

# Tibetan Narratives of the Buddha's Acts at Vajrāsana \*

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**Abstract:** Tibetan writers have composed surveys of Bodhgaya, the famous site of the Buddha's enlightenment that is more popularly known in Tibet as Vajrāsana (rdo rje gdan), since at least the twelfth century. Tibetan travelogues to Vajrāsana were composed up to at least the mid-eighteenth century. This essay offers a brief survey of this literature, and goes on to focus on one survey of Vajrāsana, Bcom ldan ral gri's *An Ornamental Flower: An Explanation of Vajrāsana*. Bcom ldan ral gri tells the story of the site, beginning with a brief etymological account of the site's name, the life and enlightenment of the Buddha, the narratives of the three "brahmin sons", the development of the site during the reign of Aśoka, and finally the building efforts of the Nāgārjuna and select late Indian Buddhist figures. Bcom ldan ral gri's account closely resembles the earlier account in Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's (1124–1192) famous history, and it is likely that this or an intermediary work constitutes his major source. The essay concludes with two points: 1) The primary purpose, at least in ideal terms, for Bcom ldan ral gri's work and comparable works was to serve as a guide for visualizing, or imagining, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, and 2) it is likely that there were Indian literary precedents for works such as Bcom ldan ral gri's, despite the fact that none are currently extant.

**Key words:** Bodhgayā/ Vajrāsana, Narrative, Tibetan

## Letters from Vajrāsana

Sometime around the year 1500 three letters were sent from Bodhgayā to Tibet. They were addressed to the Seventh Karmapa, Chodrak Gyatso (Chos grags rgya mtsho, 1450/4–1506), a powerful Tibetan religious and political leader of the day, having been dispatched by three different people: \* Śrīmān Manoratha, styled as "the great one of Vajrāsana, holder of the lion-throne," Rahulakumāra, abbot of Vajrāsana,<sup>①</sup> and a certain

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According to Rin chen bkra shis, *Rje*, f. 28a, the letter from Sgra gcan 'dzin gzhon nu was translated by Zha lu Lo tsā ba Chos skyong bzang po during or shortly after 1501, though Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Dam*, would place this event earlier, sometime before 1488.



rāja of Magadha. These epistles were sent to the Tibetan leader in the hopes that he might help to spread the teachings of the Buddha in Vajrāsana, and in Magadha more generally. Delivered by a yogin named Amṛtanātha, they were offered with earth and stones from the eight great Buddhist holy places and leaves from the Bodhi tree. As the Seventh Karmapa could not read Sanskrit, a scholar among his retinue translated the work into Tibetan on his behalf.<sup>①</sup> The Karmapa sent a reply to his Indian invitees, along with a letter encouraging the Sinhalese officiates at Vajrāsana to “act virtuously.”<sup>②</sup> It appears, however, that he politely declined to make the journey to India.

I begin with an exchange of letters and holy objects between Bodhgayā and Central Tibet at the dawn of the sixteenth century to highlight a simple point. From the perspective of Tibetan historiography, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment—or Vajrāsana (*rdo rje gdan*) as it is usually called in Tibetan literature—continued to be a living center of Buddhist activity well beyond the time when Buddhism is generally held to have declined in India. Archaeological evidence has already suggested this, for Devanāgarī inscriptions at the site may date to as late as the fifteenth century.<sup>③</sup> Tibetan accounts now available offer portraits of the late history of Bodhgayā that even take us as late as the mid-eighteenth century. The prominent place of Vajrāsana in Tibetan conceptions of the Buddhist world appears to have been due largely to the much earlier site guides that will be the focus of the present essay. Like the accounts of Vajrāsana already known in contemporary scholarship, these works will be relevant to studies of the late artistic and architectural development of the site, for they provide a rich literary source of comparison to the monuments preserved at the site as they are today.<sup>④</sup> They may also be of interest to those seeking to understand how the central geographic place associated with the Buddha's singular transformative moment was reconceived as a symbolic locus of ongoing importance in disparate places and times throughout the history of Buddhism.

The present essay will situate these writings on Vajrāsana among Tibetan historiographic and hagiographic writings, as well as within the institutional history of Central Tibet. In what follows I will first offer a brief overview of Tibetan literature dedicated to Vajrāsana. I will then introduce a detailed thirteenth-century work on the site called *Explanation of Vajrāsana* by Chomden Raldri (Bcom ldan ral gri, 1227–1305), and suggest a possible institutional context for this work in a prominent monastery of west-central Tibet. A full translation of the work will

① A translation of this letter, which amounts to a sixteenth-century work of Indian Buddhist literature, is included in the biography of the Seventh Karmapa: Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Dam*, 1084. 20–1085. 21.

② This episode as a whole occurs in Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Dam*, 1084. 10–1087. 17. Leonard W. J. van der Kuip, “Some Indian, Sri Lankan, and Burmese Peregrinators in Central Tibetan and Glo bo Smon thang During the Fifteenth Century,” (unpublished manuscript), first drew attention to this passage.

③ Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 117, 138 n. 10.

④ Such as those studied by Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., “The Life of the Buddha in the Pāla Monastic Environment,” *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 48 (1990).



be provided at the conclusion of this essay.

### The Presence of Vajrāsana in Tibetan Literature

It has been more than one hundred years since Samuel Beal translated Xuanzang's account of Bodhgayā, and more than forty years since George Roerich translated the travelogue of the Tibetan pilgrim Dharmasvāmin (Chag Lo tsā ba Chos rje dpal, 1197—1264), whom I will refer to as Chak Lotsawa, his more common Tibetan epithet. These two accounts have been utilized by art historians to great effect, containing as they do evocations of material religious life at Bodhgayā. Today the available Tibetan literature shows that interest in and even travel to the site continued throughout the centuries, both well before and long after Chak Lotsawa's journey of 1234. Vajrāsana pervades Tibetan literature, even if few works have been specifically dedicated to it. A brief and by no means comprehensive perusal of references will suffice to show the extent of Vajrāsana's place in the literature.

One of the earliest references to Vajrāsana in a Tibetan context occurs in a letter written by the Indian scholar Buddhaguhya and addressed to the Tibetan Emperor, Trisong Detsen.<sup>①</sup> This purportedly eighth-century work makes the interesting claim that the Buddha proclaimed the three-fold scriptures—*vinaya*, *sūtra*, and *abhidharma*—at Vajrāsana. Indigenous accounts of travel to Vajrāsana appear as early as the eleventh century<sup>②</sup> and continue to the mid-eighteenth century. Rinchen Zangpo, the famous translator credited with revitalizing Buddhism in Tibet at the end of the tenth century, is said to have traveled to Vajrāsana to harness the protection of the deity Mahākāla for his Tibetan patron.<sup>③</sup>

A wonderful account of the site is found in the biography of the translator Ra Lotsawa. Sometime in the mid-eleventh century, this Tibetan translator and traveler made his way to Vajrāsana. In recounting his journey, Ra Lotsawa's biographer, Yeshe Senge, pauses for a moment to paint a vivid image of the site:

[He] traveled to Vajrāsana, the heart of enlightenment where two thousand Buddhas have gone, the place that cannot be harmed, even by the ages. For about a league all around, the ground is clear and white like crystal, flat like the

① David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists & Their Tibetan Successors* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1987): volume 2, 447.

② The name Vajrāsana occurs as early as 1167 in Tibetan historiography on Buddhism in India, in connection with the Buddha's enlightenment; Bsod nams rtse mo, *Chos*, 331. 4. 4, 332. 2. 5. See also the account of Khyung po rnal'byor in Anonymous, *Mkhas grub*, 32—33.

③ David L. Snellgrove and Tadeusz Skorupski, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980), volume 2, 99.



palm of the hand and beautified with colored banners, and the dirt and rocks are faultless. Amidst forests of fruit trees planted all around the perimeter grow many medicinal herbs. Good water flows strong from every direction. In a pleasant meadow the scent of saffron wafts from flowers, and animals and birds frolic at their leisure.

Yeshe Senge describes the central temple:

In the center of this place the bodhi tree emerges from stone, huge with branches, leaves, and flowers, wide at the base, top reaching to the sky with branches splayed like a parasol in all directions, not withering in autumn, without thirst in winter, and with a great light emanating from all its flowers.<sup>①</sup>

He praises the positive effects of the place upon its visitors: "As soon as one arrives at this place one feels happy and clear-headed, and is struck by blissful non-conceptuality." Indian pilgrims, who travel to the site year-round, are lauded for their faithful offerings and devotional practice:

The Indians are extremely faithful, and arrive unceasingly from distant lands to make offerings. They mix good medicines in milk and whitewash the bodhi tree, which is thus always moist. At dusk, dawn, noon and night many pilgrims gather and make circumambulations. [Coming] from the four quarters, they perform many different kinds of worship and offerings, according to the style of their individual regions, and say prayers with loud voices [even from] afar.

Even summer rains do not stop the faithful, for

when the monsoon comes, they drink and bathe in the drops from the bodhi tree and the water which falls from the temples and stupas. The scholars and the male and female yogis perform burnt offerings to their individual deity yogas, and throw many feasts.<sup>②</sup>

① Ye shes seng ge, *Mthu*, 72–73.

② Ye shes seng ge, *Mthu*, 76–77: *rgya gar ba de rnams dad gzhi shin tu che bas / thag ring po'i sa nas kyang mchod pa skyel mi rgyun mi 'chad par 'ong / 'o ma la sman bzang po sna tshogs sbyar bas byang chub kyi shing la sku dkar gsol bas brlan dang ma bral ba lta bur byed / srod / tho rengs / dgung / dgong kha rnams la bskor mi mang po 'dus [76] nas bskor ba byed / phyogs bzhi nas yul so so'i lugs kyi phyag dang mchod pa mi 'dra ba mang po byed / rgyang skad chen pos gsol ba 'debs / dbyar char pa byung ba'i tshe / byang chub shing gi zil ba dang / lha khang dang / mchod rten gyi steng nas byung ba'i chu la 'thung zhing khros byed / par'i ta dang / rnal 'byor pho mo rnams rang rang gi lha'i rnal 'byor gyis sbyin bsregs dang / tshogs 'khor la sogs pa mang po 'bul gyin 'dug [/]. Compare this with Samuel Beal, *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1884), 117.*



Ra Lotsawa's biographer goes on to list many holy objects arranged around this luminous tree, as well as the miracles that his protagonist experienced at each. All of these, however, are arranged not just around the tree, but also around the central event in Buddhist mythology, the enlightenment of Śākyamuni Buddha.

Other travel accounts exist, some consisting only of brief asides within larger biographical narratives. Orgyenpa Rinchenpal is said to have visited Vajrāsana twice during his life, once in 1261<sup>①</sup> and once at a later date.<sup>②</sup> In 1300 another Tibetan pilgrim took a fasting vow in front of the Mahābodhi Temple.<sup>③</sup> In the early 1450s the Assamese scholar Vanaratna (1384—1468) hoped to return to Vajrāsana from Nepal, but when he learned of robbers on the road, he sent messengers in his stead to make offerings.<sup>④</sup> Further sources offer more detailed presentations of the site. One of the most interesting accounts is the *Itinerary of a Journey to Indian Vajrāsana*, which appears to date from the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>⑤</sup> The work begins with an account of the journey from Dolukha in Nepal to Vajrāsana, noting each stage of the thirty-day walk. It then offers a detailed description of the site and its surroundings, echoing the complex of effusive praise and tantalizing details found in the biography of Ra Lotsawa: "By just entering the outer door of the seven doors of Vajrāsana, [I] thought that [my] feet were not touching the ground. Then [I] went through two doors... and gave the sacristan a lot of money and bought flowers and other things for offering."<sup>⑥</sup> The author notes that many of the monuments had been destroyed by Turks (*tu ru ska*), a situation noted elsewhere in the literature. A 1789 account also laments the loss of Vajrāsana as a viable destination for pilgrimage,<sup>⑦</sup> yet a travel guide from 1752 attests to travel well into the eighteenth century.<sup>⑧</sup>

It is not only Tibetans that are highlighted as travelers to and from Vajrāsana, but Indian Buddhists as well. Atiśa's decision to travel to Tibet during the eleventh century is

① George Roerich, *The Blue Annals* (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949—53), 701.

② Bsod nams'od zer, *Bla*, 133—142, 171—175.

③ Roerich, 790; *Sman lung pa* (b. 1239).

④ Roerich, 801.

⑤ The dating of this work is tentative. The colophon contains an interlinear note stating that the work was requested by Gong sman Dkon mchog phan dar (1511—1577); Kong po Lo tsā ba, *Rgya*, f. 8. 7.

⑥ Kong po Lo tsā ba, *Rgya*, folio 4b.

⑦ 'Jigs med gling pa, *Lho*, 81. 5—17; Michael Aris, 'Jigs-med-gling-pa's "Discourse on India" of 1789: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translations of the Lho-phyogs rgya-gar-gyi gtam brtag-pa brgyad-kyi me-long (Tokyo: The International Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1995), 36—39.

⑧ Bsod nams rab rgyas, 'Phags. I will return to this interesting work in a future essay. Not surprisingly, works were also composed or translated at Vajrāsana, as colophons in the *Bstan 'gyur* attest; Ui, Hakuji, et. al. *A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons* (Sendai: Tōhoku Imperial University, 1934), no. 1956; Tshul khrims rin chen, *Thams*, folio 377b: *gshin rje gshed nag po'i zhe ba'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga zhes bya ba bla ma nag po zhabs kyis dpal rdo rje gdan du mdzad pa* /. Ui (1934), no. 4337, *Mi dpyad kyi bstan bcos bsdu pa*. Tshul khrims rin chen, *Thams*, folio 463a: *rdo rje gdan du o rgyan pas bsgyur ba* /.



said to have been motivated by a conversation with Tārā at Vajrāsana.<sup>①</sup> The Kashmiri scholar Śākyaśrībhadra, so important for the development of the Sakya School and *vinaya* lineages in Tibet more generally, also frequented Vajrāsana before his journey to Tibet in the first decade of the thirteenth century.<sup>②</sup> In 1413 an Indian figure named Śāriputra was invited to the central Tibetan artistic center of Gyantse.<sup>③</sup> We now know something of his activities in India from two biographies, both of which contain significant accounts of Vajrāsana.<sup>④</sup> What is important about Śāriputra in the present context is that he is held to be the former abbot of Vajrāsana by his Tibetan biographers and patrons, thus corroborating, along with late inscriptional evidence, a continued Buddhist institutional presence at the beginning of the fifteenth century. When a statue of the Buddha modeled on the central image in Vajrāsana was installed in the monastery at Gyantse, Śāriputra's nails and hairs were placed within it.<sup>⑤</sup> And by the time he traveled to the Kathmandu Valley in 1413, he was of sufficient renown to be granted funds from the Ming court of China to repair the Svayambhū Caitya. Finally, it was not only Tibetans who related accounts of traveling south to the center of Indian Buddhism. We also read in Newari Buddhist chronicles of a pilgrim traveling there from the Kathmandu Valley in the sixteenth century and bringing back a model upon which the Mahābaudha temple in Kathmandu is said to be based.<sup>⑥</sup>

If the site figures as a popular destination, it also serves as a point of comparison for Tibetan temples and monasteries, many of which have been compared to the site of the Buddha's enlightenment or hailed as a "second Vajrāsana." In the seventeenth century the Potala Palace—stronghold of the Fifth Dalai Lama—was elevated to the chief location of Buddhist teachings, "now that the Mahābodhi Temple has been decimated by the Turks,"<sup>⑦</sup> while a writer at the same Dalai Lama's court linked Vajrāsana to the beginnings of the Tibetan Buddhist medical tradition.<sup>⑧</sup> We even find the precise date of Vajrāsana's origins hotly debated in Tibetan studies of Buddhist chronology.<sup>⑨</sup>

Lastly, Vajrāsana figures in popular stories of miraculous events throughout Tibet as

① Roerich (1949), 246.

② David P. Jackson, *Two Biographies of Śākyaśrībhadra: The Eulogy by Khro-phu Lo-tsā-ba and its "Commentary" by Bsod-nams-dpal-bzang-po* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), 10–11, 47, 51.

③ Franco Ricca and Erberto Lo Bue, *The Great Stupa of Gyantse: A Complete Tibetan Pantheon of the Fifteenth Century* (London: Serindia Publications), 19.

④ Author unknown, *Sha ru pu t a'i rnam thar thun mong*; and Author unknown, *Paṇ chen sha ri pu tra 'phags yul du bzugs dus kyi gsang ba'i rnam thar*.

⑤ Ricca and Lo Bue, 23.

⑥ Mary Shepherd Slusser, *Nepal Mandala: A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), vol. 1, 148; Niels Gutschow, *The Nepalese Caitya: 1500 Years of Buddhist Votive Architecture in the Kathmandu Valley* (Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges, 1997), 308.

⑦ Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Rgyal*.

⑧ Rechung Rinpoche, *Tibetan Medicine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 228, 236, 240, 247.

⑨ Klu sgrub rgya mtsho, *Bstan*.



well. The Indian adept Dampa Sangye (Dam pa sangs rgyas) travels to Vajrāsana through a mystic portal in a rock atop Mount Wutaishan.<sup>①</sup> The thirteenth-century Tibetan compendium of myth, ritual, and theology known as the *Maṇi Sayings* includes material on Vajrāsana in two chapters that preface the major narrative regaling the beneficent manifestation of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet.<sup>②</sup> Miracle tales of Tārā's grace at Vajrāsana also continued to be popular. A work of 1704 dedicated to myths of Tārā also relates stories in much the same wording as the guides to Vajrāsana.<sup>③</sup>

A full study of references to Vajrāsana in Tibetan literature remains to be undertaken. We may provisionally group such references into several categories: travel accounts, systematic guides, historical passages dealing with the history of Buddhism in India, miracle tales, and brief comparisons to Tibetan institutions. Even this quick glimpse makes clear that Tibetan authors, travelers, and religious specialists were intensely concerned with Vajrāsana and its relationship to their own local spheres of influence. If used cautiously, the Tibetan literature on the site, of which Chak Lotsawa's account is only one example, may shed light upon Bodhgayā's later history, known only poorly for centuries from other regional sources. Let us now turn to the most detailed example of this literature.

### A Guide to the Monuments of Vajrāsana from Thirteenth-Century Tibet

The account of Vajrāsana that will principally concern us here is found in two versions, one dating from the mid-twelfth century and one from the late thirteenth century. The first version is contained in the massive history of Buddhism composed in the mid-to late twelfth century by Nyangral Nyima Özer.<sup>④</sup> Nyangral's account of Vajrāsana is interspersed within a larger account of Buddhist holy objects in India, which includes topics ranging from the Buddha's life to Pāla and Sena patronage of Buddhist art and activity. The second work is a systematic treatise dedicated entirely to the mythic history of Vajrāsana composed by the fascinating thirteenth-century scholar, Chomden Raldri.<sup>⑤</sup> It

① Roerich, 911–912.

② A stūpa is said to have arisen at the moment in which the Buddha subdued the demons at the Bodhi tree, an event counted here as the ninth of the Buddha's twelve acts. See Anonymous, *Rgyal*, volume 1, 47.2–3: *mdzad pa bzhi pa srod la bdud btul / nam gung nyam par bzhag / tho rangs rdo rje gdan gyi spo la mngon par rdzogs par sangs rgyas nas mtshan bzang po sum cu rtsa gnyis dang / dpe byad bzang po brgyad cus brgyan pa / shes bya ji lta ba dang ji snyed pa thugs su chud nas / rnam pa thams cad mkhyen pa'i sangs rgyas sha'akya thub par gyur to // de'i dus su rdo rje gdan dub yang chub chen po'i mchod rten byung ngo //*. The story of the three Brahmin brothers is also recounted. See Anonymous, *Rgyal*, volume 1, 96.6–104.2.

③ David Templeman, *The Origin of Tārā Tantra* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1995), 11–12, 103–104.

④ Nyi ma 'od zer, *Chos*.

⑤ Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*.



is likely that Raldri adapted his treatise from Nyangral's larger history, or possibly from an as yet unknown intermediate source or shared precedent. For reasons that will become clear shortly, I have a specific interest in Raldri's version of this work, and I will focus most of my comments on his efforts rather than those of Nyangral, despite the latter's chronological priority.

Chomden Raldri was a prolific writer whom we are only now coming to know in any detail, thanks to the recent availability of a number of his works.<sup>①</sup> He was certainly interested in Buddhist history and devoted several of his works to both the Indian and Tibetan past, including a full life story of the Buddha and a commentary on the *jātaka*. Like his predecessor in Buddhist historiography, Nyangral, he did compose a comprehensive history of Buddhism in India and Tibet, albeit on a more modest scale.<sup>②</sup> Included in this history is an account of the twelve acts of the Buddha, a narrative tradition with its own complicated history, yet often said by Tibetan authors to be culled from the *Lalitavistara sūtra*.<sup>③</sup> Raldri counts Vajrāsana as the location of the eighth act, "entering the essence of enlightenment,"<sup>④</sup> and we might understand his treatise on Vajrāsana as an elaboration of this component of the Buddha's good works.

Raldri's *Explanation of Vajrāsana* is divided into five chapters, each dedicated to a specific aspect of Vajrāsana's history. The first chapter is a summary of Vajrāsana's primordial beginnings. The second is dedicated to the activities of the Buddha in and around the site, and the third to Aśoka's patronage. The fourth chapter recounts the tale of the three Brahmin brothers who travel to the Himalayas to ask Śiva what religious path they should follow, only to be told that the Buddhist path is the best means to gain a better rebirth. The youngest of these brothers eventually erects a sandalwood statue of the Buddha in the Mahābodhi Temple. Finally, chapter five details the many holy objects erected around Vajrāsana by Nāgārjuna and other mid- to late Indian Buddhist figures. In Nyangral's earlier work these topics are not divided into individual chapters, but rather are interspersed throughout his longer history of Buddhism in India. The order is somewhat

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① See Kurtis R. Schaeffer and Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, *An Early Tibetan Survey of Buddhist Literature: The Bstan pa rgyas pa rgyan gyi nyi 'od of Bcom ldan ral gri* (Cambridge: Harvard Oriental Series, 2009); and Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin: Tibetan Traditions of an Indian Buddhist Poet-Saint* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For brief remarks on his texts on Vajrāsana, see now Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage & the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.), p. 385, n. 3.

② Bcom ldan ral gri, *Thub*.

③ Chomden Raldri's list includes the following (Bcom ldan ral gri, *Thub*, folios 2b–4a): 1) Emanation from Tuṣṭita; 2) Entry into the womb; 3) Birth; 4) Practical education; 5) Sensual life; 6) Renunciation; 7) Austerities; 8) Entering the essence of enlightenment; 9) Subduing demons; 10) Enlightenment; 11) Teaching; 12) Death. Christian Luczanits, "The Sources for Bu ston's Introduction to the Acts of a Buddha," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sundasiens* 37 (1993), discusses the sources for the twelve acts used by Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364), who was aware of Chomden Raldri's historical work.

④ Bcom ldan ral gri, *Thub*, folio 3a: *byang chub kyi snying por gshegs pa'i mdzad pa*.



different as well, with the tale of the three Brahmin brothers coming before the story of Aśoka.<sup>①</sup>

Chomden Raldri's and Nyangral's descriptions of Vajrāsana contain the same basic elements found in the seventh-century account of Xuanzang.<sup>②</sup> Unlike that of Xuanzang, however, Raldri's work does not purport to be a travel narrative. It is not an on-the-ground account and contains none of the fleeting details of local history found in Chak Lotsawa's<sup>③</sup> well-known biography or in other Tibetan travel literature. Indeed, he never left Central Tibet. It is rather a systematic presentation of the site, emphasizing commemorative monuments, yet still structured along the lines of traditional Tibetan historiographic works on the development of Buddhism in India, beginning with Śākyamuni Buddha, then moving to Aśoka, Nāgārjuna, and finally to later figures such as Buddhajñānapāda. The structure of each narrative event is straightforward: First, a direction is given locating a specific site in relation to the Bodhi tree and the Mahābodhi Temple. Second, an event from the Buddha's life—or from that of another renowned Buddhist figure—is linked to this site. Finally, a commemorative marker—most often a stūpa, but also a statue or temple—is noted.

If Chomden Raldri's work appears to be a static site-map, it is also—despite its emphasis on place—a kind of hagiography of the Buddha. Meant to eulogize a founding figure, to inspire and extol contemporary readers, and to legitimize present-day institutions—as I will suggest more fully in a moment—it is a hagiography in which place is the organizing factor rather than biographical sequence. It represents the Buddha's life and the activities of his followers in spatial rather than temporal terms. Location is the driving force of the narrative, with the holy objects associated with the central characters strewn about the cardinal directions.

We can see this clearly in chapter two, which discusses monuments commemorating the acts of the Buddha immediately after the enlightenment. Raldri employs the popular set of seven stations as a central rubric with which to spatially organize the Buddha's acts during the seven weeks following the enlightenment. According to Chomden Raldri, the Buddha's acts during the seven weeks are as follows: 1) meditating under the Bodhi tree, 2) traversing this world, 3) traversing the three thousand worlds, 4) looking at the Bodhi tree without blinking, 5) being protected by the serpent Mucilinda, 6) pacifying the Parivrājikas at the banyan (*nyagrodha*) tree, and 7) being offered honey by Trapuṣa and

① The sections are as follows: 1. Mythic origins of Vajrāsana [Nyi ma 'od zer, *Chos*, 28.5–29.3]; 2. Three Brahmin brothers [40.15–47.20]; 3. Buddha's acts [57.7–64.3]; 4. Aśoka's acts [105.5–108.7]; 5. Nāgārjuna's acts [108.7–118.16].

② Beal, volume 2, 115–137.

③ George Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvamin (Chag lo tsa-ba Chos-rje-dpal)*: A Tibetan Monk Pilgrim (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959), 65–80.



Bhallika. This is essentially the list of stations found in the *Lalitavistara sūtra*.<sup>①</sup> Many of the monuments listed in connection with the story of the Buddha's enlightenment will be familiar to readers of the Xuanzang account. Yet where Xuanzang's biographer tends to provide full narratives for each monument, Chomden Raldri generally only summarizes the story, preferring instead to list more monuments at the expense of narrative depth. In subsequent chapters, layers of mythic history unfold as overlaying systems of representing the monumental landscape of Vajrāsana. In the place where the Buddha once sat, so did Aśoka, Nāgārjuna, or Buddhajñānapāda. In the place where the Buddha walked, so did the late Buddhist master Atiśa, a figure of central importance to Chomden Raldri's own school.

Raldri moves from an account of the Buddha's acts to the commemorative work of his followers, detailing stūpas, statues, and temples erected around the Bodhi tree, the Vajrāsana at its feet, and later the Mahābodhi Temple. Both Aśoka and Nāgārjuna are credited with major architectural endeavors, the former with the central *gandhakuṭī* temple and the latter with the latticework wall around the central temple, while later figures are said to have contributed smaller monuments to the area. Here the proliferation of deities around Vajrāsana noted by art historians finds a literary analog. Tārā and Avalokiteśvara are ubiquitous in Raldri's work, and Mañjuśrī, Maitreya, Hevajra, Mahākāla, Vajrabhairava, Jambhala, and even the relatively rare Siṃhanāda Avalokiteśvara<sup>②</sup> are all found here. In total, Raldri lists some one hundred and ninety monuments, some seventy of which are stūpas marking particular events. By contrast, Xuanzang's work refers to approximately twenty-six stūpas and only forty-five monuments as a whole.

Commemorative objects are not evenly distributed throughout the chapters. None is mentioned in either the introduction or chapter one, and only one appears in chapter three. The steady listing of stūpas, statues, and temples begins in chapter two with the life of

① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, ff. 5b–7a; Nyi ma 'od zer, *Chos*, 61–64. See Gwendolyn Bays, *The Voice of the Buddha* (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1983), volume 2, 570–576. A system of stations around Vajrāsana was known to Faxian in the fourth century, though it is different than that of Chomden Raldri. See James Legge, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 88–89. These stations were developed extensively in medieval Burma, based upon Theravāda traditions. See Donald M. Stadtner, "A Fifteenth-Century Royal Monument in Burma and the Seven Stations in Buddhist Art," *The Art Bulletin* 73/1 (1991): 40. See generally John S. Strong, *The Buddha: A Short Biography* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 77–81, 163–164. Compare Anonymous, *Byang*, ff. 106b–107a: *dpal ldan byang chub chen po 'phags pa'i gnas rnams gtam du bya ba ni / bcom ldan ldas mngon par sangs rgyas nas nyin zhag bdun phrag dang po la byang chub kyi drung du'o // gnyis pa la byang chub kyi shing la spyen mi 'dzums par gzigs so // gsum pa la zhabs 'chag go // bzhi pa la byang chub kyi drung du'o // kha cig ni rin po che'i khang par zer ro // lnga pa la rgyal po'i 'byung gnas su'o // drug pa klu btang bzung gi gnas su'o // bdun pa la ra skyong kyi nya gro dha'i gnas su'o //*.

② Janice Leoshko, "Pilgrimage and the Evidence of Bodh-Gayā's Images," In *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art: Proceedings of a seminar held at Leiden University*, 21–24 October 1991, K. R. van Kooij and H. van der Veere, eds. (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 47–48.



the Buddha and continues in chapters four and five. In chapter one, the stūpa predominates, with thirty-seven stūpas identified. Statues of the Buddha himself are the next most prominent item, amounting to nine. Other statues and markers are interspersed throughout the chapter, including single statues of Tārā, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Brahmā, and Indra; five stelae, and two *gandhakuṭā* temples. The story of Aśoka's good works in chapter three lists twenty-four stūpas, ten statues of the Buddha, two stone maṇḍalas. The final chapter begins with the acts of Nāgārjuna around the site and then goes on to paint a detailed portrait of what the site and its larger environs might have looked like in the centuries just prior to the work's composition. Here the six statues of the Buddha are a minority. Tārā dominates the scene with fifteen statues, and Avalokiteśvara ranks second with nine examples. A host of tantric deities compliment the ubiquitous pair, all of which will be familiar to historians of the Pāla-period sculpture at Bodhgayā.<sup>①</sup> Once again stūpas dominate the landscape of late Vajrāsana, with thirty-eight listed in the final chapter.

### Putting Vajrāsana in Place at Nartang Monastery

It would certainly be worthwhile to unravel the many strands of storytelling, mythic motifs, and literary references found in these accounts of Vajrāsana, but this will have to wait for another occasion. Here I am more interested in suggesting possible reasons why this account was adapted in mid-thirteenth-century Tibet and what effects it might have had at the central Tibetan institution where it was compiled. If Chomden Raldri based his work on Nyangral's earlier history, or an earlier common or intermediate source, this in no way diminishes his contribution, which was to fashion an independent work dedicated solely to Vajrāsana out of pre-existing material. If we grant him this, then we must ask why he felt inclined to do so. Why was this work on Vajrāsana, the most detailed in Tibetan literature currently known to contemporary scholarship, created at the time and place that it was? To answer this we need to know something of Raldri's personal history, as well as that of his home institution, Nartang Monastery (Snar thang dgon pa), where he was active for more than four decades, between 1262 and his death in 1305.<sup>②</sup>

A number of influential figures in Raldri's education were associated with Vajrāsana, not the least of which is our well-known traveler to the site, Dharmasvāmin himself. In 1258, or shortly thereafter, Raldri met Chak Lotsawa and obtained books from him.<sup>③</sup> But Raldri himself had encountered Indian scholars associated with Vajrāsana much earlier in

① Compare the deities mentioned by Chomden Raldri with those discussed in Leoshko.

② Bsam gtan bzang po, *Bcom*, f. 19.

③ George Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvamin*, 109. It is worth recalling here that the manuscript of Chak Lotsawa's biography translated by Roerich was found by Rahula Samkṛityayana in 1936 at Chomden Raldri's institution, Nartang Monastery.



his life. In a work on language and linguistics, he defends his explanation of Sanskrit pronunciation by stating that he had studied in person with authoritative Sanskritists, including Chak Lotsawa as well as two Indians, Dānaśīla and Śubhakaradāsa.<sup>①</sup> Dānaśīla was a junior scholar in the company of no less a figure than Śākyaśrībadhra, who did spend time in Vajrāsana, as we have seen earlier. It is plausible that Chomden Raldri obtained information about, or at least inspiration regarding, Vajrāsana from these scholars, and at any rate, it seems likely that his direct connection with Indian masters was a significant component of his reputation as a scholar while in residence at Nartang Monastery.

In 1262, Raldri moved to Nartang, an institution founded in 1153, but apparently only coming to regional prominence in the thirteenth century under its seventh abbot, Chim Namkadrak (Mchims Nam mkha' grags, 1210–1285), who ruled from 1250 to 1285. Raldri was also a student of Chim Namkadrak, working under him for twenty-three years until Namkadrak's death. By Raldri's time it appears that Vajrāsana was important to the identity of Nartang Monastery—and more generally to the Kadampa School of which Nartang was a part. Chim Namkadrak's biographer and disciple averred that under this abbot's rule the monastery became just like the Vajrāsana of Magadha.<sup>②</sup> The force of this claim is no doubt due in part to the further connection made between Vajrāsana and the career of the Kadampa School's most prominent spiritual ancestor, Atiśa (c. 982 – 1054).<sup>③</sup> The life story of Atiśa composed by Chim Namkadrak at Nartang devotes an entire chapter to the South Asian master's activities around Vajrāsana.<sup>④</sup> It is likely that Raldri was well versed in this biographical tradition.<sup>⑤</sup>

There is another important feature in the sketch of Raldri's Nartang that I wish to recall here: the existence of two models of the Bodhgayā complex at the monastery. There are numerous models of the Mahābodhi Temple in Tibet and elsewhere,<sup>⑥</sup> yet the two Nartang models appear to be the only known models with multiple items—sculptural sets that attempt to represent not just the main temple, but also other monuments around it.

① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Sgra'i*, f. 19a. 1–.2: *brjod tshul de dag ni kho bo'i bla ma shar phyogs dza ga ta la'i paṇḍi ta da'a na shi'i la dang / yul bar ta ni'i paṇḍi ta shu bham ka ra da'a se dang / chag lo tsha ba dge slong chos rje dpal la sogs pa saṃskṛi ta la tshad mar gyur pa rnams la kho bos dngos su blsab shing /*.

② Smon lam tshul khriṃs, *Mchims*, folio 35a. 3–.4: *de nas gdan sa rin po che dpal snar thang gi gtsug lag khang ma ga ta rdo rje gdan dang mtshungs pa dang /*.

③ The founding of the nearby and equally renowned monastery of Zhalu is also connected with Vajrāsana. An early abbot is claimed to have visited the site sometime in the 1030s to acquire a statue of Avalokiteśvara. See Roberto Vitali, *Early Temples of Central Tibet* (London: Serindia Publications, 1990), 92, 114 n. 28.

④ Nam mkha' grags, *Jo*, 95. 1–105. 8.

⑤ The importance of Vajrāsana may also be peripherally related to the compilation of a collection of authoritative Indic Buddhist literature at Nartang (what would later become known as the Kangyur and Tengyur), a project in which Chomden Raldri was instrumental. See Schaeffer and van der Kuijp.

⑥ Ulrich von Schroeder, *Buddhist Sculptures in Tibet: Volume One—India and Nepal* (Hong Kong: Visual Dharma Publications Ltd., 2001), 321–359; John Guy, "The Mahābodhi temple: pilgrim souvenirs of Buddhist India," *The Burlington Magazine* 133 (1991).



The early twentieth-century Tibetan traveler and scholar, Gendun Chöpel (Dge 'dun chos 'phel, 1903 – 1951), provides two descriptions of the models based upon his own observations and those of local informants when he visited the monastery in 1936.<sup>①</sup> His informants traced the origin of these models back to the tenure of none other than Chim Namkadrak. One of these models is now known to bear an inscription from the reign of the Yongle emperor of the Ming dynasty,<sup>②</sup> dating it to the early fifteenth century and thus beyond our period of interest. The second is undated, though I suggest that we take seriously the claim of Gendun Chöpel's informants that it was at Nartang during the time of Chim Namkadrak and Raldri, in the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>③</sup>

There is no reason to discount the supposition that works such as Raldri's treatise on Vajrāsana were at least in part based upon first-hand accounts of the site by Tibetan travelers, or even on descriptions composed in Sanskrit or a Prakrit vernacular in India. Yet accepting this does not help to explain the contemporary relevance of such descriptions to Tibetan audiences. Since at least the eleventh century, Vajrāsana has been more than a travel destination. It has been an important rhetorical device by which Tibetan writers have granted authority to institutions by linking them with the Indian Buddhist past. With a sense of the historical setting at Nartang in mind, I want to suggest two ways in which Vajrāsana might have been significant to Tibetans who had never traveled south of the Himalayas, yet who wrote on it, read about it, or had simply heard about the place. First, I think it is very possible that Raldri's work—at least in terms of its deployment at Nartang—is not primarily a guide to Vajrāsana itself, but a guide for imagining Vajrāsana in conjunction with a model of the site. Though his work is silent on this point, Raldri does make a suggestive comment at the conclusion—a comment, interestingly, not found in Nyangral's earlier account. The principal benefit of considering Vajrāsana, Raldri tells us, is to gain merit, and the means to consider the site is through two types of visually oriented meditation, one in which the subject views himself as the object, and one in which he views the object in front of himself. The performer should, according to Raldri, "make great efforts to construct everything explained previously, and then make offerings

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① Toni Huber, *The Guide to India: A Tibetan Account* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2000), 42–43; von Schroeder, 323 (translation by Cyrus Stearns); Dge 'dun chos 'phel, *Rgya gar*, 315. As noted by Huber, 112 n. 5, Dge 'dun chos 'phel wrote a slightly longer description of these models as well. See Dge 'dun chos 'phel, *Rgyal khams*, 34. 4–. 16; *der ngo mtshar che ba rdo rje gdan gyi mchod rten sogs dgon gnas yongs rdzogs kyi bkod pa rdo nag dang tsandan dkar po las byas pa kha thor cha gnyis 'dug* [/] *rdo yi de rgya gar nas 'khyer yong ba yin zer cing* / *rdo rgyu yang bsil ba tshal dang* / *ga ya'i brgyud kyi rdo nag grags can de ga rang du 'dug* [/] *shing gi de ni mchims nam mkha grags pa'i zhal bkod bzhin rgya nag nas bzos pa yin zer* / *de yang rdo rje gdan dngos ma dang* / *bcom ldan pa'i rgyan gyi me tog dang* / *chag lo'i lam yig bzhi ga bsdur tshe mi gcig gis byas pa ltar yod pas* / *da lta bod kyi bla gzugs 'ga' res rgya gar du slebs nas rdor gdan 'di btags pa yin gyi dngos ma de nub phyogs ga shed cig na yod nges sogs 'char can gyi mgo skor chen po de'i kha rjes la nye ba sogs mchil ma'i thal ba bzhin du 'dor dgos* /.

② von Schroeder, 338.

③ Guy, 362.



to them, meditate upon them, and circumambulate them.”<sup>①</sup> Elsewhere I have noted that Tibetan hagiographic accounts of the Indian Tantric adepts are cited in ritual manuals as resources for visualization meditation.<sup>②</sup> I think something very similar is going on in Raldri's work on Vajrāsana.

Leaving the issue of ritual meditation aside, the structure of Raldri's work bears another possible relationship with the models found at Nartang, and more generally with the institutional identity of the monastery. If his treatise on Vajrāsana is not intended as a travel guide, we might ask what role the relentless listing of commemorative markers such as stūpas would be playing in it. Why describe an event in writing—already itself a means of commemoration—and then go on to describe a physical object associated with such an event? Other accounts of the Buddha's life assign events to specific locations, especially those dealing with the seven stations of his post-enlightenment activities.<sup>③</sup> Less often do we find a third element added to event and place—the explicit mention of a physical marker upon that place. Nevertheless, it is in this persistent move that Raldri has made his work relevant for his institution, for the mutability of Raldri's representation of Vajrāsana lies in its emphasis on commemorative markers rather than on temporal sequence, on events, or even upon actual locations. The potential utility of his account of an Indian holy land on Tibetan soil lies in its emphasis on stūpas and statues. Thus a Tibetan institution can capture what is essential about the place of the Buddha's enlightenment by replicating the marker of the act—be it in miniature (we have no record of full-scale replicas in Tibet) or in the visual imagination—though the act is lost to the past.

In one sense the “putting in place” that I have highlighted by the title of this essay refers simply to setting a stūpa in a place associated with a particular act of the Buddha, or a statue on the spot where his greatest followers tread. Yet by this phrase I also want to suggest that the stūpas and other commemorative markers listed in Raldri's work put the hagiography of the Buddha in a place very different than its stated locale. Because it is a generic marker, a stūpa can be replicated in a way an event or a location cannot be. The stūpa in Raldri's guide is like a relic; it is nothing without a story to give it meaning. Its lack of meaningfulness is precisely its greatest asset, for it can be used in vastly different contexts. Raldri's spatially driven tale of the Buddha's life puts hagiography in place through listing commemorative markers at the sites of famous events, and then it brings the narrative home by bringing the commemorative markers to his own institution. Thus not only can the model of Vajrāsana at Nartang be a support for ritual practice, but the institution in which the model resides and in which stories of Mahābodhi are told becomes another site at which the founding moment of Buddhism will surely be replicated, a second

① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, f. 19b.

② Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*.

③ Strong, *The Buddha*, 80–81.



Vajrāsana. If Tibetans do not seem to have gone to the same lengths as Burmese Buddhists in recreating Vajrāsana in their own land, the site nevertheless was created in miniature and in the literary imagination of Tibetan scholars.

### Conclusion: A Sanskrit Guide to Mahābodhi

I began this essay with an anecdote from sixteenth-century Tibet, a time when religious figures from both Bodhgayā and Tibet continued to travel and communicate across the Himalayas. But this period has further relevance to our discussion of guides to Vajrāsana. For the same scholar, Zhalu Lotsawa Chökyong Zangpo (Zhwa lu Lo tsā ba Chos skyong bzang po),<sup>①</sup> who translated the letters from Bodhgayā for the Seventh Karmapa was also the translator of a Sanskrit (or possibly Prakrit) work entitled *A Brief Guide to Mahābodhi*. Working from an Indic manuscript kept at Nedong, an important political center of the day, he completed his translation—again at the explicit request of powerful Tibetan leaders—most likely in the 1480s or 1490s.<sup>②</sup> This undated and anonymous work from Nedong utilizes the same three features that we saw in Chomden Raldri's account to map the site: spatial direction, narrative event, and commemorative marker. Unlike Raldri's treatise, this work focuses almost exclusively on sites of the Buddha's acts, listing more than eighty stūpas around the Mahābodhi Temple.<sup>③</sup> We cannot date this work any earlier than the late fifteenth century, and thus obviously cannot posit a direct historical connection between it and the work of Nyangral Nyima Özer. Yet if the Tibetan writers I have discussed are reluctant to reveal their sources for their detailed accounts, it nevertheless now appears plausible that they possessed Sanskrit literary precedents for putting the hagiography of the Buddha in place at Vajrāsana.

### A Translation of Chomden Raldri's *Explanation of Vajrāsana*

In the interest of making Chomden Raldri's treatise on Vajrāsana available to a wider

① Zhalu Lotsawa also authored a set of verses in Sanskrit to be placed upon the Vajrāsana gate. See Rin chen bkra shis, *Rje*, folio 36b: *rgya gar chu bo gang ga tshun la rje 'di las mkhas par med pa gsung / khong la mngon shes kyang yod par byed pa yin / rgya gar jo gi la / ma ha'a bo dhi'i bstod pa sam skri ta'i skad du sdeb sbyor dang ldan pa brtsams te / rdo rje gdan gyi sgo la rlong par bskur bas / sam skri ta bzang / bod na mkhas pa yod 'dug zer nas / sangs rgyas pa rnam dga' pa dang yi rang ba byung / phyi pa rnam yid skrag pa byung ste rgya gar na 'ang mkhas pa'i grags pa che ba yin /*.

② Anonymous, *Byang*, folio 110a: *rnam pa thams cad pa'i spyen gyis sems can ma lus pa'i kham la gzigs te / phrin las kyi 'jug pa rgyun mi chad pa'i sprul pa'i 'od zer sna tshogs kyis rnam par mdzes pa chos kyi rje rin po che zhwa dmar cod pan 'dzin pa bzhi ba'i zhal snga nas dang / rmad du byung ba'i bsod nams dang ye shes chen po'i dpung gis phyogs thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba'i mi'i dbang po chos kyi rje spyen snga rin po che'i bka' stsal spyi bor bzung ste / ki'irtyananta zhes ming du chags pas pho brang chen po sne'u gdong gi gtsug lag khang du rgya gar gyi dpe las bod skyi skad du bsgyur ba'o //*.

③ I hope to return to this work in a future essay.



audience, I include here a complete translation of the work.<sup>①</sup> I have kept annotation to a minimum, noting only major parallels to other well-known sources. Much could be said about the Indian and Tibetan literary parallels for nearly every major narrative event, if not for the specific association of the event with its commemorative marker that is the hallmark of this work. A full study of this complex of tales about Vajrāsana circulating in Tibet will have to wait for the more involved work of identifying the sources of Nyangral Nyima Özer's monumental history. I have added section titles to mark changes in topic throughout the work. These section titles do not appear in the Tibetan original.

*An Ornamental Flower: An Explanation of Vajrāsana*

**Introduction** (1b. 1–2a. 2)

Homage to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and the three times.

I pay homage to the thousand perfect Buddhas

Whose final acts were in this eon.

I will explain Vajrāsana,

The place at which they became enlightened.

Because this place is the source of all Buddhas, it is fitting for scholars to describe it. If we want to describe that place, we must know five topics: Vajrāsana, the Buddha's acts, the acts of the three Brahmin brothers, the acts of Aśoka, and, after that, the acts of Nāgārjuna.

**Chapter One—The Name Vajrāsana** (2a. 2–2b. 4)

The place called "Vajrāsana": The land has the shape of a *vajra*. Neither itself nor another will destroy it. It arose through the blessings of the Buddhas. It is formed from various precious substances at the point on the powerful golden ground. At the center of the crossed *vajra* the Bodhi tree was born. At the four tips of the *vajras* are four *vajrakīla* stūpas, according to the Śrāvakas.

The Mahāyānists claim that from a hole in a five-pronged *vajra* the Bodhi tree emerged, [and there are] four *vajrakīla* stūpas at the four prongs. Those stūpas are without thrones, have a vase section of three fathoms,<sup>②</sup> [have] four wheels ornamented with *vajras* [and have] about a medium arrow-shot length in between them. That is the

① Photocopies of two manuscripts of the work are available to me. This translation is based almost exclusively on the manuscript housed at the library of the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing. I would like to thank Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp for providing a copy of this manuscript, as well as for his encouragement of my studies in the life and works of Chomden Raldri more generally. The Nepal manuscript is poorly photographed and thus of limited use.

② Translations for measurements are as follows: hand-span (*mtho*), cubit (*khru*), fathom (*'dom*), furlong (*rgyang grags/bsgrags*).



measurement of the area of Vajrāsana.

It is claimed by both that this is in the center of the world, that all Buddhas are enlightened under the Bodhi tree, and that it is not destroyed even by the fires that destroy the eon.

Chapter one: The explanation Vajrāsana.

## Chapter Two—Acts of the Buddha (2b. 4—7a. 3)

Now the Buddha's acts will be explained.

The Buddha left Kapilavastu,

He renounced under the Great Pure [Stūpa].

Staying on the Nairāñjanā [River] for six years.

Then he went to Vajrāsana.

### The Buddha's Acts of Austerity

When the bodhisattva was twenty-nine years old, he left Kapilavastu and renounced under the Great Pure Stūpa. Then he practiced austerities at the Nairāñjanā. That river [flowed] south to north, [and] in summer flowed from the east to touch the base of the *vajra* of Vajrāsana. Owing to that [act of austerity] there is a statue of Buddha crafted from stone by artisans emanated by deities, with all the nerves and bones exposed. [He] looks far away to the west, and [his face] is about a full cubit [with] the hand of an ordinary person.

There is also the form of a cowherd with stick stuck in an ear piercing, [though] because this did not emanate, it is not known.

There is a stūpa that symbolizes the horses given by King Śudhodhana [to] a group of five hundred.

Then at the request of messengers [the Buddha] rose from his austerities and went to a cemetery about half a furlong southwest of Vajrāsana. There is a stūpa on the spot where he removed the cotton cloth from a corpse to wear and changed color.

East of that, some half a furlong, there is a big stūpa called "Kantadesha"<sup>①</sup> on the spot where he washed his Dharma clothing. Nearby, where the bodhisattva filed his knife and needle, there is a three-cubit stela. Even today worship is performed [there].

Then he went north, and to the south of Vajrāsana bathed and shaved [his] hair. There is a lake there and a stūpa and stone staircase to that. There all the broken pieces of the Bodhi tree, other trees, and the old flowers are thrown. Everyone bathes there, and it is said that whoever throws one's hair and nails there will not be reborn in a bad rebirth.

West of the lake [he] met the village girl Sujātā. There is a line of six stūpas where

① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, 3a. 6: *kanta a de sha*. Unidentified.



she prepared rice-milk. From there [he] carried the rice-milk. Inside the wall of Vajrāsana, upon a one-fathom stela called "Koladesha,"<sup>①</sup> there are embossed five small stūpas above the Bodhi tree and a Buddha [statue] of a fathom. There the caretaker cuts hair.

There is a stūpa on the bank of the Nairāṇjanā to the east of Vajrāsana [where he] drank the milk. [He] drank the milk and then [he] put his bowl in the water and said, "If [I] will attain enlightenment, take it upstream and not downstream" It thus was sent and went backward one furlong, and when it reached its target, it was taken by the gods and worshiped. At three places [along] the return there are stone stūpas within a stela of more than a fathom.

Then [Buddha's] body [was] like refined gold, and [he] went west. He drank the rice-milk and became like refined gold. Nearby, half a furlong west, on the place [he] slept one night, there is a stūpa-temple built above a life-size Buddha sleeping. There are stone stūpas more than a fathom [in diameter] made by Brahmā and Indra.

Then he went northwest and met a peacock and a deer. Each of them prayed [to him]. There are stūpas on the spot where each was prophesied.

Then [he] went north. Three furlongs from Vajrāsana at Mount Gayā above a lake, Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara stayed together. They cracked the earth under [the Buddha, who] desired [to find a place to achieve] enlightenment.<sup>②</sup> The bodhisattva [i. e., the Buddha] said to Avalokiteśvara, "Search for a place for [me to attain] enlightenment." [Avalokiteśvara] went to Vajrāsana, but remained and meditated, so [he] is known as Lazy Avalokiteśvara. His meditation place: in the south door of the Vajrāsana wall there is a stūpa-temple in which there is an Avalokiteśvara with a face of about one hand-span.

### The Approach to Vajrāsana

Then [the Buddha] went south again. There is a stone statue of the bodhisattva on the spot where he went south of Vajrāsana. Then he went to the Bodhi tree to subdue the demon. The bodhisattva went on the so-called path to dwell at the Bodhi tree. About fifteen fathoms from the Bodhi tree he looked east and from his heart came light-rays, and all [trees] that were not the Bodhi tree burned, and that marked the Bodhi tree. At that [place] there was built a life-size statue of the Buddha looking east, and over that is the twenty-fathom [tall] Light-Giving *Gandhakutā*. On the spot where the embers were collected is the Agarū Bodhi tree. Between that and the actual Bodhi tree is seven fathoms.

North of that, nearby, the spring called "Rasakāla" was transformed into mercury by the Buddha. The remains of many *arhats* rest there, and it is said that if one casts hair

① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, 3b. 4: *kho ra a ti sha*. Unidentified.

② Compare Legge, 87–88; and Beal, 114–115.



and nails there, one will not be reborn in a bad rebirth. Above that there is a stūpa, and on the side of the vase-section there is a niche in which to offer hair and fingernails.

### Battle with Demons

Then he went to the Bodhi tree, and at sunset, facing west, he stayed in a trance in which he subdued the demons, and 360,000,000 [demons] let fall a rain of weapons. Then Mañjuśrī sounded a drum, and Tārā laughed. Then from Mount Wutaishan the sound of Mañjuśrī [’s] drum came, and many drums sounded. The bodhisattva overcame all the demons through the power of his meditative absorption. A statue of Drum Sound [Mañjuśrī] of about a cubit is inside a stūpa to the west inside the wall. In front of that is a stone maṇḍala. If [one] listens when the sun is warm, the drum sound resounds. Behind that there is a big stone slab with Chinese writing on it.

When [the Buddha] overcame the demons, Laughing Tārā laughed at the defeated demon. [The Buddha] heard this and thought that [this] was not fitting for a noble, so [Tārā] covered [her] face with [her] hand. The spot [where that happened] is more than twenty fathoms northwest of the Bodhi tree, where a self-created stone statue of Hulu Hulu [Tārā], about eight years [old], looks to the south to the demon taming.<sup>①</sup> Near that there is a jewel-heap stūpa over which jewels rained, made by a Sri Lankan.

### The Seven Weeks after Enlightenment

[Week One.] Then having become enlightened at dawn, he did not speak the Dharma for seven weeks.<sup>②</sup> At dawn he looked to the east, and with diamond-like contemplation sat in the meditation position without moving for the first week.

[Week Two.] In the second [week] he traversed the world. Inside the stone rail north of Vajrāsana, in the space embossed by the twelve steps of the Buddha, twelve lotus blossoms arose, and in the space of the lotuses, at each of the two ends, there is a stūpa. South of Vajrāsana, near the Bodhi tree, on the grass seat [he] collected, there is a stūpa eight fathoms wide and twenty fathoms in height.

[Week Three.] The stūpa for his traversing the three thousand worlds in the third [week]: For about five fathoms of stone lattice there is a row of twelve stūpas to the south.

[Week Four.] The holy object for looking at the Bodhi tree without closing his eyes for seven days in the fourth [week]: To the north there is a twenty-five fathom *gandhakuṭā*<sup>③</sup> above a life-size statue of the Buddha looking at the Bodhi tree. Behind

① Compare Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvamin*, 75–76.

② Compare Legge, 88–89; and Beal, 122–123.

③ John S. Strong, “Gandhakuṭ”: The Perfumed Chamber of the Buddha, “*History of Religions* 16/4 (1977), discusses the development of this and related terms in Buddhist literature.



that, on the spot where the Buddha taught a thousand pure and impure people, there is a stūpa. In that there is a likeness of the Buddha, sheltered in back by an outstretched serpent.

[Week Five.] In the fifth [week he] went to the abode of the Serpent King Mucilinda.<sup>①</sup> To the east of a lake, two furlongs north of Vajrāsana, on the spot where [he] met Serpent King Mucilinda there is a stūpa, and there is a stone staircase to the Buddha from the lake. Then he went east, the region became cold, and the Serpent Mucilinda wrapped [the Buddha's] body with his serpent body. In the space where [the serpent] covered his head there is a likeness in a stūpa made by a Sri Lankan. Then to the west about an arrow shot, on the spot where the four [guardian] kings offered a bowl, there is a one-cubit statue of the Buddha in the manner of the four kings offering a bowl.

[Week Six.] In the sixth [week]: to the north, at the place where he went to the north one furlong, there is a stūpa at the base of a Nyagrodha tree on the spot where he pacified the Parivrājikas.

[Week Seven.] Then in the seventh week: [at] the eastern doorway of Vajrāsana, on the right-turning path behind the wall, the merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika offered honey.<sup>②</sup> On the spot where the Buddha gave thanks there is a stūpa, at the base of which are images fashioned of the Buddha and the merchants.

### Beginning to Teach

Then [the Buddha] went to the southwest of Vajrāsana and sat in the presence of a Nyagrodha without teaching the Dharma. On the spot where Brahma and Indra descended to beseech [him to teach] there is a stūpa called Nyagrodhadeśa. In [this stūpa,] which has two doors on the south side, there is medium-size statue of Buddha looking to the west, and in front of that there are statues of Brahma and Indra.

From teaching the Dharma to the five [disciples] at Vārāṇasī to his death [I] will not write.

### Chapter Three—Acts of the Three Brahmaputras (7a. 3–9a. 1)

Now, the acts of the three brahmaputras will be explained.<sup>③</sup> The three Brahmin sons of Rājagṛha built statues of the Sage at Vaiśālī, Vārāṇasī, and Vajrāsana.

One hundred years after the Buddha died, there was a Brahmin woman of 120 years who followed the Dharma teachings under the Buddha. She had three sons. The eldest

① Compare Beal, 128.

② Compare Beal, 129.

③ See Per K. Sørensen, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography: The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994), 66–69, for a translation of an alternative Tibetan version of this narrative, and 497–499 on its literary history in Tibet. The biography of Chak Lotsawa contains a lengthy rendition of the story. See Roerich, *The Life of Dharmasvamin*, 67–70. Compare Beal, 119–121.



two had faith in the non-Buddhists, and the younger had faith in the Buddha. They were always debating.

The mother said, "Indra is in the Himalayas to the north of here, so go ask there." They went there and saw [Indra] making offerings to five hundred *arhats*. They asked which was right, the outsider or insider [teachings], so [Indra said to them,] "The non-Buddhist will attain the bliss of heaven. Only the Buddhist will attain liberation."

They returned to their mother. All became Buddhist. At that time the holy objects of the three jewels were few. So the eldest made a life-size Buddha statue in a twenty-fathom *gandhakuṭā* on a spot where [the Buddha] stayed in Veluvana Kalantaka [in] Rājagṛha. The middle son made the very best statue of Buddha making the Dharma-wheel turning gesture in a *gandhakuṭā* at Vārāṇasī.

The youngest [son] went to Vajrāsana and wished to make a statue. In a dream it was shown that there is a *gośirṣa* sandalwood [tree] on the banks of the river Nairāñjanā. "Have pure Brahmin women grind three thousand measures [of it] at Vajrāsana, mix it with precious jewels and much incense, and pile that at the foot of the Bodhi tree. Let it be for seven days, and a statue in the likeness of the Buddha will form," [he heard in the dream]. He did not find the sandalwood, but then he saw many water buffaloes lying in the sand. He searched where they were resting and found [the sandalwood].

Having done as said earlier, [the brothers] returned there in six days. Then the old woman [i. e., their mother] arrived and said, "I will die tonight and no one but me has seen the Buddha. Therefore, because no one but me will know the difference, open the door [of the temple]."

When they opened [the door] they saw [a statue] looking east, the face one and a half cubits, topknot a full cubit, eyes and face a finger-width each, and ears two hand-spans. [The statue was] eight cubits in height, ornamented with the major and minor marks. They saw this and could not get enough of it.

At that the woman said, "It is very much like [the Buddha], with exceptions: The Buddha's invisible top-knot appears on this one. This one does not have the full measure of luminosity of the Buddha. Of the Buddha's working, walking, sitting, and sleeping, this one does not have [the manner of] sitting, and he does not speak the Dharma."

One day went by; the caretakers claimed that the right-turning curls of hair were incomplete, while some claimed that the small toe was incomplete. The scholars of Vikramaśīla claimed that the measure of luminosity was incomplete.

Then [the brothers] procured an *indranila* [jewel] and thought that if there were two, the [statue's] eyes could be fashioned. [The jewel] fell from a rock and split in two. From these they thus made the eyes, which became endowed with a dark blue light.

Some claim that those three [Brahmin sons] were [actually] Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin and Śaṃkarasvāmin, but that is not so, because it is explained by Ācārya Prajñāvarman



that those two are East Indians. ①

A full cup of teeth [from the woman's relics] remained which was not requested by the fire god from the caretaker [i. e. , consumed in the cremation fire].

Chapter Three: On the Acts of the Three Brahmin Sons.

#### Chapter Four—Acts of Aśoka (9a. 2–12b. 3)

Now the acts of King Aśoka will be explained.

King Aśoka created

The eight stūpas of the eight acts, [and]

Created the ten million stūpas for

[Buddha's] remains in [all] the world.

#### Savage Aśoka

More than one hundred years after the Buddha, in the city of Pāṭaliputra on the bank of the Ganga, ten furlongs east of Vajrāsana, King Aśoka appeared. He had seventeen elder brothers.

When they showed [their] names to the Brahmins [to see] which brother would rule the kingdom, [the Brahmins] said, "From whomever [comes] the best food, best care, and a good mat will be king."

One of [Aśoka's] ministers secretly asked, so he said, "The best seat [is] fine silk [and] fine cotton; the best food is cooked rice."

The seventeen enjoyed food and clothing better than that. But because Aśoka was the son of a servant woman, [he] knew a prophecy that [he] would enjoy such.

Then the seventeen went to other countries as military commanders, and their father, the king, died. So Aśoka was made king. The armies were defeated and the seventeen were killed. He practiced various sins, and because he created a reign in which the people felt the suffering of the three bad rebirths, he was called "Savage Aśoka."

#### The Conversion of Aśoka

At that time the *arhat* Yaśodhvaja, a direct disciple of Ānanda, was in the Kukkuṭ ārāma Grove [in] eastern India. [He had] a novice in a town in east India. ② Aśoka went there and, because he had not killed such a [novice monk, Aśoka] said, "Kill him."

The executioner was about to kill [the novice], and [the novice] thought, "I will meditate for a week," and [he] attained *arhatship*. Then [he] was boiled in sesame oil

① See Sørensen, 67 n. 112.

② Compare Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970), 55–57.



and emerged undead. The king was amazed and asked him, "Please purify my sins." [The novice] said, "I do not know how, so go ask my abbot." And he revealed a marvelous appearance and passed from suffering. In that space even today there is a stūpa with his remains.

The king went to the abbot and beseeched him. [The novice] said, "Having committed great harm to many countries, this *arhat* came to the presence of the king. Because there is a prophecy that you will turn the wheel (rule) through the power of the Buddha, you must make ten million stūpas with the Buddha's remains."

### The Relics and the Wheel of Sharp Weapons

When he was extracting Ajataśatru's share [of the Buddha's relics] in Rājagṛha at Veluvana, [which was] the hidden Magadha measure, a wheel of weapons arose, so [he] did not finish.<sup>①</sup>

A woman said, "I heard that [there is a tunnel from the wheel which] leads to the River Ganga." So [he] found it, cut it, and the wheel stopped. When he dug there, a precious letter arose, which said, "[these relics] would be found by the beggar-king." The king did not wish to search because of his pride, but the *arhats* implored him. A jeweled box was found. The light of four jewels shone from the four corners of that [box]. The value of the entire kingdom was in each of those, and thus [the king's] pride was cut. Then he took four big Magadha *bre* measures, [which made] one *khal* measure of a small *bre* measure. [He] hid the remainder as before, set the River Ganga, and made the wheel turn.

Even today an excellent stūpa remains there, four fathoms in height, made out of brick. Offerings to it remain uninterrupted.

### The Main Temple at Vajrāsana

Then the king made a thirty-five fathom *gandhakuṭā* above the statue of the Sage in front of the Bodhi tree.<sup>②</sup> [This *gandhakuṭā* had the] shape of a standing *vajra*, a square terrace sloping upwards made of brick, ornamented with various precious items of superior craft, with seven stories. Within a circle atop that was a full small *bre* measure of the Buddha's remains, [and] above that a golden top of one fathom.

In the lower story is a snake-essence sandalwood statue of Buddha made by Viśvakarma, with the face of grandfather Siṃhahanu. In the four corners above the doorways there are four *gandhakuṭā*.

In the understory of the pinnacle, there are three door outlines with no doorway to

① Compare Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya, 61. See John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 113–114, 302.

② Compare Beal, 118–119.



the interior. To the right and left of the middle door are Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara.

Behind the outer door, there are two statues of the Buddha [whose] faces have more than a span, with faces looking south and north. It is also said that the Jowo Śākyamuni [statue now in Tibet] once resided there.

Then along the shoulders [of the *gandhakuṭā*], there were eight stone statues; many statues made of Tārā, Mañjuśrī, Maitreya, and the Buddha to the left and right.

### The Temple Courtyard

In the south corner of the courtyard there is a temple in which it was prophesied that once as a child Aśoka, had offered sand to Buddha. [In this temple] there is a statue of Buddha taking up his bowl and [Aśoka's] mother striking the child.

In the west is the demon-subduing bodhisattva, facing west, subduing the demon army led by the demon kings Kedrapala and Dudrapala. ① The earth goddess is there. In back of that to the left and right are stone statues [of the Buddha] looking to the west, accompanied by stone maṇḍalas. Both of these [statues] are said to have taught the Dharma to Atiśa.

In the back of the north courtyard there is a statue of the birth at Lumbinī. To the back of the *gandhakuṭā*, one thousand Buddhas in relief and paintings (tib. *patra*) [of] birds, *makara*, deer, lions, are all finely crafted.

### Outside the Temple Courtyard

To the southwest, twenty fathoms outside the stone railing, on the spot of the throne spoken of in the first chapter of the *Sātra of the Wise and Foolish*, where a son of Aśoka worshiped five *arhats* and the Buddha and attained *arhatship*, there are five stūpas with statues of a thousand Buddhas in the middle of the four corners. Those are reputed to have been made by the eight classes of gods and demons.

Then in the eight great places, Kapilavastu, Vārāṇasī, Śrāvastī, Rājagṛha, Vaiśālī, Sāṃkāśya, Kuśinagara, and Vajrāsana, there are the eight great Dharmarājaka stūpas containing relics inside, made in a single night. To the southeast of Vajrāsana, on the bank of the Nairāṇjanā, is the very great stūpa with circular steps. In front of those eight, there are eight great pillars, above which are the eight different signs made in one night by the eight classes of gods and demons.

At Vajrāsana there is a stūpa made by the gods. South of that there is a fifteen-fathom stūpa built by the king [Aśoka] 's son and three queens, possessing a throne, statues of deities at its central portion, and stairs. The king also stayed in these, and it is said that [he] created them. It is said that at that time this king also made statues and stūpas, which were fashioned after the Buddha's earlier acts.

① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, f. 11a. 6; *khe dra pa'a la*; *du dra pa'a la*. Unidentified.



[Aśoka] also made eight great stūpas at Vajrāsana. The next night he made ten million stūpas containing the relics of the Buddha everywhere in the world. Then he became a Dharma king and was named Dharma [rāja] Aśoka.

Ajataśatru was king for thirty-two years and, after ten generations, came Aśoka. It is explained that he held the kingdom for fifty years, and ruled a quarter of the wheel-turning kings.

### Chapter Five—Acts of Nāgārjuna (12b. 3–19b. 5)

Now the acts of Master Nāgārjuna and others will be explained.

After that, Nāgārjuna and others,  
Scholars and faithful,  
Expanded Vajrāsana, place of  
The Buddhas of the three times.

Nāgārjuna came four hundred years after the Buddha died. [He] erected twenty stone pillars [in] the shouldered<sup>①</sup> outer courtyard of Vajrāsana. Outside this [are] one hundred and one pillars [with] stone lattice to protect against damage by elephants.<sup>②</sup> East are eight Tārās, eight protectors. Seeing all these, [one] is certain to attain various spiritual boons, [even just] glimpsing [them]. On the courtyard [he] made four large and small stūpas.

### Tārā Temples

When Master Nāgārjuna was circumambulating, inside Kabali [temple] resided the deity Tārā, who said, “[You] will work for the benefit of beings.” [She] resided there, and [he] made a *copari*<sup>③</sup> shrine.

There is the so-called Kabali Tārā, who looks to the north, inside the southeast wall of Vajrāsana. That [statue] now has three hand-spans, even though it is said that Master Nāgārjuna went when it had four. The statue, which first naturally arose at about one hand-span, grew bigger.

There the Master planted five campaka trees and said if I break my vow, may I be born until [I] break my vow in no rebirths. And thus was he reborn. Near that, in a stūpa and facing north, there is a one-cubit naturally formed [statue of] Protectress Tārā from an island of the southern sea.

① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, f. 12b. 5; *phrag pa can*. I am not clear what architectural feature this refers to.

② Compare Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya, 107–108.

③ I have not been able to find a suitable explanation for the term *copari/copara*, which occurs five times in this work.



In the circumambulation path to the north, there is a *copara* shrine made about one cubit above Tārā. At first a patron saw that [the statue] thought that it was not right, that the dust from circling the north-facing temple covered Tārā, and [her] back was facing the Buddha. So in a dream [Tārā] said, “Your displeasure is not necessary. I will look south and it will be okay.” So this is called “turning-face” Tārā. ①

### Avalokiteśvara Temples

Nearby, east of that, is the “Candragomin Lokeśvara,” the personal deity of Master Candragomin, which has a retinue of five along with rocks and is inside a stone *gandhakuṭā*. The blessing power [of this temple] is great, and thus many improvements have been made.

Inside the fence, to the right and left of the path from north to south, there are two stūpas, inside of which are two stone statues of Avalokiteśvara Simhanāda. These both have great blessing power, and at night they also light up.

### Stūpas around Vajrāsana

The naturally arising stūpas: In the northeast corner there are stone stūpas, two cubits in height, in which are statues of the Buddha. They were built by an *arhat*, who thought that because they were on the outside of the wall, they were being fatigued, worn down by dust, and he should perhaps bring them in. So he brought them in. Inside, to the south about an arrow shot from that stūpa, there is one stūpa, and it is said that the Buddha walked between the two.

At the junction of the eastern path and the circumambulation path, there is a fathom-tall stone stūpa within a stone, and in the vase-section there is a Buddha in relief. In front of that there is a stone maṇḍala of about a cubit. This was patronized by a woman on the southern coast who lamented that she would not pay homage to the stūpa before she died. In a dream [the stūpa] said to her, “There is no need to worry. I myself will go to Vajrāsana.” And so [the stūpa] went there.

Near that, to the south on the circumambulation path, there is a stone stūpa with a thousand Buddhas. This came from Nālandā and is called the “guest stūpa.”

On the outside of the stone railing, to the southwest, there is a stūpa made out of a single stone about one-and-a-half fathoms. This is said to have been made by a bodhisattva of the tenth level. It is also called a “guest.” In the northwest corner, where the Buddha mixed ginger and butter and offered it, there is a one-and-a-half fathom stūpa made from a single stone. It is said this was made by an *arhat*, and it is said, “Is it not also a guest?”

In the east section there is a *dhānyakaṭaka* stūpa, four big *gandhakuṭās* made by a king, as well as a copy of the Kasarpaṇi *gandhakuṭā*. In the upper east there is a *copara*

① Compare Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvamin*, 74–75.



shrine in which the deity is called Mashikarata,<sup>①</sup> who crosses its two hands above its head, measuring a full cubit kneeling. It has the power to confer blessings.

In the presence of the central temple, at the eastern crossway in which there is a path going to the north [and] south door [s] and a path going to the east door, the Buddha put his feet in stone.<sup>②</sup> It is more than three hand-spans, is endowed with eight great substances, and is on a lotus base of two cubits. Over that there is an archway with deer.

In front of that there is [the stūpa of] Dharma [rāja] Aśoka, at the head of which is a votive [stūpa?] with one thousand lamps.

In the south section behind a Lazy Avalokiteśvara, where the Buddha threw a toothpick, there is a stūpa with a life-size statue of Buddha in it. Nearby there is a stūpa with the sun and moon, symbols for the meeting of Buddha and the divine sons, the sun and moon. There are also two stūpas [commemorating the moment] when the Buddha met Ānanda.

Nearby, behind the stone railing to the west, there is a “descent from the heaven of the thirty-three gods” stūpa, in which there is a statue of the Buddha. To the north, on the site where Buddha offered the three medicines [fruit, pepper, and ginger], there is a stūpa with a north-facing image of Buddha that gives blessings.

Near Siṃhanāda, where the Buddha tamed the demons, a statue of the Buddha, with right hand raised to the sky and left hand at his side threatening the demons, was built and dwells in a *copara* shrine. These are the only ones that exist inside.

### Deities within the Wall

Now the inside of the wall will be explained. The beautiful wall which takes 1800 steps [to traverse]: From east to west it is narrow, from north to south, long. In all directions there are one hundred temples. The inner circumambulation path of the wall has a four-cornered circuit of 1800 steps. This was made later.

### Tantric Deities

On the north side of the eastern gate there is a stone statue of the Goddess Mārīcī.

In a hollow recess of the great gate there is the gatekeeper Mahākāla, and looking inward there are two terrifying *yakṣa* kings with knives in their hands riding *makaras*.

To the south of the eastern gate is the meditation cell of Glorious Ga Lotsawa, and there are also images of Āryadeva's Tārā and Red Yamāntaka riding buffaloes. To the southeast [are] a one-faced four-armed Amoghapāśa, the non-Buddhist deity converted into Avalokiteśvara; a statue of Avalokiteśvara on a three-level throne, about a cubit

① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, f. 15b. 5; *ma shi ka ra ta*. Unidentified.

② Compare Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvamin*, 71–72.



[tall]; and in the corner is an image of Tārā known as “Shivi Tārā,”<sup>①</sup> who adopts the manner of sleeping and being anointed by Ekajaṭi.

To the south have been installed images of Mahāmayā and Dvāranātha, dancing Avalokiteśvara, Jambhala, and a one-face, two-armed Hevajra. In the southwest corner is Mañjuśrī upon a lion.

To the west, Kurukullā, a spontaneously arisen Mañjuśrī Arapacana, and a six-letter [mantra] are the three principal [figures]. In the northwest is a bodhisattva.

To the north are a blessing Avalokiteśvara, Hevajra Trilokyavijaya, and a stūpa-temple of Avalokiteśvara in the door of a room on iron with uncooked rice as offering cakes. At the north door [is] a stūpa-temple for Avalokiteśvara.

On the east face of the wall with the north door [are] door guardians—wrathful stone statues of Sinhalese one-faced, four-armed Dharma protectors riding horses—Avalokiteśvara with female consort, Hevajra Trilokyavijaya; Acala with bent knee; the principal [deity] of Guhyasamāja with three faces and six arms holding a *vajra* and bell to his heart, two [Vajra] vārāhīs, and five Aracapana deities.

### Water-Drain Tārā

Nearby to the northeast is “water-drain” Tārā, [who is] Nāgārjuna's tutelary deity, a stone statue of one cubit.<sup>②</sup> Once King Dharmapāla was meting out punishment, and Sinhalese monks were killed. One monk asked for [Tārā's] protection, and so [Tārā] said, “When you are happy you do not remember me! Do you remember me now?” She magically transformed a water drain in which [people] cannot fit; [the monk] hid in it, and was thus saved. Then [the monk] ran far away to the east. Dharmapāla [tried to] open the door to the upper room of Mahābodhi, but it would not open, and it was heard that only a Sinhalese could open it. That monk was summoned from the east, and when [the temple] was opened, the king was repentant, and to atone he gave an offering of three spheres to Vajrāsana. There is a stūpa on the spot [where this was] offered in the center of the south path inside the wall.

### Sites Beyond the Wall (Proceeding east, south, west, and north)

Now the sites beyond the walls will be explained. Beyond the walls there are many marvelous objects, many places where scholars and adepts have stayed, and many other extraordinary [things].

To the east of [Vajrāsana], at the great outer gate of the wall, on the bank of the Nairāñjanā, there are two Mahākālas upon lions, [each having] two hands, with a club in the shape of an *om*, big and frightful, looking east.

① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, f. 17a. 1: *shi wi ta'a re zhes pa'i sgrol ma*. Unidentified.

② Compare Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvamin*, 75.



In the river behind that, on the spot where [the Buddha] once gave ordination to Uruvilvā Kāśyapa and a thousand matted hair [ascetics], there is the great form of a stūpa on a sand bar.<sup>①</sup>

Tucked in along the south wall is Ghelavihāra,<sup>②</sup> blessed by Mahākāla, where Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga stayed. Tibetan monks set this place up, [but] today Kashmiris run it.

Near there it is said that Āchārya Buddhajñānapāda went [begging] with a mud begging bowl, and Atiśa took ordination [nearby] at Mativihāra. Outside that there is a myrobalan tree planted by the blessings of Āchārya Jñānapāda. Near there in a *copara* shrine is a blessing stone statue of Tārā.

In the forest, three furlongs south of that, there is a stūpa where the Buddha took birth as an elephant, and in that space there is a five-fathom stūpa.

Further in that direction [is] the Kuvaca Forest, in which dwell many tigers and bears.<sup>③</sup> [Here] Āchārya Buddhajñānapāda meditated for six months, achieved the Great Seal boon, and saw the emanated maṇḍala of Guhyasamāja with Noble Mañjuśrī at the center.

To the west there is the Gopādeśa Stūpa on the site where once, as the Buddha went out for alms, an old woman gave him a lump of dung, he transformed it into gold and gave it back to the woman. In front of the northern wall is the dark meditation cell of Kṛṣṇācārya and his consort.

The Buddha was once born as a rabbit in the middle of a town in Sinhala. He offered [his] body in a fire to Indra, and [the fire] was extinguished. In that space there are three stūpas.

Nearby, the Buddha was once reborn as a partridge. On the spot of the banyan tree at which the elephant, the monkey, and the rabbit asked what old thing [they remembered] in order to pay respects [to the eldest],<sup>④</sup> there is a stūpa and a copse of banyan trees.

To the northwest, on the site where the Buddha met three young women, there are seven stūpas. The place where [he] subdued five hundred matted-hair [ascetics is there, as well as] the meditation cave of Master Nāgārjuna. [There are] three sticks [from when] Nāgārjuna came [here] from the serpent realm, brandishing a bodhi tip, and blessed [the place].

Fifty furlongs to the northwest of Vajrāsana [is] the adept's place called Chos kyi

① Compare Beal, 130–131.

② Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, f. 18a. 5: *ghe la bi ha'a ra*. Unidentified.

③ Compare the story of Buddhajñānapāda in Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 313.

④ The reference is to the Tittira Jātaka. See E. B. Cowell, *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), volume. 1, 92–95.



myu gu sar ba ri'i phug. ① According to a prophecy, Āchārya Buddhajñānapāda composed the fourteen Dharmas [here, including] the teaching of Mañjuśrī, and stayed with a retinue of eighteen.

### Conclusion: Visualizing Vajrāsana

While these are the supreme blessed places and objects, there are inconceivably more. Even today there are five hundred stūpas and countless statues. Great efforts should be made to construct everything previously explained out of these [objects at Vajrāsana], or whatever one desires as self-originating [objects, and then to] make offerings to them, meditate on them, and circumambulate them.

By meditating on the maṇḍala and the other deities, if one meditates by visualizing oneself [as] the deity and visualizing [the deity] in front of [oneself], and makes supplications to [the deity], blessings will come quickly. In the Prajñāpāramitā it is also explained that [from this] no harm from unripened karma will come to beings in all realms.

### Colophon (19b. 6–20a. 4)

So, by the above good explanation of Vajrāsana,  
The place at which the Buddhas are enlightened,  
May all beings not be separated from the nobles,  
Quickly [attain] the essence of enlightenment, and attain Buddhahood.

The *Ornamental Flower: An Explanation of Vajrāsana* was composed at the Glorious Nartang Monastery by the learned monk Chomden Raldri. ②

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① Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, f. 19a. 6. Unidentified.

② A small note concludes the CPN manuscript of Bcom ldan ral gri, *Rdo*, f. 20a. 3–4, which does not appear in the NGMPP manuscript: *dpyal lo'i tshe mchod rten lha can nyis brgya drug cu'o //*. The sense of the phrase eludes me, though it might be rendered as "anniversary of Dpyal Lo, 260 stūpas with deities, "perhaps referring to offerings made in commemoration of the twelfth/thirteenth-century translator, Dpyal Lo tsā ba Chos kyi bzang po, with whom Chomden Raldri studied; See Bsam gtan bzang po, *Bcom*, f. 3b. 5.



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