

The Origins of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* A Study of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*

Alexander Studholme

Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ, perhaps the most well-known of all Buddhist mantras, lies at the heart of the Tibetan system and is cherished by both layman and lama alike. This book documents the origins of the mantra, presents a new interpretation of its meaning, and includes a detailed, annotated précis of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, opening up this important Mahāyāna Buddhist work to a wider audience.

The *Kāraṇḍavyūha*—the earliest textual source for *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ*—describes both the compassionate activity of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva whose power the mantra invokes, and the mythical tale of the search for and discovery of the mantra. Through a detailed analysis of this sūtra, Studholme explores the historical and doctrinal forces behind the appearance of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* in India at around the middle of the first millennium C.E. He argues that the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* has close affinities to non-Buddhist purāṇic literature, and that the conception of Avalokiteśvara and his six-syllable mantra is informed by the conception of the Hindu deity Śiva and his five-syllable mantra *Namaḥ Śivāya*. The sūtra reflects an historical situation in which the Buddhist monastic establishment was coming into contact with Buddhist tantric practitioners, themselves influenced by Śaivite practitioners.

“This book provides a very good example of the phenomenon of religious integration, and clearly shows how Buddhism managed to integrate ideas and practices from another spiritual tradition.”

—Francis Brassard, author of
The Concept of Bodhicitta in Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra

“It was fascinating to read the author's brilliant insights into the syncretic construction of early tantric Mahāyāna Buddhist materials like the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*.”

—John J. Makransky, author of *Buddhahood Embodied:
Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet*

Alexander Studholme received a Ph.D. from the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Bristol University, England.

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OM MAṆIPADME HŪM

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Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*



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To my grandmother J. J. M. S. (1898–2002)

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INTRODUCTION

The Importance of *Oṃ Maṅīpadme Hūṃ*

The six-syllable Buddhist formula *Oṃ Maṅīpadme Hūṃ* needs little introduction. Its form and meaning have long been discussed, though seldom, it must be said, with great accuracy, by European travelers to Tibet and its surrounding regions. In 1254, in what would appear to be the earliest such reference to the formula, the Franciscan friar William of Rubruck remarked of the Mongolians of Karakoram: "Wherever they go they have in their hands a string of one or two hundred beads, like our rosaries, and they always repeat these words, *on mani baccam*, which is 'God, thou knowest,' as one of them interpreted it to me, and they expect as many rewards from God as they remember God in saying this."¹

At the end of the twentieth century, following the Tibetan diaspora of the last forty years, the influence of *Oṃ Maṅīpadme Hūṃ* is no longer confined to the outer reaches of Central Asia. Just as the single syllable *Oṃ* has become almost universally understood as a symbol of things both Indian and religious, so too has *Oṃ Maṅīpadme Hūṃ* begun to establish a place for itself in the popular consciousness of the West. That is to say, it is familiar not merely to Western Buddhists. Increasingly, as the formula appears in a wider and wider variety of different contexts, people with no obvious allegiance to Buddhism will admit to some sense of recognition at the sound or sight of the syllables *Oṃ Maṅīpadme Hūṃ*.

In Tibetan Buddhist culture, of course, the formula is ubiquitous: it is the most important mantra associated with the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the Buddhist equivalent of the patron deity of Tibet. *Oṃ Maṅīpadme Hūṃ* is, to begin with, a prominent visual feature of the landscape, carved and painted onto the rocks that line a road or a path, written in huge letters high up on a hillside, or present in monumental form in the so-called *maṅi*-walls (in Tibetan, *maṅi gdong*) the glorified dry-stone walls that are constructed entirely out of rocks each inscribed with a sacred formula, which, as the name of these edifices would suggest, is most often *Oṃ Maṅīpadme Hūṃ*. *Oṃ Maṅīpadme Hūṃ* is also (with few exceptions) the formula that, in printed form, fills the "prayer wheels" (*maṅi chos 'khor*) of the Tibetan religious

world. These are the cylinders or drums—sometimes large and sometimes small—which line the outside walls of monasteries and temples, waiting to be spun around by visitors, as well as the personal, hand-held contraptions, kept revolving by a gentle flicking of the wrist. Prayer wheels are also found, in different shapes and sizes, harnessed to the power of mountain streams, to the currents of hot air rising from butter lamps, and even, in modern times, to the flow of electric currents.³

The simple recitation of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ*, usually accompanied, as William of Rubruck observed, by the counting of prayer beads, is also the most popular religious practice of the Tibetan Buddhist system. The formula, it would be true to say, constitutes an essential part of the texture of Tibetan life. Its sound can be heard at any time of the day and in any kind of situation.² It is almost as if, as the following rather lyrical passage by the German Lama Govinda suggests, the Tibetan world is constantly humming with the subtle vibration of Avalokiteśvara's six-syllable mantra. Govinda writes:

“The deep devotion with which this hopeful message was accepted and taken to heart by the people of Tibet is demonstrated by the innumerable rock-inscriptions and votive-stones on which the sacred formula of Avalokiteśvara is millionfold engraved. It is on the lips of all pilgrims, it is the last prayer of the dying and the hope of the living. It is the eternal melody of Tibet, which the faithful hears in the murmuring of brooks, in the thundering of waterfalls and in the howling of storms, just as it greets him from rocks and *maṇi*-stones, which accompany him everywhere, on wild caravan tracks and on lofty passes.”⁴

As well as being an essential component of the exoteric side of Tibetan religious life, *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* is also an important constituent of the more private or esoteric part of Tibetan religious practice. It would be practically impossible, for instance, to count every occasion on which the formula is used, incidentally, in the course of all the many different rites and rituals of Tibetan Buddhism.⁵ In general, however, the use of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* is regarded not as an adjunct to other, more vital forms of religious procedure, but as a powerful means of spiritual development in its own right. It is a basic, foundational practice taught to children and beginners.⁶ Yet it is also a practice that not even the most advanced practitioner would ever wish to leave behind.⁷ Its recitation is one of the central pillars of the Tibetan religious system.⁸

In order to give a particular focus to this recitation, a large number of *sādhana* texts—step-by-step invocations of supernatural beings—connected to the formula were composed, each culminating in a concentrated session of the repetition of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* in conjunction with the visualization of a

particular form of Avalokiteśvara. The Tibetan *bsTan 'gyur* contains a number of *ṣaḍakṣara* (or *ṣaḍakṣarī*)—“six-syllable”—*sādhana*s.⁹ These works continued to be composed in Tibet long after the definitive creation of a fixed Tibetan Buddhist canon in the first part of the fourteenth century.¹⁰ But, possibly the most extraordinary and most mysterious application of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* is its use in the so-called Black Hat (*zhwa nag*) ceremony of the *Karma bKa' brgyud* school of Tibetan Buddhism, during which the Karmapa, the lama who sits at the head of that particular sect, is believed to manifest as a form of Avalokiteśvara while slowly reciting the six-syllable formula and while wearing a special black crown, given to the fifth Karmapa by the Chinese emperor at the beginning of the fifteenth century.¹¹

Finally, *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* plays another important role in Tibetan life as a mode of collective religious practice. On particular occasions and over the course of several days, people will gather together to recite the formula as many times as they are able. Again, though this is a form of practice which may be performed with regard to a variety of different mantras, the one most often used in this respect is, undoubtedly, *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ*. I myself saw this activity going on while staying at the Tibetan refugee settlement at Clement Town in North India during the winter of 1992–93, when, at the time of the Tibetan New Year, everyone in the colony was encouraged to recite *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ*. A large tent was set up in the forecourt of one of the three monasteries of the settlement precisely for this purpose and each person engaged in the practice was asked to keep a record of the number of recitations he or she had achieved, so that, at the end of the week, a grand total might be calculated and this number conveyed to Dharamsala, the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile, where the blessings accumulated in the process might be dedicated to the well-being of the Dalai Lama. During this time, I would be woken, early each morning, by the sound of my landlord and his two young children busily muttering the formula. Later that year, in the course of a trip into Tibet itself, I discovered a group of people, mainly elderly, gathered in the courtyard of a temple in Lhasa occupied in precisely the same way, reciting *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* in order that the accumulated number of recitations might be sent to the Dalai Lama.¹²

Given the great importance of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* in Tibetan Buddhism, an academic study devoted entirely to the history of the formula did not seem unwarranted. To this end, my original intention had been to trace the complete historical trajectory of the formula, from its original inception in India to its establishment as one of the linchpins of the Tibetan Buddhist system. Some preliminary research was, therefore, conducted into the avenues by which the formula reached Tibet from India and into the means by which it was subsequently promoted by the Tibetans themselves. However, it soon became apparent that the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, the earliest textual source for

any mention of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* and a text that has, hitherto, been largely overlooked by Western scholarship, does not just mention the formula in passing, but may, in fact, be seen as a work whose central concern is the dissemination of the formula. It seemed justifiable, then, to devote all my energies to an analysis of this sūtra, in order to see what this might reveal about the place of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* within the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism. What findings I managed to make on the later history of the formula are, occasionally, used in the support of this more modest project. Meanwhile, a complete history of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* must remain a thing of the future, involving as it would, the mastery of a wide range of Tibetan literary sources.

The first chapter of this book, then, introduces the reader to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, discussing both the internal and external evidence for its likely date and place of origin and providing a brief survey of its treatment, to date, in Buddhist academic studies. A detailed, annotated précis of the sūtra, made from the Sanskrit edition of the text produced by P. L. Vaidya and published as part of the *Mahāyāna Sūtra Saṃgraha* by the Mithila Institute of Dharbanga in 1961,¹³ with reference, also, to the Tibetan version of the text found in the Peking edition of the *bKa' 'gyur*,¹⁴ forms an appendix to the thesis. The making of this précis was, naturally, essential to my own analysis of the sūtra. It is, I believe, worthy of inclusion here not only because, without it, my own presentation and argument might seem a little obscure to a reader unfamiliar with the text, but also, because I hope it will be of some interest and use to scholars working in this field. No definitive Sanskrit edition of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* has yet been produced—the language of the work is difficult and the text exists in a number of subtly different versions—putting a proper English translation of the sūtra beyond the scope of the present, historical study.¹⁵

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 set out to show that, from an historical point of view, the six-syllable formula *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* represents a Buddhist adaptation of the five-syllable Śaivite formula *Namaḥ Śivāya*. Chapter 2 establishes, initially, that there is a strong connection between the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* and the non-Buddhist purāṇic tradition. The discussion dwells principally on an analysis of different versions of the *vāmana-avatāra*—the story of Viṣṇu's incarnation as a dwarf—found both in the sūtra and in various different purāṇas. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, the chapter concludes, seems to have been written in a religious milieu in which Śiva was the dominant god, complemented harmoniously by the other great purāṇic deity Viṣṇu. More specifically, it is argued, the evidence suggests that there may be a particular relationship between the sūtra and the Śaivite *Skanda Purāṇa*.

Chapter 3 shows that, in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, Avalokiteśvara appears as an *īśvara* (lord) and *puruṣa* (cosmic man or person) in the mold of the two

great purāṇic deities. In keeping with the findings of the previous chapter, though, certain details of this conception of the bodhisattva betray a distinctively Śaivite, rather than Vaiṣṇavite, influence. We discuss the way in which this presentation of the bodhisattva is tailored to the demands of accepted Buddhist doctrine and integrated with the roles and attributes of Avalokiteśvara already established in earlier Mahāyāna sūtras. The chapter ends by tracing the evolution of the bodhisattva, from his first appearance under the original name of Avalokitasvara as an attendant of the Buddhas Amitābha and Śākyamuni, to his emergence as the supreme Buddhist *īśvara*.

Chapter 4 examines the similarities—and differences—between the treatment of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* and the treatment of *Namaḥ Śivāya* in Śaivite texts (principally the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Śiva Purāṇa*). Both the five- and the six-syllable formulae are presented as the *hṛdaya*, or “heart,” of their respective *īśvaras*. Both are said to be *sui generis* methods of attaining liberation. Both are promoted as forms of practice that are available to everyone, regardless of social or religious status. At the same time, both are shown to be somewhat secret and difficult to obtain. Furthermore, just as *Namaḥ Śivāya* is explicitly presented as a developed form of the Vedic *praṇava* *Oṃ*, so too is *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* described in terms that indicate that it, too, is to be regarded as a kind of *praṇava*. The presentation of *Namaḥ Śivāya*, however, is illustrated in the purāṇas by a story about the marriage between a king and queen, presupposing, I suggest, an understanding of the Śaivite formula in terms of the doctrine of *śakti*, the energetic, female dimension of the male deity. Such a story is noticeably absent in the sūtra.

Chapter 5 argues that the treatment of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* represents the reconfiguration, by the Mahāyāna monastic establishment, of a practice first propagated by lay Buddhist practitioners. The sūtra is clearly written from the monastic point of view. Instead of a story about an (eventually) happy marriage, the sūtra's long section on *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* is prefaced by a story about the shipwreck of the seafaring king Siṃhala and his subsequent escape from the clutches of a band of *rākṣasīs*, man-eating demonesses, who are disguised as beautiful women—a tale more obviously in tune with the monastic temperament. More conclusively, the end of the sūtra also includes a teaching on monastic discipline, laying heavy emphasis on the importance of preventing non-celibate practitioners from making their homes in the monastery. Yet, the preceptor who grants initiation into the use of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* is said to be married. The characteristics of this man are those of an antinomian, free-living tantric yogin. This reading is supported by an association made, in the sūtra, between *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* and the idea of the *vidyādhara*, the “holder of knowledge,” a figure almost synonymous with the *mahāsiddha*, the archetypal tantric practitioner.

The presentation of *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ* in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, it seems, describes the adaptation of a practice that originated in tantric circles to the doctrinal and ethical framework of Mahāyāna monasticism.

Doctrinally, then, the sūtra is the result of a process of creative religious synthesis. Significantly, for example, *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ* is presented in a number of different ways as analogous to the Perfection of Wisdom and, finally, as greater than the Perfection of Wisdom. This would appear to express the idea that *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ*, as a form of the *praṇava*, supercedes the Perfection of Wisdom as the supreme principle of the Mahāyāna. Then, certain aspects of the tantric-style origins of the formula are preserved. Initiation into the use of *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ*, for instance, is said to be dependent on the use of a tantric-style maṇḍala. However, the central figure of this maṇḍala is not Avalokiteśvara, but the Buddha Amitābha. This is symbolic of the fact that the concise formula of Avalokiteśvara is now located within a Mahāyāna doctrinal system in which rebirth in Sukhāvātī, the pure land of Amitābha, is the overarching religious goal and, also, of the fact that the use of the formula is now to be understood as one of the many Mahāyāna practices that are believed to lead to this goal. Recitation of *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ* is no longer presented as a means of engagement with the *śakti* of the *īśvara*, but is reconfigured as a form of the traditional Mahāyāna practice of the *nāmānusmṛti*, or “bringing to mind the name,” of Avalokiteśvara, commonly associated with the goal of Sukhāvātī.

The sūtra manages to avoid, almost entirely, any allusion to the conception of the concise formula as *śakti*. This, I suggest, is deliberate. With its sexual connotations, the characteristically tantric doctrine of *śakti* is perhaps not best suited to the training of monastic practitioners. Instead, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* roots the use of *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ* in a scheme borrowed from the *bhakti*, or “devotional,” side of the purāṇic tradition. Recitation of the formula is said to lead to rebirth in worlds contained within the hair pores of Avalokiteśvara’s body. This is a reworking, I suggest, of a doctrine classically expressed in chapter eleven of the *Bhagavadgītā*. There, Arjuna “sees” (*paśyati*) a cosmic form of the *īśvara* Kṛṣṇa that contains the whole universe and is then taught the doctrine of *bhakti* as a means of making this experience his own. By the time the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* was constructed, of course, the theology of the *Bhagavadgītā* was common to both the Vaiṣṇavite and the Śaivite tradition alike. The so-called *Īśvaraḡtā* of the *Kūrma Purāṇa*, for instance, presents a Śaivite version of the teaching.

In the sūtra, the cosmic form of the Buddhist *īśvara* is expressed anew in Mahāyāna terms. The amazing attributes of Avalokiteśvara’s body mimic those of Samantabhadra, the great bodhisattva of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, a debt that the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* explicitly acknowledges by alluding several times to Samantabhadra and even, at one point, describing a kind of duel—a *samādhi*

contest (*samādhivigraha*)—between the two bodhisattvas, which Avalokiteśvara, naturally, wins. Just as the *Bhagavadgītā* promotes *bhakti*, through the use of the Vedic *praṇava* *Oṃ*, as a means of entering the vision of the Vaiṣṇavite *īśvara*, so the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* promotes the *nāmānusmṛti* of the Buddhist *praṇava* *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ* as a means of entering the vision of the Buddhist *īśvara*. The vision of the cosmic Avalokiteśvara is itself assimilated with the central Mahāyāna doctrine of Sukhāvātī, when this manifestation of the bodhisattva is said, in the sūtra, to lead beings to Amitābha’s pure land: the purāṇic doctrine of “seeing” (*darśana*) the *īśvara* is syncretized with the Mahāyāna doctrine of rebirth in the Buddha’s pure land.

Finally, chapter 6 turns to the vexed issue of the meaning of the six-syllable formula. The true meaning of *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ*, it is argued, reflects this syncretism. The middle four syllables of the mantra, “*mañipadme*,” are not, as has been variously suggested, to be translated as the (grammatically unfeasible) “jewel (*mañi*) in the lotus (*padme*)” or even as the vocative “(O thou) with the jewel and lotus,” but as the locative compound “in the jewel-lotus,” or “in the lotus made of jewels.” Variations of the same brief phrase are used, throughout the Mahāyāna, to describe the manner in which a person is said to appear in Sukhāvātī or in the pure lands in general. The image given in the sūtras is that of a practitioner seated cross-legged in the calyx of a lotus flower made of jewels, which then unfolds its petals to reveal the splendour of one or other of the pure lands. The formula, therefore, the *hṛdaya*, or “heart,” of Avalokiteśvara, the Buddhist *īśvara*, is also an expression of the aspiration to be reborn in Sukhāvātī.

In conclusion, then, the question remains open as to whether *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ* was, in fact, the original six-syllable formula of Avalokiteśvara or whether this particular form, which meshes so well with the overall design of the Mahāyāna sūtras, replaced an earlier mantra, used in the period before the incorporation of this doctrine into the Mahāyāna system, which has now been forgotten. The possible identity of such a mantra is considered.

CHAPTER 1

Background to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*

There are two separate and quite distinct versions of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, one in prose and another in verse. With respect to editions kept, respectively, at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Société Asiatique in Paris,¹ the one is a text of sixty-seven leaves, or one hundred and thirty-four pages, comprising two sections (*nirvyūha*) of sixteen and twelve chapters (*prakaraṇa*),² while the other is a very much longer work of one hundred and eighty-five leaves or three hundred and ninety pages, containing about four thousand five hundred verses (*śloka*), composed mainly in the thirty-two-syllable *anuṣṭubh* meter,³ in a total of eighteen chapters.

Neither version should be confused with a work by the name of the *Ratnakāraṇḍa* that appears in the Tibetan canon, translated by a certain Rinchen 'Tshos bsgyur. This is an entirely different text, consisting mainly of a discussion of moral and doctrinal matters in connection with the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. This work, the *Ratnakāraṇḍa*, or a very similar one, whose title is translated as *Ratnakāraṇḍavyūha*, is also to be found in the Chinese canon, translated once in 270 c.E. by Dharmarakṣa and again, sometime between 435 and 468 c.E., by Guṇabhadra.⁴

The *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, which is the concern of this thesis, is almost wholly devoted to the glorification of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, as is made clear by the full title sometimes given to the work: *Avalokiteśvaragūṇa-kāraṇḍavyūha*.⁵ This might provisionally be translated as "The Magnificent Array, (Contained in a) Casket of the Qualities of Avalokiteśvara." A discussion of this translation of the title of the sūtra follows.

In a recent English translation of the two *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtras*, Luis Gomez renders the term *vyūha* as the "magnificent display" of the wondrous qualities of the land of Sukhāvati.⁶ This meaning might easily be attached to the use of the term in the titles of other Mahāyāna works.⁷ *Vyūha*, though, is also used in the Vaiṣṇavite tradition to signify both the "successive emanations" of Viṣṇu, as well as part of the "essential nature" of the god.⁸ In actual fact, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* does, as we shall see, share many of the characteristics of the Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite purāṇas and does describe a succession

of different appearances by Avalokiteśvara (as an *asura*, as a brahmin, as a bee and as a flying horse) comparable to the different manifestations of Viṣṇu. It seems possible, therefore, that the *vyūha* of the sūtra is also being used with the Vaiṣṇavite sense in mind. “Magnificent array,” then, is perhaps better than “magnificent display.”

The term *kāraṇḍa*, in this particular context, has usually been translated as “basket.”⁹ It might, though, be better to choose a word that conveys a sense of greater solidity and gravitas. Monier Monier-Williams also offers “covered box of bamboo wicker work.”¹⁰ P. C. Majumder suggests “casket.”¹¹ The latter translation certainly befits the way in which the related term *karaṇḍaka* is employed in the Prajñāpāramitā literature. In his *Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature*, Edward Conze also translates this term as “basket” (he makes no mention of *kāraṇḍa*).¹² However, the passages in which the word occurs indicate that it describes a container used for keeping relics, an object that it seems more natural to call a “casket.” In the *Aṣṭasahasrikā*, for instance, the effect of placing a wishing-jewel (*cintāmaṇi*) in a *karaṇḍaka* is compared to the way in which the Prajñāpāramitā pervades the relics of the Tathāgata. The *karaṇḍaka*, in this context, is said to be “an object of supreme longing,” which “emits radiance” and which “should be paid homage to.”¹³

The Tibetan rendering of *Kāraṇḍavyūha* is *Za ma tog bkod pa'i mdo*, where *za ma tog* also seems to refer to a kind of casket. The term appears, for instance, in the *Tshig gsum gnad du brdeg pa*, or “The Three Statements That Strike the Essential Points,” a *gter ma*, or “discovered” text of the *rNying ma*, or “Old,” school of Tibetan Buddhism, dating from the late thirteenth or early-fourteenth century. The text is said to be the last testament of the early *rDzogs Chen* master dGa' rab rDorje, comprising an oral commentary on the *rDo rje'i tshig gsum*, or “three *vajra* verses.”¹⁴ The three verses themselves, we read, were written in melted lapis lazuli on gold, fell from the sky into the palm of dGa' rab rDorje's disciple Mañjuśrīmitra and were then put into a tiny thumbnail-sized vessel, which itself was then “placed within a casket,” or *za ma tog*, “of precious crystal” (*rin po che shel gyi za ma tog sen gang ba cig snod du babs pa*).¹⁵ There is no such thing, surely, as a “basket” made of crystal.

The *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, then is a “casket” containing the “magnificent array” of the manifestations and works of Avalokiteśvara. The implication of this title is that the sūtra is comparable, in its function, to a relic casket, which may then be made an object of homage. This is consistent with the fact that the sūtra, in the manner of the earlier Prajñāpāramitā sūtras and other Mahāyāna works, refers to itself as something to be set up and worshipped. At the end of a passage in which Avalokiteśvara is said to teach the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* to the *asuras*, the sūtra is compared to a wish-fulfilling jewel (*cintāmaṇi*). The *asuras* are then said to turn with happiness towards it, to listen to it, to develop faith towards it, to understand it, to write it, to have it written, to

memorize it and to recite it, to worship it (*pūjayiṣyanti*), to reflect on it (*cintayīṣyanti*), to explain it in full to others (*parebhyaśca vistareṇa samprakāśayiṣyanti*), to meditate on it (*bhāvayiṣyanti*) and to bow to it (*namaskuranti*) with great joy, respect and devotion.¹⁶

The longer verse *Kāraṇḍavyūha* is later than the prose version, probably by as much as a thousand years. In the opinion of Giuseppe Tucci, this verse text is representative of the worst kind of Mahāyāna sūtra. It adds little of note to the prose, he writes, and exemplifies the somewhat banal tendency within Mahāyāna Buddhism to rejoice in the simple virtue of the prolixity of a work, not exactly for its own sake, but for the sake of the increased amount of merit earned by those who wrote, read, or recited it.¹⁷ The greater part of this padding out process is achieved by the addition of certain passages from the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and of almost half of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. These are both works that have been attributed to the Indian master Śāntideva, who is said to have lived in the eighth century.¹⁸ This, as we shall see, would be enough to show that the verse *Kāraṇḍavyūha* is the later text, as the earliest known manuscripts of the prose sūtra have been dated to a time no later than the early part of the seventh century c.e.

The most significant evidence supporting the much later date of the verse sūtra, however, is the number of striking similarities between it and a Nepalese work, the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, which scholars agree was composed around the middle of the second millennium. The most obvious of these similarities, as Tucci points out, is the fact that both works are framed by similar extended prologues and epilogues. These consist of dialogues between, first, a Buddhist sage named Jayaśrī and a king named Jinaśrī, and, second, between the great Buddhist emperor Aśoka and his Buddhist preceptor Upagupta. Both this prologue and this epilogue are entirely absent from the prose sūtra.¹⁹

The *Svayambhūpurāṇa* survives today in several different recensions. This, as Tucci remarks, compounds the difficulty of deciding whether the debt of influence is owed by it to the verse *Kāraṇḍavyūha* or vice versa, or even if the two works have borrowed from a third, unknown source.²⁰ Both works are popular in Nepal. Despite the usual association of the purāṇas with the non-Buddhist religious traditions, the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* is, in fact, a Buddhist work. There is some reason to believe that it was originally referred to as an *uddeśa*, or “teaching,” a word more commonly associated with Buddhist texts.²¹ The content of the work, though, is actually more akin to that of a *māhātmya*,²² a sort of guide for pilgrims, describing the holiness of certain important shrines and temples, in this instance, chiefly, the Svayambhū, or “self-existent,” temple in the Kathmandu Valley.

At one point, however, the verse *Kāraṇḍavyūha* elaborates on a section in the prose sūtra, in which various gods are said to be produced from different

parts of the body of Avalokiteśvara.²³ Avalokiteśvara himself, the verse sūtra adds, is an emanation of the *Ādibuddha*, or “primordial buddha,” a term that is explicitly said to be synonymous with *Svayambhū* and *Ādinātha*, “primordial lord.”²⁴ It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that the verse *Kāraṇḍavyūha* was composed as an adjunct to the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, as part of a process synthesizing the cult of Avalokiteśvara with the cult of the *Svayambhū*. The sūtra, therefore, seems likely to be the later of the two works.

The oldest surviving manuscript of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* is considered to have been created in 1557 or 1558.²⁵ The present scholarly consensus, however, is that the very first version of the text was composed in the fourteenth century.²⁶ David Gellner writes that it probably dates from the period of king Jayasthitimalla, the ruler of the Kathmandu Valley between 1382–1395.²⁷ John K. Locke concludes, too, that the text belongs to the late Malla period.²⁸ Allowing a certain interval, then, between the creation of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* and that of the verse *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, we may perhaps conclude that the latter was composed not long after the beginning of the fifteenth century. Siegfried Lienhard suggests that it was written in the sixteenth century.²⁹

The fact that the verse sūtra is later than the prose is also supported by the linguistic character of the two texts. The Sanskrit of the verse text, despite the inclusion of some peculiarly Buddhist vocabulary, is written in almost pure classical Sanskrit, a considerable stylistic refinement of the prose text. The prose sūtra is written in a form of hybrid Sanskrit. F. Edgerton, for instance, includes the prose text in his third class of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.³⁰ Constantin Régamey comments: “According to the more detailed classification of John Brough, the [prose] *Kāraṇḍavyūha* would present the characteristics of the late Avadāna style and of the medieval Buddhist Sanskrit, frequent in tantric works, though not confined to them.”³¹

The earliest existent copies of the prose *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* belong to the collection of Buddhist texts unearthed, during the 1940s, in a *stūpa*, situated three miles outside the town of Gilgit in northern Kashmir. Fragments of two different manuscripts of the sūtra have been identified amongst this find.³² These are both written in much the same type of script, which, according to the expert palæographic analysis conducted on one of these texts, became obsolete around 630 c.e.³³ It is less easy to gauge when the sūtra was actually composed: this must remain, for the time being, a matter of some conjecture. In 1955, Nalinaksha Dutt, without giving any grounds to substantiate his opinion, stated simply that the sūtra is “of about the fourth century.”³⁴ Such an estimate, however, would seem to be broadly supported by Adelheid Mette, who has recently produced an edition of the Gilgit fragments of the text.³⁵ Where these fragments correspond, Mette observes, their wording is not always identical, indicating that the history of the text tradition had

begun much earlier. She writes: “Many of the seeming peculiarities of language are due to corruption which, perhaps already in the fifth or sixth century A.D., affected a formerly more correct Sanskrit text.”³⁶

This view would also be compatible with another aspect of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, namely, that it is representative of that stratum of Buddhist literature in which the categories of sūtra and tantra are somewhat blurred. The work is, as its name declares, very obviously a sūtra, laying great stress, for instance, on the central Mahāyāna doctrine of rebirth in Sukhāvātī. However, the promotion of the formula *Om Maṇipadme Hūṃ*, together with other features of the text such as the use of a maṇḍala, the role of a guru figure and the motif of the conversion of Śiva to *Buddhadharma* are all more characteristic of the tantra genre.

Following a discussion of this issue by the fifteenth century Tibetan lama mKhas grub rje, David Snellgrove cites three works in which the forms of sūtra and tantra seem to overlap: the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*, which includes a presentation, common in the tantras, of a fivefold arrangement of buddhas and long sections on the use of mantras, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa Tantra*, sections of which refer to themselves as sūtra, and the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha Tantra*, which, similarly, is said to be a sūtra in the colophon of its Sanskrit manuscript.³⁷ This list is, of course, by no means exhaustive. However, while these texts were, subsequently, classified as tantras by the Tibetans, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* has, as far as I can tell, always remained a sūtra. In this respect, it might be grouped alongside texts such as the late Prajñāpāramitā works, the *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya*, or “Heart Sūtra,” and the *Svalpākṣarā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. Despite their propagation of such well-known formulae as, respectively, *Gate Gate Pāragate Pārasaṃgate Bodhi Svāhā* and *Om Mune Mune Mahāmunaye Svāhā*,³⁸ these last two texts have generally—though not always—been regarded as sūtras. mKhas grub rje, for instance, writes that it seems reasonable that the *Svalpākṣarā* should belong to the “mantra” category and that some assert that the *Hṛdaya* should also belong to the same category.³⁹

The dating of these texts, too, is a matter of informed guesswork. Snellgrove, for instance, implies that the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* was written in the fifth century,⁴⁰ N. Dutt (suggesting that the text postdates the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*) the sixth century,⁴¹ and Yukei Matsunaga, in a more recent study, the seventh century.⁴² The tantric-hued Prajñāpāramitā texts are probably earlier than this. Conze suggests a fourth century date for the *Hṛdaya* and *Svalpākṣarā*.⁴³ Sounding a more definite note, R. E. Emmerick reports that, while the earliest surviving Sanskrit manuscript of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* can be no earlier than the middle of the fifth century, a more primitive version of the text seems to have been used by its first Chinese translator Dharmakṣema, a figure who arrived in China in 414 c.e.⁴⁴ In the company of such texts, a late

fourth century or, perhaps, early-fifth century date for the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, does not, then, seem unreasonable.

This dating would, furthermore, be consistent with the traditional account of the earliest appearance of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* in Tibet. The text is said to have been one of the first two Buddhist works ever to have reached the Land of Snows during the reign of Lha tho tho ri, arriving either (depending on which account you read) in a casket which fell from the sky onto the roof of the king's palace, or in the hands of missionaries from the country of Li, modern day Khotan.⁴⁵ King Lha tho tho ri, said to have been born five generations before the first of the three great Tibetan religious monarchs, Srong btsan sgam po, who died in 650 c.e., is deemed to have lived some time between the end of the fourth and the end of the fifth century.⁴⁶

This putative connection with missionaries from Khotan would also fit in with the most likely place of origin of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*. The text makes one mention of the Indian province of Magadha, where Avalokiteśvara is said to bring an end to a twenty year famine.⁴⁷ It also refers several times to the city of Vārāṇasī, itself situated on the borders of that province, where Avalokiteśvara is said to manifest in the form of a bee,⁴⁸ where the preceptor, who grants initiation into the practice of *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ*, is said to live,⁴⁹ and where those who abuse the customs of the *Samgha* are said to be reborn as the lowliest creatures living on filth.⁵⁰ I do not think, however, that we can conclude from these references that the sūtra was composed in the region of either Magadha or of Vārāṇasī. Much of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* reflects a close interaction between Buddhism and Śaivism. The use of Vārāṇasī, the great Śaivite city, as the backdrop to the drama of the sūtra, may surely be seen simply as a symbolic means of acknowledging the confluence of the two traditions. Similarly, the use of Magadha as a location for the action of the sūtra may merely be a way of linking the activity of Avalokiteśvara to the holy land of northeast India.

It seems more likely that the sūtra originated in Kashmir. The evidence for this, I must admit, is rather slim and highly circumstantial. First, the earliest manuscripts of the sūtra were found, at Gilgit, in Kashmir. Second, Kashmir is strongly associated with the development of Śaivite tantra and the influences of both Śaivism and of tantric-style practice are, it will be argued, strongly apparent in the sūtra. Third, as we shall see, the sūtra gives Avalokiteśvara some of the characteristics of Samantabhadra,⁵¹ the great bodhisattva of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, a work whose origins are associated with the Central Asian regions bordering Kashmir.⁵² Finally, it is not very far from Kashmir to Khotan, from whence the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* may first have reached Tibet.⁵³

Scholars working in the first part of this century would have been resistant to the idea of a late fourth or early-fifth century date for the sūtra. They

would, similarly, have been surprised to learn that the Gilgit manuscripts of the text were attributed to a period no later than the beginning of the seventh century. Their preconceptions would even have been disturbed by an examination of various editions of the Tibetan canon, where the prose *Kāraṇḍavyūha* is clearly shown to have been one of the many texts brought to the Land of Snows during the first great period of Buddhist transmission, that is, at the end of the eighth century. In the colophons of the Derge and Lhasa editions of the *bKa' 'gyur*, the translators of the work are named as Jinamitra, Dānaśīla, and Ye shes sde, all of whom are well-known figures from that time.⁵⁴ A third colophon lists different translators,⁵⁵ Śākyaprabha and Ratnarakṣita, who may also have been working at that time: one Śākyaprabha is said, in Tāranātha's early seventeenth-century *History of Buddhism in India*, to be a contemporary of Dānaśīla's.⁵⁶ The prose *Kāraṇḍavyūha* is also listed in a Tibetan catalog of translated Buddhist texts, the *sTong Thang lDan dKar*, or "White Cheek of the Empty Plain," which was probably compiled in 812 c.e.⁵⁷

For up until the 1940s, western Buddhist scholars had consigned the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* to an imaginary corpus of late, "corrupted" Mahāyāna literature, belonging to the ninth or tenth century.⁵⁸ Linguistically, according to Régamey, there were good reasons for thinking that the work was written towards the end of the first millennium c.e.⁵⁹ Also, the only known manuscripts were of Nepalese origin, the earliest of which came from the twelfth century. On top of that, the Chinese translation of the sūtra, by T'ien Si Tsai, did not take place until as late as 983 c.e.⁶⁰ (The verse sūtra is not found in Chinese translation, a fact which is quite in accord with the probability that it was not written until the fifteenth or sixteenth century. It is, likewise, not found in Tibetan translation, having, almost certainly, yet to have come into existence by the time the Tibetan *bKa' 'gyur* was first compiled by Bu ston in 1322.)

Another factor taken to support a late ninth or tenth century date for the sūtra was the absence of any copy of the work and, it seemed, of any mention of *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ*, from among the hoard of manuscripts collected from the Silk Road oasis town of Tun Huang, whose libraries were sealed up in the tenth century.⁶¹ In 1979, however, Yoshiro Imæda announced that the formula (slightly altered as *Oṃ ma ni pad me hūṃ myi tra sva hā, Oṃ ma ma ni pad me hum mye*, and *Oṃ ma ma ni pad me hum myi*) did, in fact, appear in three different Tun Huang manuscripts. These are all versions of the same text, a treatise known as the *Dug gsum 'dul ba*, or "The Purification of the Three Poisons," which describes how a dead person may be prevented from taking an unfavourable rebirth by the practice, performed by relatives on his or her behalf, of purifying ('*dul ba*) the three poisons (*dug gsum*) of greed, hatred, and delusion. *Oṃ Mañipadme Hūṃ* (or its approximation) is associated in this text with the activity of Avalokiteśvara and is said to purify the third poison of delusion.⁶² It remains a mystery, however, as to why the six-

syllable formula is only found in these semicorrupted and elaborated forms and why no copy of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* has been found in the hoard of sūtras and tantras discovered at Tun Huang. The caves, after all, contain a painting (executed in 836 c.E.) of the thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara,⁶³ an iconographic form that is, as we shall see, central to the dogmatic purpose of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*.

Nonetheless, this mistaken assumption that the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* was such a very late and, by implication, such a very heterodox Mahāyāna sūtra was probably the principal cause of a distinct lack of scholarly interest in the text. The number of academic articles on the sūtra remains small: there are four by Régamey, three on linguistic peculiarities and one on the Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite influences discernible in the sūtra; one by Tucci, editing short passages from the verse sūtra and pointing out its connection to the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*; one by Majumder on the verse sūtra that does little more than give a short précis of its contents; one by Jeremiah P. Losty on a twelfth-century Indian manuscript of the sūtra,⁶⁴ and, lastly, a piece by Siegfried Lienhard focusing on an obscure lexicological detail. More recently, Adelheid Mette has published her edition of the Gilgit fragments (including a brief introduction to the text) and another short article on the history of the text. And that, apart from the cursory treatment given to the sūtra in the early literary surveys of Eugène Burnouf and Maurice Winternitz, is that.⁶⁵

No critical edition has been made of either the prose or the verse version of the Sanskrit text. Tucci seemed to have abandoned his ambition to edit the verse sūtra as soon as he had discovered it added little of value to the shorter prose version.⁶⁶ The lack of a critical edition of the prose text is also explained, to some extent, by the difficulty and obscurity of much of the language and the many inconsistencies found between the different manuscripts.⁶⁷ The sheer volume of these documents attests to the great popularity of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* in Nepal. Scholars have long been familiar with Nepalese manuscripts in the libraries of Calcutta, Cambridge, London, Munich, Oxford, Paris, and Tokyo. But, as Mette adds, a team of German scholars has recently photographed more than one hundred and twenty additional Nepalese manuscripts, “some of them very early.”⁶⁸ Jean Przyluski began, but never managed to complete, an edition of the Sanskrit prose version, using three manuscripts available to him in Paris at the time.⁶⁹ Similarly, Régamey was prevented by illness from producing editions of the prose and verse versions of the sūtra.⁷⁰ A complete edition of the Tibetan text was, however, completed by Lalou, who consulted a number of different recension of the *bKa’ gyur*, as well as the Chinese tradition. This remains unpublished.⁷¹

The most well-known edition of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, that of Satyavrata Sāmaśrami, first published for the *Hindu Commentator* in Calcutta in 1873 and based on a late-twelfth-century Nepalese manuscript, cannot be regarded

as “critical.”⁷² Reproduced by the Mithila Institute at Darbhanga in 1961, it is described by its editor P. L. Vaidya as “very corrupt.” Régamey pronounces it “noncritical” and “very peculiar”: its readings differ in almost every line from the majority of manuscripts. Moreover, Régamey writes, it is impossible to know to what degree these readings are based on a particular (and obviously very corrupt) manuscript or whether they represent Vaidya’s own emendations.⁷³ This is also Mette’s view: “It seems that Vaidya too has altered the text, but without consulting any further manuscripts.”⁷⁴

This, however, for convenience’s sake, is the edition which I have used in order to produce a précis of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. I have also referred to the Tibetan translation of the text found in the Peking *bKa’ gyur*. There exists no published translation of the sūtra in any modern European language. I have, though, been able to consult a handwritten French translation of the sūtra, made by Eugène Burnouf in 1837.⁷⁵ I cannot pretend, however, to have made any more than the occasional, fairly rudimentary comparison between the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the text. Nor have I referred in any great detail to the recent edition of the Gilgit fragments prepared by Mette. The first Gilgit text, Mette remarks, shows some slight differences between the later Nepalese versions, but corresponds “on the whole,” as regards content and length.⁷⁶ Fortunately, for present purposes, these fragments do include parts of the section of the sūtra devoted to the subject of the six-syllable formula, where the mantra’s form is unambiguously confirmed as: “*Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ*.”⁷⁷

The *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, then, on the balance of the available evidence, is a work that was composed in Kashmir at around the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century c.E. In the following chapter, we begin our examination of the different religious influences brought to bear on the construction of the text.

moral precepts (*ye śīlavanto guṇavantah prajñāvantastairbhikṣava imāni śikṣāpadāni mayā prajñaptāni dhārayitavyāni*). Misconduct should never be indulged in. That which relates to the community (*sāṃghikaṃ vastu*) is like a vase of fire (*agnighaṭopamam*), a poison (*viṣopamam*), a vajra (*vajropamam*), a burden (*bharopamam*). It is possible to make an antidote to poison, but it is not possible to make an antidote to misuse of that which relates to the community (*viśasya pratikāraṃ kartuṃ śakyate, na tu sāṃghikasya vastunaḥ pratikāraṃ kartuṃ śakyate*).¹⁹⁶

Ānanda then tells Śākyamuni that those mendicants who uphold the moral precepts (*ājñaptāni bhagavatā śikṣāpadāni*) will arrive at forbearance and liberation (*pratimokṣasaṃvarasaṃvṛtā*), be inclined towards the *vinaya* and the *kośa* (*vinayābhīmukhā bhavanti / kośābhīmukhā bhavanti*), and be prosperous and accomplished (*śikṣākuśalā bhavanti / tāni ca bhagavataḥ śikṣāpadāni bhavanti*). Then Ānanda prostrates himself before Śākyamuni. The great *śrāvakas* go to their respective buddhafiends and all the gods, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kinnaras*, and men disappear. All the assembly rejoices in what Śākyamuni has said. This is said to conclude the Maheśvara, the display of the *dhāraṇīs*, the jewel-king of Mahāyāna sūtras, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (*-ratnarājasya dhāraṇivyūhaḥ maheśvaraḥ samāptaḥ*).¹⁹⁷

NOTES

Introduction

1. William W. Rockhill, *The Journey of Friar William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253–55, as Narrated by Himself* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1900), p. 145f.

For a recent survey of the various Western treatments of *Oṃ Maṅpadme Hūṃ* see the chapter entitled “The Spell,” in *Prisoners of Shangri La, Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, by Donald S. Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

2. Robert Ekvall has described the various uses of *Oṃ Maṅpadme Hūṃ* in Tibetan society in the course of a discussion of *chos 'don*, or “express verbalized religion.” He writes, at one point: “When a Tibetan takes a vow of silence for a period of time, the only utterance permitted is the verbalization of religion; therefore, in theory he is bound to the utterance of prayers alone. In such a case, the mantra *Oṃ Maṅpadme Hūṃ* may serve many conversational needs. The tent wife who is bound by a vow of silence for the day may shout it in your ear to call attention to the fact that she waits to fill your tea bowl, and I have seen many a trespassing dog rise and depart with speed when told *Oṃ Maṅpadme Hūṃ*.” See Robert Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet: Pattern and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 98–149.

3. See Lorne Ladner, *Wheel of Great Compassion: The Practice of the Prayer Wheel in Tibetan Buddhism* (Somerville: Wisdom, 2000), for a survey of the prayer wheel tradition.

4. Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (London: Rider, 1969), p. 256f.

5. For instance, *Oṃ Maṅpadme Hūṃ* is used as a means of preliminary purification in the practice, often performed early in the morning, of making an offering of *sang*, or incense.

6. A text attributed to the late-eleventh- and early-twelfth-century Tibetan teacher Ma cig Lab kyi sgron ma says: “. . . infants learn to recite the six-syllable (mantra) at the very same time that they are beginning to speak . . .” Karma Chags med, *Thugs rje chen po*, translated in Matthew Kapstein, “Remarks on the *Maṅi bKa' 'bum* and the Cult of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet,” in *Tibetan Buddhism, Reason and Revelation*, Steven D. Goodman and Ronald M. Davidson eds. (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), p. 85.

Thang stong rgyal po, the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Tibetan yogin who was highly influential in the propagation of the use of *Oṃ Maṅpadme Hūṃ* by his countrymen, is said, as a youth, to have taught a group of traders to recite the mantra

five hundred times a day as a minimum Buddhist practice. See Janet Gyatso, *The Literary Transmission of the Traditions of Thang stong rgyal po: A Study of Visionary Buddhism in Tibet* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1981), p. 107.

7. This point is particularly well illustrated in a story about the thirteenth-century *rNying ma* guru Chos kyi dbang phyug, who, when asked by a disciple whether he had achieved *siddhi*, or supernatural power, through his meditations, replied: "I have reached the real point of their practical application, but because I devote myself to reciting the mantra *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* I have no leisure to practise them." The guru, though capable of performing magic, considered it more important to recite the six-syllable mantra. See Dudjom (bDud 'joms) Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom, 1991), p. 767.

8. In the *'Drol ba zang mo*, a play depicting the struggle to establish Buddhism within the Tibetan cultural realm that is performed at the *Maṇi Rīm 'Dus* festival held at Tengboche monastery in Nepal, *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* is treated as if it is the essence of Buddhist practice. For instance: "The basis of religion is reciting the six-syllable prayer." Regions which have not been converted to Buddhism are described as follows: "They did not know how to pronounce the magic formula of six syllables." Luther G. Jerstad, trans., *Maṇi Rimdu: Sherpa Dance Drama* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1969), pp. 22 and 24.

See also Dilgo Khyentse, *The Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), for a presentation of *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ* as the distilled essence of the complete Buddhist path.

9. I have counted ten of these *sādhana* texts listed in the index of the Peking *bsTan 'gyur*.

10. One of the most famous of these is the '*Gro don mkha' ma*, "For All Beings Throughout Space," composed by Thang stong rgyal po. See Janet Gyatso, "An Avalokiteśvara Sādhana," in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, Donald S. Lopez, ed. (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 266–270.

11. See Nik Douglas and Meryl White, *Karmapa: The Black Hat Lama of Tibet* (London: Luzac, 1976), p. 64.

12. See the chapter entitled "The Great Festival of the Maṇi Prayer" (*maṇi rgya bzhag*), in *Journey Among the Tibetan Nomads*, by Namkhai Norbu (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1997), for an account of this collective practice as performed by Tibetan nomad communities.

See also Lama Thubten Zopa, *Teachings from the Mani Retreat* (Weston: Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 2001), for teachings given to a group of western Buddhists engaged in this kind of practice.

13. Hereafter, referred to simply as "Vaidya," together with the page and line number of each reference.

14. Hereafter, referred to simply as "Peking," with the number of the Tibetan page and line number (rather than the number of the page of the bound photocopied edition published by the Suzuki Research Foundation, Tokyo, 1962).

15. Vaidya's edition cannot be regarded as "definitive." See the discussion of this issue in chapter 1.

Chapter 1: Background to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*

1. See Eugène Burnouf, *L'Introduction à l'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1844), p. 196.

2. The prose version in Vaidya's edition is divided up into two sections of sixteen and eight chapters.

3. The verse version also occasionally breaks into *upajāti* and *sragdharā* meters. See P. C. Majumder, "The *Kāraṇḍavyūha*: Its Metrical Version," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 24 (1948): 294.

4. Nanjio 168 and 169, or Taisho 461 and 462, respectively.

5. Vaidya, p. 258, l. 1. Majumder "The *Kāraṇḍavyūha*," p. 294 also gives *Āryāvalokiteśvaragūṇakāraṇḍavyūha* as the full title of the verse text.

6. See Luis Gomez, trans., *The Land of Bliss, The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), p. 3.

7. That is, the *Sarvathāgatādhiṣṭhānasattvāvalokanabuddhakṣetrasandarśanavyūha Sūtra* and the *Mañjuśrībuddhakṣetragūṇavyūha Sūtra*.

8. See Jan Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism, A Comparison* (London: Athlone Press, University of London, 1970), p. 49.

9. See Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1899), p. 254. Burnouf uses the French word "corbeille" (Burnouf, *L'Introduction*, p. 196).

10. See Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 254.

11. Majumder, "The *Kāraṇḍavyūha*," p. 294.

12. Edward Conze, *Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature* (Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1967), p. 145.

13. See E. Conze, trans., *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), for translations of these passages (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, 98 and R., iv, 3).

14. See John Reynolds, *The Golden Letters* (New York: Snow Lion, 1996), p. 139f.

15. I am following the translation of the text by John Reynolds. See Reynolds, *The Golden Letters*, p. 172.

The term *za ma tog* seems also to have been used by the Tibetans to refer to the large, round object often seen, in Tibetan religious painting, sitting beside *mahāsiddhas* and *vidyādharas*, such as dGa' rab rDorje. See for instance, Namkhai Norbu, *The Dzogchen Ritual Practices* (London: Kailash Editions, 1991), p. xi: "By his [dGa' rab rDorje's] left side is a spherical object known as a *za ma tok* [sic]. This was a yogi-practitioner's

personal kit container in which he kept his ritual implements, sacred relics, medicine, and the like.”

16. Vaidya, p. 269, ll. 15–19.

See, for instance, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, 57 ff. (Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom*, p. 105f.) for an example of the way in which the Prajñāpāramitā (implicitly, in book form) is said to be copied and worshipped in the same way.

For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Gregory Schopen, “The phrase ‘sa prthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet’ in the *Vajracchedikā*: notes on the cult of the book in the Mahāyāna,” in *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17 (1975): 147–181.

17. See Giuseppe Tucci, “La Redazione Poetica del Kāraṇḍavyūha,” *Atti della Reale Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, Classe di Scienza di Morali, Storiche e Filologiche* 58 (1922–23): 607.

18. As Tucci points out, although the verse sūtra contains four hundred and fifteen of the nine hundred and thirteen verses of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, it contains no trace of the tenth chapter, an omission which would support the hypothesis that this chapter was not actually written by Śāntideva and was a later addition. See Tucci, “La Redazione,” p. 616.

19. See Tucci, “La Redazione,” p. 608 ff.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 609.

21. See David Gellner, *Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 366, n. 12. Gellner refers to research by Horst Brinkhaus.

22. Maurice Winternitz writes that the work “is not really a *Purāṇa*, but a *Māhātmya*.” See Maurice Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1933), II: 375f.

23. Vaidya, p. 265, ll. 1–6.

24. I am relying, here, on Burnouf’s summary of the verse sūtra. See Burnouf, *L’Introduction*, p. 198.

25. Malla, *Classic Newari Literature: A Sketch* (India: Kathmandu Educational Enterprises, 1982), p. 4.

26. This supercedes Winternitz’s judgment that the date of these sixteenth century manuscripts also represents the time of the work’s original creation. See Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, II: 376.

27. See Gellner, *Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest*, p. 21.

28. John K. Locke, *Karunamaya: The Cult of Avalokiteśvara-Matsendranath in the Valley of Nepal* (Kathmandu: Sahayogī Prakashan Research Centre, 1980), p. 281.

29. See Siegfried Lienhard, “Avalokiteśvara in the Wick of the Night-Lamp,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 36 (1993): 93. Lienhard gives no reason for this judgment in this article.

30. See F. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953) I: xxv. The third class is one in which Middle-Indic or Prakritic forms have almost all been transposed into Sanskrit, leaving a residue of Prakritic grammatical peculiarities, as well as a distinctively Buddhist vocabulary. Other texts in this category include: *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, *Divyāvadāna*, *Avadāna Śataka*, *Prātimokṣasūtra* of the Sarvastivādins, (*Ārya*) *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, *Māhāmāyūrī*, *Bhīkṣunīkarmavācānā*, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, *Vajracchedikā*, *Jātakamāla*.

31. Constantin Régamey, “Lexicological Gleanings from the Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra,” *Indian Linguistics* 16 (1965): 1.

32. The second of these two sets of fragments was identified by O. von Hinüber, in 1981, among the manuscripts from the Gilgit find labeled as belonging to the *Samghāṭasūtra*. See O. von Hinüber, *Die Erforschung der Gilgit-Handschriften—Neu Ergebnisse* (Wiesbaden: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft 131, 1981), p. 11.

33. See N. Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* (Calcutta: Calcutta Oriental Press, 1939) I: 42. “The script used in the manuscripts is mostly Upright Gupta of a date little later than those used in the manuscript remains found in Eastern Turkestan and similar to the script found in the Bower manuscript. The script of the Bower manuscript is assigned to the sixth century A.C., and so the Gilgit manuscript may also be dated in the sixth or at the latest in the seventh century A.D.”

See also O. von Hinüber, *Die Bedeutung des Handschriftes bei Gilgit*, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft Supplement V. 21 Deutsches Orientalistentag, Ausgew* (Weisbaden: Vorträge, 1982), pp. 47–66, esp. pp. 52 and 61.

34. See N. Dutt, “Religion and Philosophy,” in *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, R. C. Majumdar, ed. (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1955), p. 261.

35. Adelheid Mette, *Die Gilgitfragmente des Kāraṇḍavyūha* (Swisstal-Odendorf: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1997).

36. Adelheid Mette, “Remarks on the Tradition of the Kāraṇḍavyūha,” in *Aspects of Buddhist Sanskrit*, Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Language of Sanskrit Buddhist Texts, 1991 (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1993), p. 514 f.

37. David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Serindia, 1987), p. 148f.

38. See Edward Conze, trans., *The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts*, (London: Luzac 1973a), pp. 141 and 145.

39. He also writes that it seems reasonable that the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* should belong to the tantras. He presents the *Mañjuśrīmūlatantra* as “the chief tantra of the Master of the Family,” and the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* as “the fundamental one of all the Yoga Tantras.” See F. D. Lessing and A. Wayman, *mKhas-grub-rje’s Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1978), pp. 107ff and p. 215.

40. David Snellgrove, *Buddhist Himālaya* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1957), p. 69.

41. N. Dutt, "Religion and Philosophy," p. 263.
42. Yukei Matsunaga, "On the Date of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*," in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein*, Michel Strickman, ed. (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1985) 3: 887–894.
43. See Edward Conze, "The Development of Prajñāpāramitā Thought," in *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*, (1960; reprint, Oxford: Cassirer, 1967), p. 138.
44. See R. E. Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1996), p. xii.
45. See, for instance, E. Obermiller, trans., *History of Buddhism, Being an English Translation of Bu ston's Chos 'Byung* (Delhi: Sri Satguru) II: 182ff; Tarthang Tulku, *Ancient Tibet* (CA: Dharma, 1986), p. 167f and p. 192; and George N. Roerich trans., *The Blue Annals* (1949; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), p. 38.
Mention of missionaries from Li, or Khotan, is found in *The Blue Annals* of Gos Lo tsa ba and the *Chos 'byung rin po che'i gter mdzod* of kLong chen rab 'byams.
46. Tarthang Tulku, for instance, argues that Lha tho tho ri is most likely to have been born in 374 c.e. See Tarthang Tulku, *Ancient Tibet*, p. 166f.
Hugh Richardson writes that the king "may be placed tentatively in the middle of the fifth century." See Hugh Richardson, "Some Monasteries, Temples and Fortresses in Tibet before 1950," in *High Peaks, Pure Earth*, by Hugh Richardson (London: Serindia, 1998), p. 319.
47. See Vaidya, p. 282, l. 8. This may, of course, refer to an actual historical event. I have, however, been unable to identify any such occurrence.
48. Vaidya, p. 281, ll. 23–32.
49. Vaidya, p. 298, ll. 2, 23, and 31.
50. Vaidya, p. 307, l. 23–25.
51. See, particularly, the "samādhi-contest" (*samādhivigrahaḥ*) between Avalokiteśvara and Samantabhadra (Vaidya, p. 306, ll. 1–18). The descriptions of Avalokiteśvara's body (Vaidya, pp. 288, l. 18–292, l. 8 and pp. 301, l. 15–303, l. 2), which contains worlds in its hair pores, is also clearly indebted to the conception of Samantabhadra's body found in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. See Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Flower Ornament Scripture, A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1993), p. 1510.
52. See Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 121: "The original texts translated as the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* were brought to China from Khotan, in Central Asia. The texts refer to China and Kashgar, so it is likely that compilation and even authorship of at least some portions of the comprehensive work took place within the Indic cultural sphere of Central Asia."
53. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* does not, however, appear to be among those Mahāyāna works that have so far been found, mainly in fragmentary form, at Khotan. See R. E. Emmerick, *A Guide to the Literature of Khotan* (Tokyo: Studia Philologica

Buddhica, Occasional Paper Series III, 1979), pp. 15 ff. The text may, however, as we shall show in the course of this thesis, be linked to some of the works that seem to have been most widely represented at Khotan: for instance, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, the *Sukhāvatyūha Sūtra* and the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. Also, in the retelling of the *jātaka* story of Sīṃhala and the man-eating *rākṣasīs*, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* displays one of the characteristics of the Khotanese literature, "a continuing interest in the quasi-historical life of Śākyamuni Buddha and the stories of his previous rebirths." See Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 336 f.

54. See, for instance, Snellgrove, *Ibid.*, p. 439f.

55. See Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, "Analysis of the Sher—'Phyin," in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 20, pt. 2 (1839): 440.

56. See D. L. Chattopadhyaya, ed., *Taranātha's History of Buddhism in India* (1970; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), p. 259.

57. For the dating of this catalog, see Giuseppe Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts*, II (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1958), p. 48. For a full presentation of the contents of the catalogue, see Marcelle Lalou, "Les textes bouddhiques au temps du roi Khri Srong-lde-brtsan," in *Journal Asiatique* (1953): 313–353.

58. Thus, Régamey writes of an article written by Lalou in 1938: "A l'époque de la rédaction de cet article le *Kāraṇḍavyūha* était situé au IXe–Xe siècle parmi les textes du 'Mahāyāna décadent.'" See Régamey, "Motifs Vichnouites et Sivaites dans le *Kāraṇḍavyūha*," in *Etudes Tibétaines Dediées à la Memoire de Marcelle Lalou* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1971), p. 420, n. 15. Régamey refers to Lalou, "A Tun-huang Prelude to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 14 (1938): 398–400.

See also Burnouf, 1844, p. 196: "Parmi les traites que je viens de désigner, il en est deux auxquels le titre de *sūtra* n'a vraisemblablement été appliqué qu'après coup, où, ce qui revient au même, qui, malgré leur titre de *Mahāyāna Sūtra*, ou *sūtra* servant de grand véhicule, ne peuvent prétendre à être classés au nombre des *sūtras* primitifs, ni même des *sūtras* développés."

59. Régamey, "Motifs Vichnouites," p. 418f.: "Ces caractéristiques du contenu, de même que l'état corrompu de la langue dont certaines tournures syntaxiques font déjà penser aux structures néo-indiennes, étaient des raisons valables pour assigner à ce texte une date tardive, au moins celle du IXe siècle."

60. Taisho 1050 and Nanjio 782. T'ien Si Tsai was a Kashmiri who left the great Buddhist university of Nālandā for China in 980. The precise date of the translation of the *sūtra* is given in a catalogue of Buddhist texts translated into Chinese between 982 c.e. and 1011 c.e. See Y. Imaeda, "Note Préliminaire sur la Formule *Om Mañi Padme Hūṃ* dans les Manuscrits Tibétains de Touen-Houang," in *Contributions aux Études sur Touen-Houang* (Genève-Paris: Librairie Droz, 1979), p. 71.

61. See M. Lalou, "A Tun-huang Prelude," p. 400. Lalou refers to P. Pelliot, *T'oung Pao*, vol. 30, 1934, p. 174 and a reference in *Bibliographie Bouddhique*, 6, no. 273, whose judgment about the late date of the formula is probably based on the date of the Chinese translation of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*. Lalou's article concerns a Tun Huang

text called the “*gShin lam bstan ba*,” or “Teaching on the Path of the Dead,” which, like the text discussed by Imaeda, describes how a dead person may be prevented from taking an unfortunate rebirth. One of the striking features of this text is that Avalokiteśvara, who is said to be able to save the dead person from a great hell, is invoked not by the formula *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ*, but by *Oṃ hri hung pad ma pri ya sva hā*. The text also includes a shortened version of the *Balāhajātaka*, a long version of which is also found in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, leading Lalou, on the basis of her belief in the late date of the sūtra, to dub the *gShin lam bstan ba*, “A Tun-huang Prelude to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*.”

62. See Imaeda, “Note Préliminaire sur la Formule.”

63. See H. Karmay, *Early Sino-Tibetan Art* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1975), p. 11.

64. I am grateful to Burkhard Quessel, Curator of the Tibetan Collections at the British Library, for drawing my attention to this article.

65. See bibliography for detailed references to these books and articles.

66. Guiseppa Tucci, “La Redazione,” p. 605.

67. See Régamey, “Motifs Vichnouites,” p. 418. “La composition du *Kāraṇḍavyūha* est très incohérente, même dans la rédaction des détails. La langue dans laquelle ce texte est rédigé, sans être ce qu’on appelle le ‘sanskrit hybride,’ est extrêmement incorrecte, dépassant par ses incongruités grammaticales et syntaxiques même la langue des Avadāna.”

Also, Burnouf, *L’Introduction à l’Histoire*, p. 197: “D’ailleurs, le manuscrit du *Kāraṇḍa* en prose est si incorrect, qu’il m’aurait été beaucoup plus difficile d’en donner un extrait parfaitement exact, qu’il ne me le serait de traduire intégralement le poème.”

68. Adelheid Mette, “Remarks on the Tradition of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*,” p. 512.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 511.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 511.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 511.

72. See, *Ibid.*, p. 513, n. 1. According to p. 230 of Cecil Bendall’s, *Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Longmans, 1902), Sāmaśrami’s edition is based on a palm leaf manuscript (No. 542 = Or. 3345) of the India Office Library, dated Newār 316 (1196 C.E.)

73. See Régamey, “Lexicological Gleanings,” p. 1. Régamey was preparing a critical edition of the text based on Nepalese manuscripts dated from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

74. Mette, “Remarks on the Tradition of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*,” p. 513.

75. Régamey gave this translation high praise. See Régamey, “Le Pseudo-Hapax *ratikara* et la Lampe qui Rit dan le ‘Sūtra des Ogresses’ Bouddhique,” *Études*

Asiatiques 18/19 (1965a): 176, n. 5. “C’est un document stupéfiant . . . se basant sur un seul manuscrit népalais (actuellement Bibl. Nat., Fonds Sanskrit No. 24) . . . fit en neuf jours . . .”

76. Mette, “Remarks on the Tradition of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*,” p. 514. Régamey remarks that the first Gilgit text is the most fantastical and incoherent of any manuscript known to him and that it is extremely carelessly edited with regard to grammar and spelling. See Régamey, “Motifs Vichnouites,” p. 418 and Régamey, “Le Pseudo-Hapax,” p. 183.

77. See Adelheid Mette, *Die Gilgitfragmente*, p. 87.

Chapter 2: Purāṇic Influence on the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*

1. A fuller discussion of the place of this couplet in the *Skanda Purāṇa* occurs later in this chapter.

2. Vaidya, p. 265, l. 6.

3. Vaidya, p. 265, l. 7f.

4. Régamey, “Motifs Vichnouites,” p. 431, n. 49.

5. See *Ibid.*, p. 432: “Il prouve que pour les textes dans le genre du *Kāraṇḍavyūha* ces sources sont à chercher avant tout dans la vaste littérature des Purāṇa.”

6. Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), p. 90.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

11. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, I: 525.

12. Lienhard, “Avalokiteśvara in the Wick of the Night-Lamp,” p. 93. He refers to the *Valāhassajātaka* in the Pali canon, the *Dharmalabdhajātaka* in the *Mahāvastu* and the *Siṃhalāvadāna* in the *Divyāvadāna*. The story appears, too, in various Nepalese, Tibetan, Chinese, Kotanese, and Japanese Buddhist works. It is also found in a Prakrit Jain text, the *Nāyādhammakahāo*. See Todd T. Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), for a discussion of the use of the story of Siṃhala in contemporary Nepalese religion.

13. See the translation of the “*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*” by H. Kern, in *The Sacred Books of the East Series*, ed. Max Muller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1884), p. 406f.

14. Vaidya, p. 280, ll. 1–31.