspheme one another and to quarrel. *Damsi* (*dam-sri*) spirits will enter the hearts of the mantra-adepts (*sngags-pa*) and cause them to cast great spells against one another. *Gongpo* (*'gong-po*) spirits will enter the hearts of men and cause them to defile themselves (*dme-byed*) and to fight with one another. Demonesses (*'dre-mo*) will enter the hearts of women and cause them to argue with their husbands and to take their own lives. *Therang* (*the-brang*, = *the'u-rang*) spirits will enter the hearts of youths and cause them to act perversely. The gods, *nāgas*, and *nyenpo* (*gnyan-po*) divinities will be disturbed, and the rains will not come during appropriate seasons. Sometimes there will be famine. A time will come when people's merits will decline. So, at that time, if you wish to amass happiness, then pray to Mahākāruṇika-Avalokiteśvara! Recite these six heart-syllables (*snying-po yi-ge drug-pa*): *Om Maṇipadme Hūṃ!* Because all the happiness and requirements of this lifetime come forth from this, it is like praying to the [wish-fulfilling] gem. There can be no doubt that in future lives your obscurations will be removed and that you will attain enlightenment. Harbor not divided thoughts about it! Meditatively cultivate Mahākāruṇika! Attain it! Teach it! Expound it! Propagate and spread it! [In this way], the presence of the Buddha is established. The doctrinal foundation is established.⁶¹

It was during this same period that the custom of propagating the cult of Avalokiteśvara at public assemblies (*khrom-chos*) seems to have begun, for by the second half of the thirteenth century no less a hierarch than the renowned Karma Pakshi (see chapter 6) composed a rite for just that purpose.⁶²

What was the result of Avalokiteśvara's ascension to a position of such central importance in the Tibetan world, particularly during a period of grave political unrest?⁶³ There can be little doubt that the myth of the religious king did much to support the notion that worldly affairs might best be placed in the hands of essentially spiritual leaders. And it is possible, too, that the Tibetan people came to expect their temporal woes to be set aright as before, by the timely intercession of the great bodhisattva. Can it be any wonder, then, that when Tibet finally achieved some measure of real unity during the seventeenth century—after almost eight centuries of intermittent strife—it did so under the leadership of a latter-day emanation of Mahākāruṇika residing in the ancient capital of Lhasa, and constructing for himself a hilltop palace named after the divine Mount Potalaka? It seems we are in the presence of a Tibetan twist on the Arthurian legend, whereby the once and future king becomes at long last the king, once and present.

3. The Maṇi Kambum's view of Avalokiteśvara's role in Tibetan history and, in particular, his manifestation as Songtsen Gampo, develops, as we have seen, themes whose general features had been well defined by the time the first sections of the collection appeared. More eclectic in their formation, and thus more resistant to efforts to understand their evolution, are the cosmology and theology of the Maṇi Kambum.

The notion that Avalokiteśvara might be regarded as the primordial deity, the point of departure for a unique theology, was introduced into Tibet no later than the ninth century with the translation into Tibetan of the *Karaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* (The Sūtra of the Cornucopia of Avalokiteśvara's Attributes), though the theogonic theme is but

slightly developed therein.⁶⁴ The same sūtra presents also a vision of Avalokiteśvara in which each pore of the bodhisattva's body is seen to embrace whole world systems, a vision that was later said to have been taught by Atiśa in connection with the precepts of the *Four Gods of the Kadampas* (*Bka'-gdams lha-bzhi*).⁶⁵

In the *Great Chronicle*, Avalokiteśvara undergoes a tremendous evolution. Though presented there as the emanation of the Buddha Amitābha, it is the bodhisattva whose own body gives rise to the thousand cakravartin kings and the thousand Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa, just as the body of the Avalokiteśvara of the *Karaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* had given birth to the brahmāṇical pantheon.⁶⁶ Moreover, the *Karaṇḍavyūha's* vision of the deity is now amplified by a cosmological vision widely associated in Tibet with the *Avatamsakasūtra* (The Sūtra of the Bounteousness of the Buddhas), but with Avalokiteśvara here occupying a position even prior to that of the cosmic Buddha Vairocana.⁶⁷ It is, moreover, a novel sense of Tibet's station in the universe that constitutes the most striking innovation:

[After Amitābha] had empowered the best of bodhisattvas, Ārya Avalokiteśvara, to benefit living beings, an inconceivable and immeasurable light radiated forth from his body and magically created (*sprul*) many fields of the buddhas' body of rapture (*sambhogakāya*) in which he magically created many buddhas of the body of rapture. So it was that he benefited many sentient beings.

And from the hearts of those bodies of rapture, there radiated forth inconceivably many fields of emanational bodies (*nirmāṇakāya*) in which were magically created many emanationally embodied buddhas; and from the hearts of those emanational bodies, light radiated forth, which was ineffable and beyond being ineffable.⁶⁸ From that light Ārya Avalokiteśvaras, Bhṛkuṭīs, and Tārās were magically created equal to the number of sentient beings. So, too, did he benefit living creatures.

Again, light emanated from his body and he magically created many world systems, as many as there are atoms in the substance of the world system that is the "middle array."⁶⁹ And in them the innumerable Tathāgatas magically emanated forth to an equal number, whereby he again benefited sentient beings.

Then from their bodies, there radiated forth light rays, which were immeasurable and beyond being immeasurable.⁷⁰ At [the tip of] each one there was magically created a Jambudvīpa, in each of which was a Vajrāsana. To the north of each Vajrāsana there was a land beyond the pale, which was a Land of Snows, [and in each of these there was] a supreme horse who was a destroyer of armies,⁷¹ an eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara, and a Tārā, and a Bhṛkuṭī. In each one, King Songtsen Gampo and the venerable ladies, white and green, were magically created.⁷² Ineffable light rays poured forth from their bodies and they magically created Mahākāruṇikas and six-syllable mantras equal to the number of sentient beings. Thus they benefited living creatures.⁷³

The enlightened activity of Avalokiteśvara, his incursion into Tibetan history in the form of King Songtsen Gampo, is no longer an event occurring within the Tibetan historical framework. Rather, Tibet itself is now an aspect of the bodhisattva's all-pervading creative activity. How could the Buddha's teaching have been artificially implanted in such a realm, the very existence of which is evidence of the Buddha's compassionate engagement in the world? That Tibet is here referred to as being "beyond the pale" (*miha'-'khob*) is the fortuitous survival of an outmoded turn of phrase,



Figure 8.1 Avalokiteśvara emanates worlds. Nineteenth century (after *Bod-kyi thang-ga*).

for it is clear that the Mañi Kambum regards the Land of Snows as no less part of the Buddhist universe than the sacred land of India itself.

The Teaching of Supreme Compassion

To what end has the Mañi Kambum elaborated its peculiar worldview, with its broad ramifications for cosmology, theogony, and history? It is clear that the impulse to explain events in the external world is a consideration of but little importance here. The aim of the Mañi Kambum's cosmology is, rather, to propagate the cult of Mahākāruṅika and his six-syllable mantra—to demonstrate that this is the most efficacious spiritual practice in this debased age, particularly for the Tibetan people. It is a measure of the emphasis of the Mañi Kambum that merely one-third of its total volume is concerned with the themes we have been considering thus far, the remaining two-thirds being wholly devoted to the exposition of a unique system of meditation, which is developed throughout the *Cycle of Attainment*, the *Cycle of Precepts*, and the *Cycle of the Disclosure of the Hidden*. While many aspects of Buddhist

metaphysics, psychology, and ritual are referred to and commented upon in these cycles, the Mañi Kambum by and large eschews speculative philosophy and the elaboration of a systematic psychology. Hence, with the exception of the formal rites for the worship of and meditation upon the deity (*sādhana*, *sgrub-thabs*), which are accorded a fairly well-established pattern of exposition such as is required by the structure of *sādhana* itself, the doctrinal portions of the Mañi Kambum exhibit much freedom in their development. Not confined by a single system, the Mañi Kambum utilizes a variety of systems, calling upon them when they are needed to advance a teaching that, we are told, lies beyond them all.⁷⁴ These instructions that are placed in the mouth of Songtsen Gampo touch upon such diverse topics as the nine successive vehicles,⁷⁵ the two truths,⁷⁶ the Great Seal, or Mahāmudrā,⁷⁷ Great Perfection,⁷⁸ the sequence of the path,⁷⁹ the trio of ground, path, and result,⁸⁰ the trio of view, meditation, and action,⁸¹ the three bodies of buddhahood,⁸² et cetera. But none of these topics is ever allowed to ascend to the position of becoming a central leitmotif that would unify, to some extent, the Mañi Kambum's diverse contents. Of this, the Mañi Kambum is itself conscious. The catalogue of contents (*dkar-chag*) tells us that these precepts “are not all dependent on one another. They are ‘magical fragments of instruction’⁸³—each one benefits a particular individual.”⁸⁴

The peculiar term “magical fragment,” which so appropriately describes the Mañi Kambum's many short precepts, is itself the subject of a detailed definition found in the *Great Explanatory Commentary*:

“Magical fragments” are so called because, just as magic appears variously but is without substantial existence (*rang-bzhin med-pa*), so too this doctrine of Mahākāruṅika is explained and taught by various means and in various aspects (*thabs yan-lag sna-tshogs-su bshad*) but nonetheless remains the same in that it is an indivisible union of emptiness and compassion. “Fragment” means that each particular division of the doctrine suffices as the occasion for the particular development of [spiritual] experience [by a given] individual.⁸⁵

So the many doctrines referred to by the Mañi Kambum all serve to illustrate the single doctrine of Mahākāruṅika and are thus the basis for an exposition of the central doctrines of the Mahāyāna, those of compassion and emptiness, which, though they are indivisible as aspects of the play of enlightened awareness, must nonetheless be distinguished conventionally. It is from such a perspective that the catalogue of contents endeavors to summarize the teaching of the Mañi Kambum:

[H]owever many precepts associated with the doctrines of provisional meaning (*drang-don-gyi chos-kyi zhal-gdams*) are expounded, they are not the doctrines of Mahākāruṅika unless you have deliberately taken up sentient beings, having seized the ground with loving kindness and compassion. If, because you fear the sufferings of saṃsāra, you desire freedom, desire bliss, desire liberation for yourself alone and thus cannot create an enlightened attitude for the sake of sentient beings, then these are not the doctrines of the bodhisattva Avalokita. If you do not practice for the sake of all living beings, you will not realize Avalokiteśvara. . . .

However many doctrines of definitive meaning (*nge-don gyi chos*) are expounded, you must recognize the true Mahākāruṅika, Reality itself (*chos-nyid-don-gyi thugs-rje chen-po*), mind-as-such, which is empty and is the buddhas' body of reality (*dharmakāya*), to be within yourself (*rang-la yod-pa*). Cultivate it! Familiarize yourself with

it! Grow firm in it! If you desire to attain some Mahākāruṅika who “dwells in his proper abode,”⁸⁶ or desire to behold his visage, or to attain the accomplishments (*siddhi*, *dn̄gos-grub*), you will be granted the common accomplishments but will stray far from the supreme accomplishment, buddhahood.⁸⁷

It appears that, in its emphasis on the union of compassion and emptiness, the teaching of the Maṇi Kambum is inspired by the eleventh-century renewal of interest in the path of the Mahāyāna sūtras, particularly as developed in the instructions of the Kadampa school.⁸⁸ But in its discussion of “the true Mahākāruṅika, Reality itself,” that is, in its discussion of “doctrines of definitive meaning,” the diction of the Maṇi Kambum becomes decidedly that of the Nyingmapa tradition—for example, in its identification of Mahākāruṅika, Supreme Compassion, with “the play of intuitive awareness and continuous, fresh gnosis.”⁸⁹ These doctrinal orientations may be illustrated by a short collection of instructions, taught by the king to his daughter Trhompayen, the “adornment of the town”:

The *view* of Supreme Compassion is the indivisible union of appearance and emptiness, and is like the sky.

External appearances, the incessant appearing of whatever may be, are nonetheless the appearance of mind, self-manifest.

The essential character of mind is that it is empty.

And the essential character of appearance is that it is empty; for it is apparent, but without substantial existence.

The *meditation* of Supreme Compassion is like the indivisible union of clarity and emptiness and is like a rainbow appearing in the sky.

You must cultivate the realization that the essential character of mind, which is clear and unobscured, and which emerges by itself, arises by itself, is that it is empty.

The *action* of Supreme Compassion is the indivisible union of awareness and emptiness, and is like the sun rising in the sky.

Action is freedom from hankering after whatever there is that arises incessantly in mind, whose nature is pure awareness.

Though you act, you act in emptiness, not grasping at entities as real.

The *fruit* of Supreme Compassion is the indivisible union of bliss and emptiness.

Mind itself, without contrivances, is blissful within the expanse that is the foundation of all that is real.

Being empty and free from grasping, it is like the moon reflected in water.

Being free from all superimposed limits, it is without features that serve to define it.

And because it has forever abided within you, it cannot be achieved.

The *spiritual commitment* of Supreme Compassion

Is emptiness of which the core is compassion.

Its characteristic being just that,

You’ll grasp all living beings in all three realms

With unqualified compassion.

Being equal, you will act without “levels.”

The *enlightened activity* of Supreme Compassion

Grasps beings with a snare of compassion in which

Buddhas and sentient beings are no different.

It slaughters their pain with the weapon of emptiness,

And draws sentient beings to the level of bliss supreme.⁹⁰

While the great variety of the Maṇi Kambum’s teachings of doctrine and ritual and the unsystematic way in which these topics are, for the most part, presented, do not permit us to define too strictly a “central doctrine” in this case, the teaching of the Maṇi Kambum represents, by and large, a syncretic approach to the doctrines of the Nyingmapas and those of the Avalokiteśvara traditions of the new translation schools, particularly the Kadampa, with its emphasis upon “emptiness imbued with compassion.”⁹¹ Further, through the instructions on the visualization and mantra of Avalokiteśvara transmitted by masters of all the major Tibetan Buddhist schools, as well as by lay tantric adepts and itinerant *maṇi-pas*—“Omṃmaṇipadmehūmists”—who preached the bodhisattva’s cult far and wide, it was this syncretic teaching that became, for all intents and purposes, Tibet’s devotional norm.⁹²

The Advent of the Lotus Guru

If there is a figure in the Tibetan pantheon whose popularity rivals the ubiquitous cult of Avalokiteśvara, surely it is Padmasambhava, the Lotus-Born Precious Guru (Guru Rinpoche). Indeed, the two in many respects have tended to reinforce one another and may be considered virtual twins. Padmasambhava, like Avalokiteśvara, is an emanation of the buddha Amitābha, and Tibet is his special field. Both are strongly associated with Tibet’s glory days under the old empire. The tales of their compassionate intercession in the Tibetan world are elaborated in epic narratives that were discovered as revealed treasures (*gter-ma*), and in the early development of this literature the twelfth-century treasure-finder Nyangrel Nyima Özer and his successor, Guru Chöwang (1212–1270), emerge as central figures for the formation of both cults.⁹³ The most striking disanalogy between the two (besides the fact that one is supposed to be a cosmic bodhisattva and the other an historical individual), is that whereas we know that Avalokiteśvara was an important figure in the Indian Buddhist pantheon, whose following had come to extend throughout much of Asia long before Buddhism ever became established in Tibet, nothing similar can be said of Padmasambhava. Indeed, the evidence for him prior to his twelfth-century apotheosis in the *gter-ma* traditions is so thin that some have been inclined to regard him as a rather late Tibetan invention.⁹⁴ We shall therefore retrace here some of the ground we have already covered, following now the course whereby the Lotus Guru emerged from the margins of the old Tibetan empire to become, in effect, the royal master of the Tibetan people as a whole.⁹⁵

According to the tradition of the *Testament of Ba*, repeated with considerable elaboration in later histories, the local deities and spirits of Tibet so obstructed the foundation of the temple at Samye that the intervention of occult power in the service of Buddhism was deemed essential. At the recommendation of Śāntarakṣita, a master of mantras named Padmasambhava was summoned, who visited Tibet briefly in order



Figure 8.2 Above: Songtsen Gampo, the Buddha Amitābha emerging from his turban, and accompanied by his Chinese and Nepalese queens. Modern representation at the chapel of Songtsen's mausoleum in Yarlung valley. Below: Padmasambhava in the revered image from Yarlung Sheldrak, the Crystal Peak of Yarlung, where the treasures of Orgyen Lingpa were recovered (see chapter 9).

to suppress and place under oath the restless demonic forces. Towards the end of his visit, we are told:

At the bamboo grove of Drakmar, having expounded the *Man-ngag Ita-ba'i phreng-ba* (The Garland of Views: An Esoteric Precept)⁹⁶ to twenty-one, including the Tsenpo and his retainers, he said, "Great king! these secret mantras of mine conform with the Dharmakāya in respect to their view and conform with the factors of enlightenment in respect to their conduct. Do not allow conduct to slip into the sphere of the view, for, if you do, it will become antinomian [lit. 'no virtue, no sin']. That nihilistic view having arisen, there's no correcting it. But if you permit the view to follow in the way of conduct, becoming bound up in superficialities, you'll not be liberated. These mantras of mine, which are allied to the mind (*sems-phyogs*), are very great in respect to their view. In the future, there will be many who will be confident about the words but will not have acquired confidence in the application of that view to the mind-stream, and they will descend to infernal births. Some exceptional persons, however, who will not have broken up view and conduct, will come to benefit many beings. But because, owing to the contrivances of ordinary persons, there will be many variations, the blessing will decline and there will be few who are realized. So if I conceal all these that are not corrupted, in the future they will serve well some who have a karmic connection." Saying this, he hid many books in a clay pot. Having bestowed upon the Tsenpo the sequence of empowerment, he granted the transmission of the secret mantras of the Mahāyāna. After explaining the *Phur-bu 'bum-sde* (The Hundred Thousand [Verse] Tantra of Vajrakīla),⁹⁷ he placed the other esoteric precepts, with prayers, in the Akaniṣṭha heaven:

"I pray that I and my patrons, whosoever,
In this lifetime and wherever we are born,
Practice the fruitional Mahāyāna of Yoga,
In that sacred realm called Akaniṣṭha."

Having so spoken, he departed without completing what remained of the *homa*-ritual [that had been begun earlier].⁹⁸

Towards the end of the *Testament of Ba*, when Trhi Songdetsen enters into retirement, the master Vimalamitra arrives in Tibet and the emperor receives from him the remaining teachings of Padmasambhava that he had not obtained earlier. These he practices as his personal way of meditation.⁹⁹

The account that we find here represents, no doubt, a version of the tale of Padmasambhava's visit to the king, developed in the century or so after the events it recounts but prior to the massive elaborations of the twelfth century and after; these elaborations begin, so far as we now know, primarily in works authored or rediscovered by Nyangrel Nyima Özer.¹⁰⁰ Given the fact that the *Garland of Views* was certainly in circulation and accepted by some as a genuine work of Padmasambhava before the mid-eleventh century,¹⁰¹ we may posit that the great guru's cult began its ascent during the obscure period between the fall of the empire and the late-tenth-century renaissance. This finds some support in the couple of references to Padmasambhava known from the pre-eleventh-century documents found at Dunhuang, both of which may well date to the postimperial period.¹⁰²

An important tantric cycle of the Nyingmapa school that came under fire in later times is that of the wrathful deity Vajrakīla (*Rdo-rje phur-pa*), the Vajra Spike or Dagger. Vajrakīla embodies the ritual tent peg or spike (*kīla*, often referred to in

English as a “magic dagger”) through whose power the place of practice is, literally or metaphorically, staked out and so rendered safe from harmful interference and obstacles.¹⁰³ For the later Nyingmapa traditions, including those handed down within the Khön family, which in the eleventh century founded the Sakyapa school, this was to be one of the most popular and widespread cults, generating an enormous ritual and exegetical literature, together with elaborate rites of dance, exorcism, yoga, et cetera.¹⁰⁴

The ritual traditions of Vajrakīla are represented in the Dunhuang documents in *PT 44*, a small manuscript preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, and in several smaller fragments.¹⁰⁵ The manuscript *PT 44* is in most respects rather crude, and one can well imagine that it emanates from a source outside of monastic orthodoxy. There is no positive indication of its source of origin, however, or of the date of its production.¹⁰⁶ Its opening chapter reads as follows:

At first, there was the journey from Yang-la-shod in Nepal to the temple of Nālandā in India in order to fetch the *Phur-bu'i 'bum-sde* (The Hundred Thousand [Verse] Tantra of Vajrakīla): when the Nepali porters Shag-kya-spur and I-so were hired and sent off, there was a tetrad of *Bse* goddesses who, at about nightfall, killed everyone and stole their breath. Padmasambhava became short-tempered, made as if to steal [their] breath, and caught them as they were wondering where to flee. Then he put them in his hat and departed. Arriving at Nālandā, he opened his hat and an exceedingly pretty woman appeared in the flesh. When she vowed to be a protectrice for the practice of the Kīla, he empowered her as its protectrice. Because the prognostications were fine, he laughed, offered up a whole handful of gold dust, and then brought forth the *Hundred Thousand [Verse] Tantra of Vajrakīla*. After arriving at Yang[-la]-shod in Nepal [with it] he performed the practices belonging [to all the classes of yoga] from the general Kriyā up through Atiyoga. He proclaimed each and every transmission of the Kīla, for the purposes of all the vehicles, from the *Hundred Thousand [Verse] Tantra of Vajrakīla*, as [is affirmed] in all the secret tantras. In that way, having definitively established the transmissions concerning attainment, and having again escorted the *Hundred Thousand* [back to Nepal], Ācārya Sambhava then performed the rites of attainment in the Asura cave with the Newari Ser-po, Indra-shu-gu-ta, Prabese, and others. And thus he performed the rites, impelling the four *Bse* goddesses, whose embodied forms had not passed away. He named them Great Sorceress of Outer Splendor, Miraculous Nourisher, Great Witch Bestowing Glory, and Life-Granting Conjureess. Having performed the great attainment for seven days, he manifestly beheld the visage of Vajrakumāra [the Adamant Youth, an epithet of Vajrakīla].

Having acquired the accomplishment of the Kīla, concerning [his attainment of] the signs, Padmasambhava, having set a limitless forest ablaze, thrust [the Kīla] at the blaze. Śrīgupta, having struck it at the rock in the region of the frontier forest of India, broke the rock into four fragments and thus “thrust it at stone.” The Newari Ser-po thrust it at water and so reversed the water’s course, thereby establishing Nepal itself as a mercantile center. Such were the miraculous abilities and powers that emerged.¹⁰⁷

In Tibet Ācārya Sambhava explained it to Pagor Vairocana and Tse Jñānasukha. Later Dre Tathāgata and Buna Ana heard it and practiced at the cave of Samye Rock at Drakmar. Dre Tathāgata thrust it at fire. Buna thrust it at the Rock of Hepo. Then the glory of the Kīla came to Chim Śākya and Nanam Zhang Dorje-nyen. Then it was explained to Jin Yeshe-tsek.

The trio of Yeshe-tsek, Nyen Nyiwa Tsenbapel, and Demen Gyeltshen successfully practiced at Nyengong in Lhodrak. The preceptor thrust [the Kīla], having set the rock of Bumthang ablaze. Nyiwa and Demen thrust it into wood and stone. Thrusting it thus, and displaying the signs, they attained it while maintaining the appearance of secrecy. Teaching it as a method for those who would follow, they conferred the mantra and transmission together.¹⁰⁸

This text offers little hint of the later destiny of the cult it describes, for Vajrakīla certainly ranks among the most widely propitiated of the tutelary divinities. Nevertheless, it seems continuous with later tradition in a number of highly suggestive ways. These include its emphasis on the role of Padmasambhava and the assignment of the inception of his involvement in the Vajrakīla cult to the period of his meditation in the cave of Yangleshö, near modern Pharping, a town to the south of the Kathmandu Valley.¹⁰⁹ Its tale of four goddesses, Padmasambhava’s scattering of gold dust, the episode of the portage of the texts relating to Vajrakīla from India, and the marvelous powers attributed to its adepts—all are among the features of the account that, in one form or another, are preserved in the later traditions as well.¹¹⁰

What do these relatively early texts tell us of the beginnings of the cult of Padmasambhava? I believe that, if we accept in general the historical veracity of only the most plausible of the circumstances recounted in these tales, matters begin to come into focus. The two elements I should like to emphasize are: first, that part of the tradition of the *Testament of Ba*, according to which Padmasambhava did visit central Tibet at the time of the foundation of Samye, perhaps meeting there with the king, whether or not he actually instructed him;¹¹¹ second, the affirmations of the Vajrakīla manuscript to the effect that Padmasambhava was a charismatic tantric master with a following in Nepal and a growing group of disciples in southern Tibet, that is, in the regions of Drakmar and Lhodrak, down to Bumthang in what is today Bhutan. In short, in the early legends of Padmasambhava we may perhaps discern the recollection of a popular eighth-century guru who met with a king, rather like those among contemporary Buddhist teachers who have attracted large followings and on one occasion or another have met with leading political figures. From this perspective it becomes possible to imagine that the several lineages of lay tantric practitioners that during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries traced their antecedents back to Padmasambhava, and that were devoted to the cult of Vajrakīla, would have laid great stress upon the royal meeting, whatever the facts of the matter may have been, as this no doubt strengthened their sense of legitimacy and authority. Once these older tantric lineages started to come under attack by proponents of the newer lines of tantrism being introduced from India from the late tenth century onwards, the tendency would have been to insist increasingly upon recollections of Padmasambhava’s imperial connection, thereby reinforcing the ancient tradition against the upstart claims of the new teachings. Padmasambhava, a marginal Dharma master of the eighth century, in this way reemerged two centuries later as an emblem of Tibet’s imperial greatness, and a hero to a wide network of tantric cults that had taken root and flourished during this time.¹¹²

In the preceding chapter, I argued that the phenomenon of the rediscovered treasures in Tibet must be understood in terms of the authority of the past, the conception of a lost golden age whose retrieval came to be valued over progressive discovery. Beyond this, there was at the same time a need felt to reassert past tradition in the face of foreign novelty, while appropriating innovation under the description of

what was past. The apotheosis of Padmasambhava must be seen in this light, for he was at once ancient hero and foreign presence. However indistinctly, we may thus begin to discern how it was that he became the definitive signifier of the entire treasure phenomenon.

Hierarchy and Universality

The Tibetan cults of Avalokiteśvara and Padmasambhava, and indeed the entire treasure tradition with which they are intertwined, are in interesting respects at once both hierarchical and antihierarchical. The dialectic between these two apparently opposed tendencies offers, I think, a valuable key to their interpretation. They explicitly share a common allegiance to the hierarchical order of the Tibetan empire of the seventh to the ninth centuries,¹¹³ and thus implicitly, and sometimes explicitly as well, they call into question the credentials of the various hegemonic orders that arose in Tibet during the postimperial period. Both can be strikingly egalitarian, above all when compared with the self-conscious elitism of much of Buddhist esotericism, in that their cults are addressed to the Tibetan people as a whole, as if to one extended family. In this respect they perhaps recall that the old Tibetan empire, though hierarchical, had also staked a claim to being a universal order. The universalist dimension of the Padmasambhava cult is in evidence, for instance, in the introduction to a fourteenth-century treasure promulgating the benefits that accrue from the recitation of the guru's mantra:¹¹⁴

I, the woman Yeshe Tshogyel, offered the vast inner and outer maṇḍalas and then prayed in this way: "Great Teacher! Padmasambhava! in the past there has been no one so gracious to us, the living beings of Tibet, as you yourself have been, by extensively fulfilling our needs in this and future lives; nor will one so gracious come forth in the future. You have bestowed upon us your own sādhanas as the very essence [of your teaching]. Therefore, even though I am just a woman, I harbor no doubts. Nevertheless, in the future, beings will have much on their minds and will become extremely wild. They will look askance at the True Dharma and, in particular, they will come to blaspheme the unsurpassed doctrine of the esoteric mantras. When that occurs, disease, famine, and strife will spread among all creatures, and, above all, China, Tibet, and Mongolia will become like a ravaged ants' nest, so that the subjects of Tibet will have fallen on hard times. Though many remedies for that have been spoken of, individuals in the future will not have occasion to practice; and even those who wish to practice a little will confront formidable obstacles. Beings will be argumentative, and their thoughts and actions will not be harmonious. Because such bad times will be most difficult to avert, what would be the benefits, during such times, of relying solely on your own sādhanas, the Vajraguru mantra?¹¹⁵ I pray that you speak of this for the sake of the base-minded ones of the future."

Padmasambhava's response to her request powerfully affirms the universal presence and applicability of his teaching, and its availability to devoted persons throughout the Tibetan world:

"Faithful girl! your prayer is most truthful. At such a time in the future, it will certainly benefit beings, both temporally and ultimately. I have concealed innumerable instructions and sādhanas as treasures in the earth, treasures in the waters, treasures in

the rocks, and treasures in the sky. But in those bad times, it will become exceedingly difficult for fortunate ones to find the means, the auspicious occasion [for their discovery]. This will be a sign that the merits of beings are exhausted. Nevertheless, even then the essential Vajraguru mantra will have inconceivable benefits and powers if it is recited at great places of pilgrimage, places of retreat, mountain peaks, the banks of great rivers, or in craggy places and ravines inhabited by deities, ogres, and spirits, or elsewhere, by adepts adhering to the spiritual commitments of the tantras, members of the saṅgha adhering to their vows, faithful men, suitable women, or others, who with the vast inspiration of bodhisattvas, recite it one hundred, one thousand, ten thousand, one hundred thousand or more times. Then, all disease, famine, and strife, as well as war, crop failure, evil omens, and magical calamities will be averted everywhere; and the rains will fall and the country will prosper. In this and in future lives, and in the abyss of the intermediate state, the greatest adepts will meet me repeatedly in person, those of moderate calibre in visions, and even the least in dreams. Have no doubt about it! such persons will perfect the sequence of spiritual stages and paths and will enter the company of the male and female knowledge-holders on Cāmara Isle. One who recites my mantra one hundred times daily will be well thought of by others and will obtain food, wealth, and enjoyments without effort."

Moreover, it is stressed that the treasures have been concealed throughout the land of Tibet, so that there is no particular locality, and therefore no local hegemony, that can claim unique authority with respect to them or to the source of their authority, which must be identified with the continuing spiritual power of the old empire. As a famous passage from a fifteenth-century treasure declares:

Because, generally, I harbour great compassion
For the Tibetans, who love what is new,
And for creatures of this defiled age,
I have filled the frontier and centre with treasures. . . .¹¹⁶

The emerging cults of Avalokiteśvara and Padmasambhava from the twelfth century onwards thus both engendered a mythical reconstruction of the Tibetan world and set forth in their sādhanas and precepts the means by which one might live in the world thus created, a way which affirmed that the same creative, spiritual ground from which the empire drew its power might be actualized within every individual. We must resist, however, the temptation to place too much emphasis upon the apparently antihierarchical dimensions of this description. Though there is some reason to suppose that there may be a correlation between these cults and the relatively egalitarian communities thriving outside of the political realm dominated by the Central Tibetan estate system,¹¹⁷ we must also recall that the treasure traditions did establish their own local hierarchies, which focused upon the figure of the treasure-discoverer himself, who was thought always to be Padmasambhava's direct representative.¹¹⁸ This is very much in evidence in Aris's study of Pemalingpa, of whose legacy in Bhutan he writes:

So prestigious was Pemalingpa's name that his sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons became highly sought after as husbands throughout the area. . . . Thus at least ten of the most important houses headed by religious hierarchs . . . trace their descent from three of Pemalingpa's sons . . . This new aristocracy more or less supplanted the earlier one into which it had married.¹¹⁹

The phenomenon that we see at work here drew its strength in large measure from the persisting presence of the old empire and from the continuing felt allegiance to it, rather than to the new and strictly local hegemony who rarely commanded much loyalty outside of their own narrow domains. Once more, it was the Fifth Dalai Lama who clearly understood this, and who systematically deployed the authority of the treasures to underpin the authority of his own regime.¹²⁰ It is perhaps not too great an exaggeration to hold, therefore, that it is in the writings and rediscoveries of the twelfth-century treasure-finder Nyangrel Nyima Özer that we find the clearest blueprint for the later Tibetan religiopolitical construction.

Samantabhadra and Rudra

Myths of Innate Enlightenment and Radical Evil

Fragments from a Myth of Tibet

I do not propose to examine the historical origins of the myths of Samantabhadra and Rudra in the compass of the present chapter. Even limiting one's field solely to Buddhist materials, it would be essential to consider an extensive body of Indian literature—above all, the many Buddhist tantras—even before seeking to elaborate peculiarly Tibetan developments. And in Tibet itself, we would have to investigate the manner in which the Indian versions of these myths were variously assimilated and transformed through the historical ramification of Tibetan Buddhism into a great number of distinct lineages and schools.¹

My concern here, therefore, will be solely with the best-known versions of these myths as transmitted in the Nyingmapa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, for which they have a special importance. I believe that some puzzling aspects of Nyingmapa thought and practice become more readily understandable when we grasp something of the manner in which these myths are employed within that tradition.

The Nyingmapa stand in a distinctive relationship to all other religious traditions of Tibet. As their name, which literally means the "Ancients," suggests, the school maintains that it uniquely represents the ancient Buddhism of Tibet, introduced during the reigns of the great kings of Tibet's imperial age, in the seventh to the ninth centuries C.E. In contradistinction to the organized Bön religion, it identifies itself as a purely Buddhist school, whereas, over and against the other Tibetan Buddhist schools and in harmony with the Bön, it insists upon the value of an autochthonous Tibetan religious tradition, expressed and exalted within a unique and continuing revelation of the Buddha's doctrine in Tibet, often in the form of "treasures" (*gter*). Certain features of Nyingmapa Buddhism are particularly noteworthy in connection with the present discussion. The primordial Buddha Samantabhadra (Tib. *Kun-tu bzang-po*, the "Omnibeneficent"), iconographically most often depicted as celestial blue and naked, is regarded as the supreme embodiment of Buddhahood (shared with Bön). The highest expression of and vehicle for attaining that Buddha's enlightenment (which is equivalent to the enlightenment of all Buddhas) is the teaching of the

Chapter 8

1. Collins 1998, pp. 121–133, introduces and clarifies this dichotomy in connection with the conception of *nirvāṇa* in the Pali tradition.

2. The classicist Arthur Adkins (1990), for instance, has suggested that we study, in the context of Greek thought, not the relationship between *mythos* and *philosophia*, but rather the relationship between *mythos* and *logos* within *philosophia*. Lawrence J. Hatab (1990, p. 293), also referring to classical philosophy, concludes: “[T]he idea of rationality *versus* myth is both misleading and at times simply wrong because rationality and myth can overlap. . . . [R]ationality and myth *have* coexisted, *can* coexist and, I would suggest, *should* coexist.” (Emphasis in original).

3. Refer to Dundes 1984 for useful surveys of the leading attempts to define “myth,” particularly in relation to the categories of “legend” and “folktale,” and for general bibliographical background. For more recent work in this area, see especially Lincoln 1989, pt. 1.

4. In this context, readers may wish to reflect on the so-called Gaia-hypothesis of the British chemist James Lovelock, which regards our planet as forming a single organic system. In a popular review of scientific work on Gaia, *The Economist*, vol. 317, no. 7686/7687 (December 22, 1990), 107, commented that “the strongest resistance to Gaia comes from those whose faith is grounded in another metaphor—‘natural selection.’ Nature is not a goddess who chooses, as Darwin knew full well. But the metaphor of choice was the best way to express his views. . . . Darwin’s metaphor provided a great insight into the workings of the world. *If Gaia manages to do the same*—something which looks unlikely at present, but not impossible—then the objections to Dr Lovelock’s metaphor will be forgotten, too.” (Emphasis added.)

5. Slusser 1982, vol. 1, pp. 364–365.

6. See, in particular, “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth” and “The Will to Believe,” both in James 1948.

7. Refer to ch. 4, n. 17, and ch. 7, n. 43. My remarks in the following paragraph are based upon my own observations and conversations with regard to the Rdo-rje Shugs-ldan dispute in recent years.

8. Besides these examples, consider Daniel 1990, where the topic investigated is the virtually ubiquitous presence of myth in early modern philosophy. Daniel’s work develops a conception of “myth” essentially similar to that which I am exploring here. In his introduction, p. 3, he writes, “What I mean by myth is a particular mode or group of functions, operative within discourse, that highlight how communication and even thought are themselves possible. Certain functions of discourse are mythic insofar as they reveal how discourse itself is possible.”

9. In this chapter I have used the published facsimile edition of the Punakha version of the *Maṇi bka’-’bum*. The blocks for this edition were apparently carved at the request of a certain Mnga’-ris sgrub-chen Ngag-dbang chos-’phel, the disciple of Ngag-dbang bstan-’dzin rab-rgyas (*Maṇi bka’-’bum*, II. 708). Dr. Michael Aris kindly informed me that while the former remains unidentified, “his master . . . was the fourth *’Brug-sDe-srid* (regn. 1680–1695, lived 1638–1696). He was the first in the line of the *Khri-sprul* or *Bla-ma khri-pa* (of which there have been six). The *Lho’i chos-’byung* makes him the first rGyal-tshab, the official stand-ins for (sometimes the incarnations of) the 1st *Zhabs-drung*. He was one of the greatest and most effective Bhutanese rulers. There is an extremely long biography by Ngag-dbang lhun-grub, dated 1720 . . .” (correspondence, July 18, 1980). The Punakha edition is based on an earlier edition from Gung-thang in Mnga’-ris (*Maṇi bka’-’bum*, II. 617), an example of which is preserved in the National Archives of Nepal. I am grateful to Franz-Karl Ehrhard for calling my attention to this rare print.

10. *Thugs-rje-chen-po spyan-ras-gzigs kyi dbang-phyug*.

11. Vostrikov 1970, p. 52.

12. Kőrös 1984, p. 81. Among earlier studies see also Bacot 1934–1935.

13. Vostrikov 1970, p. 55.

14. Ariane Macdonald 1968/69, p. 528.

15. Refer to Aris 1979, pp. 8–24; Blondeau 1984a; Gyatso 1987; Alexander Macdonald 1984a; Per Sørensen 1994. A brief hagiography of Nyang-ral Nyi-ma ’od-zer will be found translated in Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 755–760.

16. The basic structure of the *Maṇi bka’-’bum* is revealed in its *dkar-chag* (*Maṇi bka’-’bum* I. 9–23). It seems that this *dkar-chag* is of some antiquity and is identical to the *Yer-pa’i dkar-chag* referred to by *Maṇi bka’-’bum*’s editors (I. 19, *mchan*). A similar *dkar-chag* served as the basis for the Fifth Dalai Lama’s discussion of the contents of the *Maṇi bka’-’bum*: *Lnga-pa’i gsan-yig*, vol. 3, plates 130–153. *Lnga-pa’i gsan-yig*’s discussion is, for all intents and purposes, a detailed commentary on the *dkar-chag* and reflects the Dalai Lama’s great personal interest in the *Maṇi bka’-’bum*. It is noteworthy that at least one group of texts listed in the *dkar-chag* that was not available to the redactors of the *Maṇi bka’-’bum* (II. 616–617) could not be located by the Great Fifth either (*Lnga-pa’i gsan-yig*, 149). The Dalai Lama also mentions one group of texts (*Lnga-pa’i gsan-yig*, 139–140) that are not to be found in the *dkar-chag* but seem to have been in circulation in connection with the *Maṇi bka’-’bum*. For useful summaries of the *Maṇi bka’-’bum*’s contents see also Vostrikov 1970, pp. 53–55; Ariane Macdonald 1968/69, pp. 527–528.

17. In *Maṇi bka’-’bum*, it forms a separate cycle (II. 619–711), where it is entitled *’Phags-pa nam-mkha’i rgyal-po’i mngon-rtogs sogs phran ’ga’*. The title *Gab-pa mngon-phyung gi skor* is given in the *dkar-chag* (I. 22).

18. See esp. Karmay 1988b; Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 821–824.

19. *las dang skal-bar ldan-pa*.

20. *gtsang-khang byang-ma’i rta-mgrin gyi zhabs ’og-tu sbas*.

21. *gnod-sbyin Nā-ga Ku-be-ra’i dar-sham-’og-gi brla-g.yas-par sbas*.

22. The Tibetan titles of these texts are: *Thugs-rje-chen-po stong-rtsa’i sgrub-thabs*, *Gab-pa mngon-phyung*, *Sangs-rgyas stong-rtsa’i bskyed-rzdogs*, *Thugs-dam mthong-ba’i phanyon*, and *Srong-btsan ’da’-kha’i bka’-chems*.

23. *Thugs-rje-chen-pos rjes-bzung*.

24. In Dudjom 1991, vol. 2, p. 70, n. 995, it is argued that the correct dating should be 1136–1204. As van der Kuijp 1994 shows, however, Śākyaśrī’s arrival in Tibet in 1204 corresponds to the consecration of Nyang-ral’s memorial stūpa, and not to his death. The dates 1124–1192 are therefore to be preferred.

25. *Lnga-pa’i gsan-yig*, vol. 3, p. 130. This is a restatement of part of the *dkar-chag* (*Maṇi bka’-’bum*, I. 21–22). It is of interest to note that some of the masters mentioned in connection with the compilations of the *Maṇi bka’-’bum* are also mentioned in connection with the cult of the Lhasa Jo-khang. See *Lha-ldan dkar-chag*, pp. 78–79.

26. Blondeau 1984, p. 81, rightly emphasizes the uncertainty with which the Fifth Dalai Lama proposes this.

27. *Lnga-pa’i gsan-yig*, vol. 3, p. 131.

28. *Bshad-’grel chen-mo*, in *Maṇi bka’-’bum*, I. 498, 584. A.-M. Blondeau has suggested to me that the present version of the *Great Chronicle* is of doubtful attribution. See Blondeau 1984, esp. n. 19.

29. *Maṇi bka’-’bum*, I. 504.

30. Ariane Macdonald has advanced the thesis that Nyi-ma ’od-zer and Mnga’-bdag Myang (= Nyang)-ral were, in fact, two distinct persons, for the latter was used as a familial title among Nyi-ma ’od-zer’s descendants. See Ariane Macdonald 1971, p. 203, n. 59. However, the mention of the *siddha* Dngos-grub in connection with the lineage of the *bka’-brgyad* as well as that of the *Maṇi bka’-’bum* leads me to believe that such a view may not, in this in-

stance, be tenable, though we cannot rule out the possibility that one of Nyang-ral's sons has been conflated with his father. See *Gter-ston brgya-rtsa*, pp. 371–372; Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 758. *Nyang-ral*, p. 501, summarizes the *gter-ma* discoveries, possibly including those forming the early portions of the Mañi bka'-'bum.

31. *Lnga-pa'i gsan-yig*, vol. 3, p. 151, notes that he was a *bhikṣu*. It appears that the Fifth Dalai Lama had access to some specific information about the lesser known figures in the Mañi bka'-'bum's lineage.

32. *Mañi bka'-'bum*, II. 651.

33. It should be noted that the *dkar-chag* seems not to have originally listed any of Shakya-'od's discoveries, but that the account of them forms an appended discussion (*Mañi bka'-'bum* I. 22). Perhaps the "original" *Mañi bka'-'bum* consisted solely of the discoveries of Dngos-grub and Mnga'-bdag Nyang, as assembled by the latter or one of his school.

34. Compare, for instance, *Shes-bya kun-khyab*, vol. 1, p. 433.

35. *lha'i sgrub-thabs*.

36. *zhal-gdams kyi rtsa-ba-rnams*.

37. *'Phags-pa Spyian-ras-gzigs-kyi bka' dngos*.

38. *pha-chos mying-ma*.

39. Tāranātha, *Khrid-brgya'i brgyud-pa'i lo-rgyus*, in *Gdams-ngag-mdzod*, vol. 12, pp. 356–357.

40. Among *gter-ma*, the *Mañi bka'-'bum* is peculiar with respect to its punctuation: it makes use of the ordinary *shad*, instead of the *visarga*-like *gter-shad*. It is of interest to compare, too, Tāranātha's mild suggestion that the treasure-discoverers composed, rather than found, some parts of the *Mañi bka'-'bum* with Sum-pa Mkhan-po Ye-shes dpal-'byor's vociferous remarks (Vostrikov 1970, pp. 56–57). Cf. ch. 7 here, p. 132.

41. This is confirmed, for instance, by the Central Tibetan *Lnga-pa'i gsan-yig*, the Bhutanese *Mañi bka'-'bum*, and the many references found throughout *Phyag-rdzogs-zung-'jug*. Karma Chags-med, the author of the latter, who hailed from Nang-chen in Khams, was active during the first half of the seventeenth century.

The exact meaning of the title *Mañi bka'-'bum* is somewhat problematic; see Vostrikov 1970, pp. 52–53 and Ariane Macdonald 1968/69, p. 527. The biographies of Guru Chos-kyi dbang-phyug (1212–1270) were perhaps the first works to use this title and may provide the key to its precise interpretation. My own rendering is similar to that of A.-M. Macdonald: "The Collected Works (*Bka'-'bum*) of King Srong-btsan sgam-po Concerning the Six-Syllable Mantra (*Oṃ Mani padme Hūm*)."

42. *Chos-skyong-ba'i rgyal-po Srong-btsan sgam-po'i bka'-'bum*.

43. *Thugs-rje-chen-po yi-ge drug-pa'i chos-skor: Mañi bka'-'bum*, I. 1, 10. This title seems to confirm the interpretation of the title *Mañi bka'-'bum* given in n. 41 here.

44. *Rgyal-po-lugs kyi spyian-ras-gzigs*.

45. Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 578.

46. For instance, Bu-ston, in Obermiller 1931–1932, pp. 183–185. Bu-ston's account certainly has some affinity with that of the *Mañi bka'-'bum*, though there is no reason to assume that he based himself on that source directly. See, too, *BA*, p. 1006, and Per Sørensen 1994.

47. *Thu'u-bkwan grub-mtha'*, pp. 57–58. Passages such as this one, found in the work of a leading Dge-lugs-pa hierarch, suggest that the *Mañi bka'-'bum* did not meet with the condemnation in Dge-lugs-pa circles that the scholar who encounters Sum-pa Mkhan-po's opinion (n. 40, this chapter) may suppose. See, for example, Ariane Macdonald 1968/69, p. 531. Discussions with a number of Tibetan scholars, notably Ven. Dezhung Rinpoche, who himself studied the *Mañi bka'-'bum* under the Dge-lugs-pa *dge-bshes* Blo-bzang-chos-kyi-dga'-ba, have convinced me that the Great Fifth's love of the *Mañi bka'-'bum* made a lasting impression on the cult of Srong-btsan sgam-po–Avalokiteśvara within the Dge-lugs-pa sect.

48. *Mañi bka'-'bum*, I. 22, and *Lnga-pa'i gsan-yig*, vol. 3, p. 131. According to these texts it was Padmasambhava who revealed to Khri srong-lde'u-btsan the works of his ancestor.

49. These issues are taken up at length in Ariane Macdonald 1971 and Imaeda 1979. See also Blondeau 1970; Stein 1986a; and ch. 4 of the present book. There is considerable evidence for the Avalokiteśvara cult in the banner paintings and murals of Dunhuang, but it is difficult to interpret with certainty the ramifications for Tibet. In at least one instance, an exquisite maṇḍala of Avalokiteśvara in the form of Amoghapāśa preserved at the Musée Guimet (MG 26466, reproduced in Giès and Cohen 1995, cat. no. 283), one is tempted to speculate upon a Tibetan connection, although there is unfortunately no evidence linking it positively with Tibet. More telling, perhaps, is Dunhuang cave 14, where Avalokiteśvara in his various forms is the figure emphasized, but where this is clearly due to work that post-dates the period of Tibetan occupation. The mural that remains from the Tibetan period is of Vairocana, with whom, as I have argued earlier (ch. 4), Khri Srong-lde'u-btsan and his successors were personally identified. I am inclined to hold that the post-eleventh-century Avalokiteśvara cult drew some of its inspiration from the earlier Vairocana cult and absorbed aspects of it, so that there may be a certain poetic justice in the transformation of Dunhuang cave 14.

50. Lalou 1953. Texts related to the Avalokiteśvara cult that are listed here include numbers 79, 114, 157, 316, 343, 347, 352, 366, 388, 410, 440, 459, 460.

51. My remarks on the *Rnying-ma Bka'-ma* are based on conversations with the late H. H. Bdud-'joms Rin-po-che and with Rev. Mkhan-po Thub-bstan. Avalokiteśvara is one of the eight bodhisattvas in the *maṇḍalas* of the *Sgyu-'phrul zhi-khro*, which is associated with the *Guhyagarbhatantra*, and in the initiatory cycle of the *Mdo dgongs-pa 'dus-pa*, the foremost *Anuyoga-tantra*. In the latter he is also found, with Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāni, as one of the Lords of the Three Clans (*rigs-gsum mgon-po*). Avalokiteśvara's wrathful aspect, Hayagrīva, occupies a position of great importance in the *Bka'-ma* tradition, particularly in the *Bka'-brgyad* cycle. When I state that the *Bka'-ma* includes "authentically ancient material," I do so with the understanding that the many threads that are woven together there cannot at present be satisfactorily sorted out. The history of the *Bka'-ma* as seen from a traditional standpoint is recounted in Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, book 2, pt. 5.

52. *Shes-bya kun-khyab*, vol. 1, p. 433. Repeated verbatim in Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 511.

53. These are the *Bka'-gdams lha-bzhi'i spyian-ras-gzigs*, *Skyer-sgang-lugs kyi spyian-ras-gzigs*, and *Dpal-mo-lugs kyi spyian-ras-gzigs*. Their lineages and precepts have been masterfully summarized by Jo-nang Rje-btsun Kun-dga' grol-mchog: *Gdams-ngag-mdzod*, vol. 12, pp. 252, 256–257, 394–395, 430–432.

54. See *Thugs-rje chen-po dang phyag-rgya chen-po zung-'jug-tu nyams-su-len tshul rjes-gnang dang bcas-pa*, in *Sgrub-thabs-kun-btus*, vol. 3, fol. 1–8; and *BA*, pp. 1006–1046. The *Thugs-rje chen-po rgyal-ba rgya-mtsho* introduced by Ras-chung-pa became particularly popular among the Rnying-ma-pas, and above all among the Karma Bka'-brgyud-pas, whose hierarchs adopted it as their *yi-dam*. There is also a tradition of the *Thugs-rje chen-po rgyal-ba rgya-mtsho* that is traced back to Mitrayogin and is at present a specialty of the Dge-lugs-pa.

55. *Phyag-rdzogs zung-'jug*, p. 265. Compare the tale of La-stod Dmar-po, given in *BA*, pp. 1026–1029, who on requesting teachings in India, probably during the late eleventh century, the very period with which we are here concerned, receives the six-syllable mantra from the master Rdo-rje-gdan-pa and then thinks to himself, "This mantra is repeated throughout Tibet by all old men, women, and even children. This doctrine seems to be a common one." A relatively early Bka'-gdams-pa text, *Bka'-gdams pha-chos*, p. 626, also insists that Avalokiteśvara "certainly is the divine portion of Tibet" (*bod-kyi lha-skal-nyid-du nges*).

56. *Mañi bka'-'bum*, I. 87.

57. See ch. 4.

58. Ariane Macdonald 1971, p. 388.

59. Ariane Macdonald 1968/69, p. 532.
60. Vostrikov 1970, pp. 28–32, 67–78. Per Sørensen 1994. The *Bka'-chens ka-khol-ma* is traditionally said to have been revealed by Atiṣa, a tradition to which *Nyang-ral*, p. 501, already seems to refer.
61. *Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 192–193.
62. *Phyag-rdzogs zung-'jug*, pp. 268–269. *Mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston*, vol. 2, p. 894, relates this directly to precedents established by Mnga'-bdag Myang and Guru Chos-dbang. On Karma Pakshi, see, in the present work, ch. 6.
63. The degree to which even ascetics were affected by this unrest is clearly indicated in *Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 525, where the yogin is advised to equip his retreat with weaponry. Traditions relating to the Bka'-brgyud Bla-ma Zhang (1122–1193; see D. Jackson 1994) exemplify the martial exploits of certain yogins. The hagiography of Guru Chos-dbang (Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 764–765; Gyatso 1994) also alludes to the involvement of certain *gter-ston* in military crafts.
64. *Avalokiteśvara-guṇa-karaṇḍavyūha*, p. 265. See, too, the excellent study by Regamey 1971.
65. *Avalokiteśvara-guṇa-karaṇḍavyūha*, pp. 288–292. The *locus classicus* for Atiṣa's reported teaching of this vision is found in the *lha-bzhi-la ji-ltar gdams-pa'i le'u* of the *Bka'-gdams pha-chos*, pp. 624–635. The relevant verses may be found quoted in *Phyag-rdzogs zung-'jug*, p. 258. See also n. 53 in the present chapter.
66. *Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 34.
67. *Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 35–36.
68. *brjod-du-med-pa'i yang brjod-du-med-pa*.
69. *Bkod-pa bar-ma*, consisting of one million worlds of four continents each surrounding a Mount Meru.
70. *dpag-tu-med-pa'i yang dpag-tu-med-pa*.
71. *ba-la-ha*, from Skt. *Balāha*, the wondrous horse that saved the merchant Sinhala. See Holt 1991, pp. 49–50, for a summary of the story.
72. The green Tārā is identified with the Chinese princess of Wencheng, while the white goddess, Bhṛkūṭī, is the princess of Nepal.
73. *Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 29–30.
74. *Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 511–2, II. 265–266, 279. (In notes 75 through 82, it is not my intention to provide a comprehensive catalogue of relevant passages, but rather to signal representative examples.)
75. *theg-pa rim-pa dgu. Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 496–497, 511–512.
76. *bden-gnyis. Maṇi bka'-'bum*, II. 584–586.
77. *phyag-rgya chen-po. Maṇi bka'-'bum*, II. 288–289, 531, 579–582.
78. *rdzogs-pa chen-po. Maṇi bka'-'bum*, II. 288, 582–584.
79. *lam-rim. Maṇi bka'-'bum*, II. 182–234.
80. *gzhi-lam-'bras-bu gsum. Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 514–519.
81. *lta-sgom-spyod gsum. Maṇi bka'-'bum*, II. 29–30, 279–280, 396–397.
82. *sku-gsum. Maṇi bka'-'bum*, II. 280. More often, however, the *Maṇi bka'-'bum* speaks of the *sku-drug*, six *kāyas*, e.g., II. 26–27, and elsewhere.
83. *man-ngag 'phrul-gyi dum-bu*.
84. *Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 18.
85. *gang-zag nyams-su len-pa re-re'i cha-rkyen. Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 514.
86. *rang-bzhin-gyi gnas-na bzhugs*.
87. *Maṇi bka'-'bum*, I. 20–21.
88. *Gdams-ngag-mdzod*, vols. 2, 3. The intricate teaching of the Bka'-gdams-pas requires careful study. My statement here is a tentative one, based on the reading of such sources as those brought together by Kong-sprul in the magnificent anthology herein cited.
89. *Maṇi bka'-'bum* I. 470: *rig-pa'i rtsal-kha, ye-shes so-ma rgyun-mi-'chad-pa*.

90. *Maṇi bka'-'bum* II. 27–28.

91. *stong-nyid snying-rje'i snying-po-can*, Skt. *śūnyatā karuṇagarbhā*.

92. Having at one time or another attended discourses on Avalokiteśvara given by representatives of all the major Tibetan Buddhist traditions, I cannot but observe that the unifying features of this cult are far more apparent than the distinguishing features of the various lineages involved. It would seem that this unity of the cult is what moved 'Gos Lo-tā-ba to give it separate treatment in *BA*, pp. 1006–1046, Kong-sprul to anthologize it separately in *Gdams-ngag-mdzod*, vol. 11, and Karma Chags-med to combine freely precepts from its different lineages in his *Phyag-rdzogs zung-'jug*.

93. Kunsang 1990, 1993, translates selections from Nyang-ral's *gter-ma*-s relating to Padmasambhava. Though Gu-ru Chos-dbang is not known to have discovered a biography or historical record along these lines, his liturgical cycle, the *Bla-ma-gsang-'dus*, was undoubtedly among the most influential of the early rites for the worship of the precious master.

94. Bischoff 1978 surveys some of the grounds for doubt here.

95. Paul 1982, p. 81, thus rightly remarks that “Guru Rimpoche . . . in many ways, is to be understood as the ‘king’ of the Sherpas, in that he plays, in a divine, symbolic way, the same ritual role that kings often play in providing the ‘center’ for a social-cultural system.”

96. See ch. 1, nn. 61–62.

97. On this (possibly mythical) tantra, see Mayer 1996, p. 66, n. 1.

98. *Sba-bzhed*, p. 32. According to the remarks of Pa-sangs-dbang-'dus and Hildegard Diemberger, on the recently rediscovered *Dbā'-bzhed*, Padmasambhava's role is apparently even thinner than this.

99. *Sba-bzhed*, p. 81.

100. Above all, the *Zangs-gling-ma*, translated in Kunsang 1993.

101. This is demonstrated by the commentary of the eleventh-century master Rong-zom-pa, in *Rong-zom gsung-btus*.

102. Refer to Eastman 1983.

103. On the Tibetan cult of Vajrakīla and its literature, see now in particular Boord 1993; Mayer 1996. Traditional accounts of some of the major Vajrakīla lineages are given in Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 710–716. See also the more detailed *Dpal rdo-rje-phur-pa'i lo-rgyus* in *Sog-bzlog-pa*, vol. 1, pp. 111–201.

104. The history of the early Phur-pa tradition within the 'Khon family is summarized in *Sa-skyā'i gdung-rabs*, pp. 14–15.

105. This small and highly interesting text was first noticed by M. Lalou and was later edited and translated by Bischoff and Hartman 1971. I have interpreted the text somewhat differently than they have in a number of places.

106. The manuscript does include a marginal annotation specifying a tiger year, but it is not possible even to guess with which tiger year during the ninth and tenth centuries this may correspond.

107. In this and the following paragraph, for the convenience of nonspecialist readers, I have transcribed the personal and place names as pronounced, where possible using their current forms and not those of *PT* 44 itself. The orthography as given in the manuscript is noted in the index.

108. *PT* 44, 1b–12b.

109. Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 472.

110. Thus, the modern account of Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 481, includes a reference to “four female earth spirits,” surely a recollection of the fourfold *Bse* goddess. The portage of the texts is recounted on p. 472. The narration of the occult powers realized by the adepts (p. 714), though mentioning different persons by name, is striking in its overall similarity to the account found in *PT* 44: “By brandishing the kīla at a brushfire in a sandalwood forest, the great master Padmasambhava restored the forest. By brandishing it at the flooding waters

of the Ganges, Vimalamitra fixed the river's course. By brandishing it at Mount Trakar Kongcen, the Newar Śīlamanju made the rock face crumble to pieces. By thrusting it at the tracks of a wolf, the venerable lady Kharcenza caused the wolf to be swept away in an avalanche. By raising it against the crow which had carried off his rosary, Menu Gyelwei Nyingpo made the bird fall to earth. And by inflicting it upon the yak-hair tents of the Mön army, Lo Pelgi Lodrö overpowered them. In these and other instances, these masters, thrusting the kīla at both enemies and obstacles, were invincible, even in the face of powerful magic." Finally, the mention of Padmasambhava's scattering of gold, an important motif in tales of great tantric masters, is usually associated with his first entry into Tibet, as it is in Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 513. On this theme see also Kapstein 1992b, n. 19.

111. See n. 98 in this chapter.

112. Thus Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 710–712, enumerates seven lineages specializing in Vajrakīla, of which at least five must have been active at around the beginning of the eleventh century, and this list is certainly not exhaustive.

113. A caveat is required here, for the Padmasambhava cult, while celebrating the monarch Khri Srong-lde'u-btsan also diminishes him by emphatically depicting him as performing obeisance before Padmasambhava. The cult is also frequently at odds with the old ministerial clans, so that its allegiance to the imperial hierarchy is partial at most. The traditions surrounding Srong-btsan-sgam-po seem overall to affirm the imperial order with less reservation, and to treat the ministers as the ruler's disciples and confidants.

114. *Ba-dzra-gu-ru'i phan-yon*, attributed to the discovery of Karma-gling-pa, mid-fourteenth century. Assuming that this dating is approximately correct, the text is of great interest for, among other things, its protest against the current situation in China, Tibet, and Mongolia, and the deleterious effects of this on Tibet.

115. *Oṃ Āḥ Hūṃ Vajraguru Padmasiddhi Hūṃ!*

116. From the *ger-ma* of Ratna-gling-pa, cited in Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 744.

117. Cf. the remarks of Ortner 1989, pp. 33–35, on "egalitarianism and hierarchy: the core contradiction" in Sherpa society. See also Samuel 1993, pp. 123–125, on "horizontal relationships" even within Central Tibet. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that there was an absence of hierarchy on the Tibetan periphery, only that in many instances hierarchy seems to have been more fluid in these regions than in the center.

118. For the example of the authority and prestige accruing to a contemporary *ger-ston*, see Germano in Goldstein and Kapstein 1998. Mkhan-po 'Jigs-phun, the subject of Germano's study, is, however, a rare example of a *ger-ston* who has chosen to remain a monk. But even in this case, some element of the aggrandizement of family power may be seen, for the community of nuns associated with his monastic settlement is directed by a niece who has now herself been recognized as an incarnation.

119. Aris 1989, pp. 105–106.

120. Refer to Karmay 1988b, and Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 683–684, 821–824, for a glimpse of the Great Fifth's Rnying-ma-pa persona. Throughout the enormous historical and biographical corpus produced by the Fifth and by his spiritual son and regent, Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho, one is struck, too, by the abundant use of prophetic passages culled from the entire range of the *ger-ma* literature in elaborating the ideological justification of the Great Fifth's rule. It is clear that these figures understood very well the enduring authority of those who channeled the voices of the empire.

Chapter 9

1. Aspects of the development of the Buddhist tantric Rudra myth have now been masterfully discussed in Davidson 1991 and Stein 1995. See now also Mayer 1998. For much on

the background of the myth in Indian religions generally, see Hildebeitel 1989. For interesting speculations on the evolution of the Samantabhadra myth, refer to Germano forthcoming.

2. For an extended example of the traditional polemic concerning authenticity, see Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, book 2, pt. 7.

3. Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, book 2, pt. 2.

4. See, for instance, Karma Pakshi's *Rgya-mtsho mtha'-yas*, vol. 1, p. 402. Nonetheless, Karma Pakshi, like both *Mun-pa'i go-cha*, which work he is probably following, and *Dgongs-'dus 'grel-chen*, is primarily interested in the symbolic dimensions of the Rudra tale.

5. *Bstan-srung rnam-thar*, pp. 4–30. He is concerned here with the variant Buddhist tantric forms of the story of the defeat of Mahādeva (Śiva) by the Buddha or members of the Buddha's retinue, which is clearly the antecedent of the Rudra episode. For a very influential version of the story that is clearly related to that of Rudra, refer to Snellgrove 1987, pp. 134–141.

6. For the general background of Tibetan history during this period, refer to Shakabpa 1967, ch. 4–5; Petech 1990; van der Kuijp 1991.

7. This is particularly evident in the writings of Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'od-zer (1124–1196) and his associates, on which see esp. Ruegg 1989, pp. 74–92; Kunsang 1990, 1993; Dudjom 1991, pp. 755–759; ch. 8 in this book.

8. On the life and background of Klong-chen-pa, see Guenther 1975–1976, vol. 1, pp. xiii–xxv; Thondup 1989, pp. 145–188; Dudjom 1991, pp. 575–596. All of these accounts may be traced back to the biography authored by Klong-chen-pa's disciple Chos-grags bzang-po. A critical interpretation will be found in Germano forthcoming.

9. This is very clear in the biographical accounts, such as those cited in the preceding note, and in his own poetical works: see, for instance, the colophons found in *Klong-chen gsung-thor-bu*, vol. 1, pp. 95, 137, 149; vol. 2, p. 622. On the influence of Sanskrit *kāvya* in Tibet, see Kapstein in press.

10. There does exist a commentary on the *Uttaratantraśāstra* (*rgyud bla-ma'i bstan-bcos*), by one Blo-gros-mtshungs-med, that has sometimes been attributed to him, though this attribution is doubtful. Reports have recently circulated of the discovery of a manuscript in Tibet that seems surely to be his commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramānavārttika*.

11. Concerning the major writings, refer to Guenther 1975–1976, vol. 1, pp. xvi–xx; Thondup 1989, pp. 149–58.

12. E.g., Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 775–779. On O-rgyan-gling-pa's writings, see in particular Blondeau 1971, 1980.

13. *Padma bka'-thang*, Toussaint 1933.

14. Refer to Blondeau 1971.

15. Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 777. The strange tale of the fate of O-rgyan-gling-pa's corpse also has powerful political implications: Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 777–778.

16. Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 294–334, provides an extended doxographical account. For historical background, see Karmay 1988a.

17. *Klong-chen gsung-thor-bu*, vol. 1, p. 261. A complete translation of the text from which this passage is taken appears in Berzin, Sherpa Tulku, and Kapstein 1987.

18. *Theg-mchog-mdzod*, fol. 202b–221b.

19. It is important to note, however, that the myth of Samantabhadra is not, and by the Rnying-ma-pa is never taken to be, an actual creation myth: Samantabhadra is neither a creator god nor a demiurge; there is no divine volition posited, through which the ground is thought to give rise to the primordial buddha and to sentient beings. Whereas, in the quotation given later, the ground is itself made to speak in the voice of the original buddha, there is no evidence to suggest that the tradition has ever regarded this to be other than a metaphorical representation. Nevertheless, some contemporary Western scholars have suggested there to be a quasi-theistic standpoint disclosed in certain aspects of Rnying-ma-pa discourse. See, for