

Early Teachings on the Four Phurpas in the Light of the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* (*bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*) Revelation of Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124-1192), and the Relationship between the Revelatory (*gter ma*) and Transmitted (*bka' ma*) Textual Traditions¹

Cathy Cantwell

ABSTRACT: Myang ral's twelfth century revealed corpus of the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* (*bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*) became a template for Rnying ma practice focusing on the tradition's eight central tantric deities. In a previous article (2020a), I have suggested that the entire Action Phurpa (*phrin las phur pa*) section of the *Eightfold Buddha Word* is likely to pre-date Myang ral, and seems to preserve an archaic practice tradition. Here, I explore further Phurpa materials in the corpus which relate to the teachings on the Four Phurpas, or the Four Phurpa Materials (*phur pa'i rgyu bzhi*), alongside related teachings in the corpus of transmitted texts (*bka' ma*) which were also part of Myang ral's heritage. The centrality of the Four Phurpa teachings in these texts may have influenced the later Vajrakīlaya traditions, which generally put considerable emphasis on these teachings. I assess how the specific teachings on the Four Phurpas passed on by Myang ral in the revealed (*gter ma*) and transmitted

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texts (*bka' ma*) relate to each other, and to other early sources on the Four Phurpas. It seems not only that some of the transmitted *Eightfold Buddha Word* texts of *The Fortress and Precipice* (*rdzong 'phrang*) cycle were very early, but one short instruction on the Four Phurpas is quite likely to derive from the historical Padmasambhava. Moreover, it draws upon an authoritative source which seems also to have made its way into texts within Myang ral's *Embodying the Sugatas* revelation dealing with the same topic. Finally, in considering the framing of Myang ral's *Embodying the Sugatas* as revelation, one effect of the new presentation is that King Khri srong lde'u btsan,² who was supposed to have been the main original recipient of *The Fortress and Precipice* transmissions, but did not remain in the lineage, was brought back into centre stage in the transmission. For Myang ral was his rebirth, and key texts of the *Embodying the Sugatas* revelation are said to have come from the King's manuscripts.

Preamble

In both the Rnying ma and Sa skya Vajrakīlaya traditions, the Four Phurpas,³ variously called by such terms as the Four Phurpa Materials (*phur pa'i rgyu bzhi*) or the Four Types of Enlightened Attention to the Phurpa Perforations⁴ (*phur pa thal 'byin gyi dgongs pa rnam pa bzhi*), are a central teaching. They are generally elaborated upon in oral teachings accompanying empowerment rites or introductions to Vajrakīlaya, and often feature prominently within written Vajrakīlaya commentaries. They are considered to sum up the crucial aspects of the necessary approach throughout practice on this tantric deity, and moreover, to sum up succinctly the entire path to Enlightenment. Yet these important teachings seem to be at best only hinted at within extant Vajrakīlaya root tantras, so the question arises as to how they developed and became so firmly established within the tradition. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence from early historical sources to answer this question with certainty, and the relative dating of the early sources which are extant remains an open question. Here, I review a few key early sources, and

2 Note that here I use the spelling Khri srong lde'u btsan rather than the apparently more archaic Khri srong lde btsan in deference to my sources which consistently use this spelling, in contrast to the spelling of Myang ral, where most of the earlier sources I use prefer this spelling to Nyang ral.

3 Here, I am treating the word, phurpa, as an English word equivalent for *phur pa*. Generally in this article I simply transliterate Tibetan names/terms — phurpa is an exception to this rule, although of course, transliteration is used where the term is included within a longer Tibetan phrase or citation. Note also that the terms, *phur pa* and *phur bu* are used virtually interchangeably in Tibetan sources. Again, I have simplified by using *phurpa* throughout, except where giving a citation which gives, *phur bu*.

4 The Tibetan term *thal 'byin* is not straightforward to render into English in the sense used here. It implies not only the penetration of the phurpa into its object, but the object's total disintegration or transformation. In using the word *perforation(s)*, with the verbal form, to *perforate*, I have tried to retain one of the literal senses of the term and related words, in the idea of boring or drilling into an object (see, for instance, the example given in the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* for *thal byung*: ལྷང་བྱ་རྩོན་པོས་པང་ལེག་ཐལ་བྱང་བྱ་ལྷག་ནས་བྱག་པ་འདྲན་པ་, Volume 2, 1157).

seek to situate the Four Phurpa teachings contained in Myang ral's corpus in the light of the emergent Vajrakīlaya tradition.

First, to introduce briefly the Four Phurpas, the standard set consists of:

1. The Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa (*rig pa ye shes kyi phur pa*);
2. The Compassion Emanation Phurpa (*thugs rje sprul pa'i phur pa*);
3. The Secret Bodhicitta Phurpa (*gsang ba byang chub sems kyi phur pa*);
4. The Symbolic Material Phurpa (*mtshan ma rdzas kyi phur pa*).

There are some variations in the list. In particular, the Compassion Emanation Phurpa is also frequently called, the Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa (*tshad med snying rje'i phur pa*).⁵ The Secret Bodhicitta Phurpa is often given as, the Superior Bodhicitta Phurpa (*lhag pa byang chub sems kyi phur pa*). There is also some variation in the ordering of the set, in some cases apparently depending on the context for usage — but generally, simply a matter of which textual sources are being referenced in a particular tradition. The order given here can be considered to embody the structure of the path. The first gives the atiyoga view, in the light of which the practice is to be performed throughout. The second consists of the generation stage (*bskyed rim*) practices, with an emphasis on mahāyoga, while the third consists of the completion stage (*rdzogs rim*) practices, and an emphasis on anuyoga. These three together comprise the Primary Ritual (*stod las*), while the fourth and final phurpa relates to the Secondary Ritual (*smad las*). As we shall see, this order is given in the influential *Black Collection* ('*bum nag*) commentary, but many other sources give the second and third categories listed above in reverse order. This ordering creates correspondences for the first three with the three kāyas in their usual order, with the sequence of the Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa corresponding to the dharmakāya; the Secret or Superior Bodhicitta Phurpa relating to the sambhogakāya; and the Compassion Emanation Phurpa or Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa relating to the nirmāṇakāya.⁶ Another order lists the group according to a progression through different stages of the path. From this perspective, the main tantric practice consists of two aspects, first, engagement in the Primary Ritual through the Compassion Emanation Phurpa, and second, the Secondary Ritual (*smad las*) which involves the usage of the Symbolic

5 A myes zhabs notes (1973: 142.4) *tshad med snying rje'i* (Immeasurable Compassion) as an alternative for *thugs rje sprul pa'i*, and cites the *Rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa* (142.6-143.1) on the categories.

6 This is made explicit in Shechen Gyaltap's (1871-1926) Commentary (*The Concise Quintessential Commentary on the Saadhana, The Utterly Secret Razor Knife Vajrakīlaya*): 13; for the Tibetan, see Zhe chen rgyal tshab 'gyur med padma rnam rgyal, Volume 9: 381-6. Note that Khenpo Namdrol (1995: 45-7), and Gyatrul Rinpoche (1996: 254-260) also use this order.

Material Phurpa.⁷ On this basis, the inner anuyoga practices can be developed with the Secret Bodhicitta Phurpa, and finally, the enlightened fruition is expressed in the Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa.⁸

Precedents for the Four Phurpas in the root tantras, and the early development of the set

Even the dating of the Vajrakīlaya root tantras is uncertain: it is probable that they were mostly compiled or redacted in Tibet rather than representing direct translations of complete texts from Sanskrit, and were established during the *snga dar* or soon afterwards during the post-imperial period. There is little direct evidence for the Vajrakīlaya root tantras during Imperial times, since the official translation projects seem to have excluded the Inner tantras as inappropriate for public distribution. Nonetheless, the Inner tantras were certainly well-established by the *phyi dar* period: this much is clear from the works of early Rnying ma masters such as the ninth to tenth century Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes and the eleventh century scholar, Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po. Specific Vajrakīlaya tantras are mentioned or cited in early Vajrakīlaya commentaries. These early tantras often contain apparently disordered or obscure materials,⁹ and it is perhaps improbable that they were ever a self-sufficient textual basis for practice — they were surely supplemented by practice manuals. Yet it would seem safe to assume that these tantras represent at least part of the earliest strata of Vajrakīlaya materials.

I have not found any clear discussion of the Four Phurpas as understood by the tradition in any extant Vajrakīlaya root tantra.¹⁰ The set are elaborated upon in verses said to derive from two root tantras — the *Root Tantra*, *Vajra Wrath* (*rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa*) and the *Phurbu Fierce Mantra Teachings Tantra* (*phur bu ngan sngags gtsug lag gi rgyud*). Citations of these

7 Here, I translate *stod las* and *smad las* as Primary and Secondary Ritual respectively, since in Rnying ma practice, they are the two necessary components of the spiritual path, the *smad las* rites for benefitting others dependent upon the prior accomplishment of the *stod las*, which develops one's own understanding. The *smad las* rites are *not* included within the class of mundane rites (*las tshogs*), even if — like many Dharma practices — they may have beneficial worldly effects. See Cantwell 2020c: 110.

8 Dudjom Rinpoche uses this ordering in his Aspiration verses which he wrote for the *Meteoric Iron Razor* (*gnam lcags spu gri*) Ritual Manual (*Collected Works* Volume Tha: 148-149). In the title to his commentary on the verses (Volume Da: 489-499) he notes that this presentation represents the set in terms of a graduated path (*lam rim*).

9 Cantwell and Mayer 2007: 79-82.

10 Robert Mayer and I have produced detailed textual studies of three Vajrakīlaya tantras, see Mayer 1996, and Cantwell and Mayer 2007. During the course of the Oxford research project on the two tantras, I had browsed through the other Vajrakīlaya root tantras found in the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* collections without finding any explicit reference to the set of four. It is possible that I might have missed a reference, which future research may identify.

passages are found repeated in many Vajrakīlaya commentaries, apparently on the basis of the citations found in the famous early *Black Collection* ('bum nag) commentary.¹¹ It may be that these root tantra sources were indeed drawn upon by the early tradition, although if the cited passages ever derived from tantras with these titles, no trace of them is available to us now.

Generally in root tantras, when four types of phurpa, or four phurpa materials are mentioned, this refers to the different ritual phurpas used for each of the ritual actions: a white round phurpa for pacifying; a yellow square phurpa for enriching; a red semi-circular phurpa for controlling; and a black triangular phurpa for destroying. This set of phurpas for the four ritual actions persists in the Vajrakīlaya tradition — such a group of phurpas may be included in the periphery of the main deity's maṇḍala, and they may feature in supplementary rites connected with the four actions. The fact that this set of four occurs in the root tantras does not imply that the root tantras have greater interest in mundane rites than the later tradition. In fact, such phurpa rites in the Mahāyoga root tantra literature may imply soteriological interpretations of what may seem to be mundane rituals — there is no doubt that the thrust of the Mahāyoga approach embodied in the Inner Tantras is precisely to develop pure vision of the sameness of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and of the tantric deities and the associated rituals as expressions of this pure vision. Thus, an early commentary on the *Thabs kyi zhags pa* offers an entirely soteriological interpretation of the four phurpa rites which are described in Chapters 20, 26, 31, 36.¹² The *Thabs kyi zhags pa* features amongst the list of the Eighteen Tantras of Mahāyoga¹³ and was considered to elucidate Mahāyoga in general.¹⁴

As well as these four types of phurpa, the root Vajrakīlaya tantras¹⁵ often refer to numerous other types or understandings of phurpa which have a good deal in common with what became the standard classification of Four Phurpas in the tradition. Thus, one finds references to the *Bodhicitta Phurpa* and the *Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa*, but not as part of the set of four, and not with precisely the same senses as the standard set.¹⁶ Occasionally, such hints of different types of phurpa are tantalisingly close to standard exegesis, although never fully explicit. Thus, in the context of a stabbing ritual, the *Vajra Wrath Root Tantra* (*rdo rje khros pa*

11 Boord 2002: 259ff, 282ff; see below for more on the *Black Collection*.

12 Cantwell and Mayer 2012: 78-81, 319, 327, 333, 338.

13 Almogi 2014.

14 Cantwell and Mayer 2012: 4.

15 In fact, the specifically Vajrakīlaya tantras rarely discuss the four phurpas associated with the four rituals, although they are occasionally mentioned, such as in the *Twelve-fold Kīlaya Tantra* (*phur pa bcu gnyis*)'s Chapter 10 (*gting skyes* vol. Dza 106; *sde dge* vol. Pa 215v) and Chapter 22 (*gting skyes* vol. Dza 183-186; *sde dge* vol. Pa 246r-247r).

16 For instance, both these terms are found in Chapter 12 of the *Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra*; see Cantwell and Mayer 2007: 37, 168-70.

rtsa ba'i rgyud)'s¹⁷ Chapter 7 refers briefly to three of the four categories in familiar terms, and possibly implies the fourth.¹⁸

What is clear throughout the Vajrakīlaya root tantras is the principle that the phurpa ritual implement serves not only its ritual functions, such as stabbing and releasing negative forces into a buddha field, or pinning protective spirits in a circle around the sacred site, but it becomes a symbol and embodiment of the tantric deity, and moreover, of the enlightened view and of the path or the techniques needed to attain realisation. It is worth stating explicitly here that even if the extant Vajrakīlaya root tantras appear to omit any reference to the set of Four Phurpas, the new classification most probably came out of the same environment and ethos in which these Mahāyoga tantras were being established.¹⁹

The shift from an earlier pre-Mahāyoga understanding of a ritual phurpa is sometimes explicitly broached in early Vajrakīlaya sources. In later tradition, the topic is so established that it hardly invites comment, but in some early commentarial sources, it seems that an explanation may be necessary. Thus, the longer commentary section of the Action Phurpa (*'phrin las phur pa*) text within Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas (bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa)* addresses an objection to the idea that the primordial wisdom of emptiness is the naturally abiding [*phurpa*] point in the heart. Since a phurpa should be used for striking, yet the primordial wisdom of emptiness has no [*phurpa*] point, why should it be called, phurpa? The answer is given that this enlightened heart is called phurpa since it strikes all discursive thoughts.²⁰

Similarly, in relation to the Four Phurpa teachings, the early *Black Collection* (*'bum nag*) commentary²¹ raises objections that the first three phurpa categories do not appear to correspond to the phurpas of the four ritual actions. The objection is not articulated in relation to the fourth material ritual phurpa, since the four ritual actions are clearly included within its remit, but the discrepancy between the first three and a conventional notion of a phurpa is stark. Thus, in relation to the Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa, the hypothetical questioner complains that generally, a phurpa should accomplish pacifying, enriching, controlling or destroying, and asks whether these actions are fulfilled in the inseparability of the spatial field and primordial wisdom. The response is that this is the pacifying phurpa since the afflictions are pacified by

17 Despite the similar name, this tantra is not to be confused with the *rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa* mentioned above (see Cantwell and Mayer 2007: 5-7).

18 Cantwell and Mayer 2007: 34, 259.

19 I discuss below a text on the Four Phurpas from the *Bka' ma* transmission, suggesting that its representation as an instruction deriving from the historical Padmasambhava is plausible. If so, then clearly the Four Phurpa teachings derive from the same historical era as the time when the Mahāyoga root tantras were being redacted in Tibet.

20 བཀའ་བཤམས་ལྷན་པ་ནི་འདེབས་པ་ལ་བྱའོ་སྤྱོད་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཡི་ཤེས་ཆེ་མོར་མེད་པ་ལ་ཅིའི་ཕྱིར་ལུས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་ཞེན་ལྷགས་དེ་རྣམས་པར་རྟོག་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་འདེབས་པས་ལུས་ཞེས་བྱའོ་ (KAH89-90, TSH383-4, PH254,1, X694-5, Y728-9). See also Cantwell 2020a: 54.

21 Boord 2002: 260-5.

it; it is the enriching phurpa since it expands the buddhas' primordial wisdom; the controlling phurpa since it brings one's own mind under control; and the destructive phurpa since it effects liberation from saṃsāra.²² Similar responses are given for the other two categories. Thus, the Compassion Emanation Phurpa is the pacifying phurpa since clarity in the deity's form pacifies outer and inner hindrances; it is the enriching phurpa since it increases siddhis; the controlling phurpa since it brings appearances under control; and the destructive phurpa since hostile forces and obstacles are released by it. The Secret Bodhicitta Phurpa is the pacifying phurpa since it pacifies self-centred passion; it is the enriching phurpa since it increases bliss; the controlling phurpa since it brings the channels and airs under control; and the destructive phurpa since it liberates from saṃsāra.²³ In short, all four ritual actions are encompassed within each of the four categories, but those four contain much more, and are not limited by the ritual actions they accomplish.

Early Commentarial Traditions: The Vajrakīlaya Black Collection (*phur pa 'bum nag*)

The extensive early *Black Collection* commentary has had an important role in the coalescing of the Vajrakīlaya traditions. Long passages are cited either with acknowledgment or silently in many of the most influential commentaries,²⁴ and moreover, the entire text itself is still read widely today by Vajrakīlaya scholars and practitioners. It presents itself as a single work representing the instructions of the three *ācāryas*, Padma (sambhava), Vimala (mitra) and the Newari (Śīlamanju), transmitted to Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and recorded by Ngam 'bre (ācārya Gsal le). While this attribution may just about be within the realm of possibilities, there is not enough evidence for confidence that such a long work, containing many root tantra citations and so forth, is likely to derive in full from the early ninth century. Moreover, the section on the transmission of the teaching, which follows the account of Guru Padma's activities, takes

22 བཀའ་བ་ནི་སྤྱི་ཕུར་པ་ལ་ཞི་རྒྱས་དབང་དྲག་ཚད་དགོས་ལ། དབྱིངས་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་དབྱིར་མེད་དེ་ལ་ཞི་རྒྱས་དབང་དྲག་ཚད་དམ་ཟེར་ན་ཚད་ཉེ། དེ་ཉན་མོངས་ཞི་བས་ཞི་བའི་ཕུར་པ། སངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས་རྒྱས་པར་བྱེད་པས་རྒྱས་པའི་ཕུར་པ། རང་སེམས་དབང་དུ་འདུས་པས་དབང་གི་ཕུར་པ། འཁོར་བ་ལས་སྦྱོལ་བར་བྱེད་པས་དྲག་པོའི་ཕུར་པའོ། (Dudjom *Bka' ma*, Volume Tha: 437)

23 ལྟའི་སྤྱི་གསལ་བས་ཕྱི་ནང་གི་བར་ཆད་ཞི་བས་ན་ཞི་བའི་ཕུར་པ། དཛོས་གྲུབ་རྒྱས་པས་རྒྱས་པའི་ཕུར་པ། ལྷང་བ་དབང་དུ་འདུས་པས་དབང་གི་ཕུར་པ། དྲག་བགེགས་སྦྱོལ་བས་ན་དྲག་པོའི་ཕུར་པའོ། ་་་ ཆགས་པ་རང་རྒྱུད་པ་ཞི་བས་ཞི་བའི་ཕུར་པ། བདེ་བ་རྒྱས་པས་རྒྱས་པའི་ཕུར་པ། ཚ་རྒྱུད་དབང་དུ་འདུས་པས་དབང་གི་ཕུར་པ། འཁོར་བ་ལས་སྦྱོལ་བས་དྲག་པོའི་ཕུར་པའོ། (Dudjom *Bka' ma*, Volume Tha: 439, 441)

24 This includes the A myes zhabs commentary for the Sa skya Vajrakīlaya tradition, and Kong sprul's widely read commentary on the *Vajrakīlaya Root Tantra Fragment* (*rdo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi dum bu*).

the record far beyond the earliest era.²⁵ Ācārya Gsal le is said to have increased his life-span, and transmitted the teachings to Lang lab Byang chub rdo rje, a contemporary and adversary of Rwa lo tsā ba Rdo rje grags, who lived in the eleventh century.²⁶ The gurus given in the further lineage lists are mostly not easy to identify, but one at the end of the first list, Zur chung Shes rab grags pa (1014-1074) was a famous figure of the Zur clan. The early Zur masters were known for their work in preserving and codifying the Rnying ma Transmitted teachings.²⁷ In this case, it would seem most likely that the work was compiled from earlier materials, much of which may indeed have been archaic,²⁸ even if the integrated structure of the text as we have it was created by the editors, who probably supplied the Introduction which lays out the topics to be covered (supplying the outline or *sa bcad*). In fact, some of the sections seem to revisit themes already covered in earlier sections. Such repetition, however, may suggest that the editorial work was not so extensive as to integrate separate transmitted teachings, but primarily to compile them together.²⁹ The framing in terms of the instructions of the three *ācāryas* most probably relates to the longest single section of the text.³⁰ This section would seem to cohere together as a single unit, and its core explanations of the classic verses for establishing the maṇḍala are given through a series of instructions with each of the three *ācāryas* adding their own reflections.

The *Black Collection* supplies two teachings on the Four Phurpas, the first of which³¹ runs

25 See Boord 2002: 126-29. Here, we find a long account of Lang lab's exploits, and even the list following this gives some comment on a few of the teachers. Had we found merely a list of later gurus appended at the end of the text, a later editor's addition might have been suspected, but in this case, it would seem improbable that this whole section has been inserted into an otherwise discrete text.

26 The *Black Collection* does not give any account of this encounter in its relation of Lang lab's demonstration of his mastery, but the story is well-known in the Vajrakīlaya traditions. See, for example, Dudjom 1991 Volume 1: 713-4.

27 Kapstein 2019: 268.

28 Here, I concur wholeheartedly with Martin Boord's assessment of the materials as archaic and of great historical significance. I differ only in being more cautious in not assuming the entire work (apart from the lineage list) in something like its present form to derive from Ācārya Gsal le's transcription in the ninth century (Boord 2002: xxv-xxviii). That said, as will be seen from the rest of this article, I think that modern scholarship should be careful not automatically to dismiss claims relating to the teachings of Padmasambhava when those teachings derive from transmitted sources, as in this case. It is to be hoped that future research may bring to light more evidence for the existence of the *Black Collection* or its constituent parts before the eleventh/twelfth centuries.

29 There are, however, rare cross-references, such as the statement at the beginning of *The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement* (Boord 2002: 252) that the first point relating to the introductory basis has been dealt with above in the first major section. There are also occasionally apparent links between topics in different sections (see the discussion on the two sections which discuss the Four Phurpas below). These limited connections between different discrete sections would seem to demonstrate *either* that there has been at least some editorial intervention to reduce overlaps, *or* that all the segments of the work were in fact integrated from the outset, contrary to my suggestion here.

30 Boord 2002: 143-249.

31 Boord 2002: 257-66.

from the final part of point two through the whole of point three in a section called, *The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement* (*rgyud kyi them sbyor bcu*). The second teaching is an independent section simply entitled, *The Four Phurpa Materials* (*phur bu'i rgyu bzhi*), said to represent the heart teachings of Padma rgyal po (i.e. Padmasambhava), as given to Ye shes mtsho rgyal.³²

This article is not the place to review these teachings in detail.³³ In brief, the Four Phurpas are clearly a central instruction within *The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement* (*rgyud kyi them sbyor bcu*). This text or section constitutes the third main part of the *Black Collection* presentation,³⁴ following first, the account of the history and transmission of Vajrakīlaya, and second, the above mentioned longest single section of the text, which is structured around a scheme entitled, *The Six Tantric Bonds* (*rgyud kyi chings drug*). The second step of *The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement* consists of three sets of characteristics, of the maṇḍalas, of the mantras, and of the materials. The first three Phurpas are mentioned in relation to three of the maṇḍala types,³⁵ and then the section on materials discusses appropriate materials to support each of the Four Phurpas.³⁶ Step three is entirely devoted to the Four Phurpas.³⁷ It lists the four along with similes for the types of person who are associated with each, and then works through each Phurpa in turn, breaking down the discussion into the subdivisions of: the person; the nature of the phurpa; the object to strike; the method; evaluating it; the faults of not striking; the necessity for striking; objections; how the practice is absorbed. The separate section specifically on *The Four Phurpa Materials*³⁸ covers some of the same material, but is more extensive. Each of the four is subdivided into: the practitioner; the purpose of the practice; the methods; and the result. This subdivision corresponds to the final subdivision of the earlier section (how the practice is absorbed), where the four aspects are merely listed, and in the first three cases, illustrated with an appropriate cited root tantra verse. It soon becomes clear that the notion of different persons really implies different approaches appropriate to each stage of practice, and the discussion seeks to connect the meditations for activating each of the phurpas with specific lines in the Vajrakīlaya liturgy for generating the maṇḍala, visualising the

32 བཟླ་ཀླུ་པོའི་བླགས་ཀྱི་བཞག་པ། གཟུངས་མ་མཁར་ཆེན་བཟའ་ལ་གནང་བ། ཐུར་བུའི་རྒྱ་བཞི་རྫོགས་སོ། (Dudjom *Bka' ma*, Volume Tha: 486, Gangtok version: 183).

33 Martin Boord's study includes a full translation with reference to the two printed versions then available, and noting meaningful variants. Since that time, further copies have come to light in Tibet, which have now been scanned by TBRC (W3PD894, W2PD17514). It will be for future research to assess whether these additional sources add anything to the picture. Unfortunately, TBRC: W3PD894 has restricted access. TBRC: W2PD17514 is a print on traditional paper from a collection from Zhe chen monastery, and it is clear that the layout in the opening pages is not identical to either of the other prints.

34 Boord 2002: 251-72.

35 Boord 2002: 252.

36 Boord 2002: 257-8.

37 Boord 2002: 259-66.

38 Boord 2002: 282-93.

tantric deity and performing the rituals. The third phurpa includes instructions relating to sexual yoga, while the fourth gives details of various subsidiary rituals needed to accomplish the full range of phurpa rites.

Other Early Commentarial Traditions

Another famous early commentary is *The Glorious Vajrakīlaya Commentary, Light rays from the Sun* (*dpal rdo rje phur pa'i tī ka nyi ma'i 'od zer*), composed by Mi bskyod rdo rje, which is a foundational text for the *Rog lugs* Vajrakīlaya tradition. Like the *Black Collection*, it is cited and read widely, beyond its specific tradition.³⁹ Mi bskyod rdo rje is a common name, but it seems almost certainly to apply to Snye mo Jo sras Bsod nams dpal, who seems to have lived in the twelfth or thirteenth century.⁴⁰

The *Light rays from the Sun* commentary has a relatively short (three pages) section on the Four Phurpas.⁴¹ Each of the four are subdivided into the nature of the phurpa; the object to strike; evaluating it; and the necessity for striking. This list is rather similar to that given in the *Black Collection*, and although not parallel, the treatment of each phurpa is also similar. The most striking aspect of this presentation is its framing: the section is given not as a general teaching to be applied throughout the practice, but as part of the section on generating the maṇḍala of material phurpas. One is therefore left with the sense that here, the categories retain the earlier sense of an equation with the ritual phurpas, even though the explanations carry the same soteriological content as found in the *Black Collection*.

Of other early transmitted Vajrakīlaya traditions, I have not found any clear discussion

39 For example, the first introductory part of the commentary on the Dudjom Meteoric Iron Razor (*bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri*) by Mkhan po A chung (1918-1998) contains copious citations of both the *Black Collection*, and the *Light rays from the Sun*. My attention was first drawn to this important work by Lama Kunzang Dorjee Rinpoche of Jangsa Monastery, Kalimpong, and of Pema Yoedling, Gelephu, in 2009.

40 This identification is noted in an annotation on the authorial colophon in the text (Dudjom *Bka' ma*, Volume Ta: 451), and furthermore, Dudjom Rinpoche's Lineage Supplication (*rog lugs kyi phur pa'i brgyud 'debs*; Dudjom *Bka' ma*, Volume Ta: 453-454) would seem to affirm Bsod nams dpal in the appropriate position (as the student of Shes rab 'od, who is mentioned at the end of the lineage history (233) in the *Light rays from the Sun*. Thus, the Mi bskyod rdo rje of our text does not seem to be identical to the famous Sman lung Mi bskyod rdo rje of a similar period who wrote important commentaries on the *Rgyud Gsang ba snying po* (Dudjom *Bka' ma*, Volume Ki).

41 Dudjom *Bka' ma*, Volume Ta: 348-51.

of the Four Phurpas in the surviving early materials of the Sa skya 'Khon lugs tradition.⁴² For the Rong lugs tradition, the Dudjom *Bka' ma* Collection contains a compilation of the Source Authoritative texts (*gzhung*), which contains some early materials, including some notes written by the eleventh century scholar, Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po.⁴³ These notes do not include any clear teachings on the Four Phurpas.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, apart from the short sections by Rong zom, it is hard to be sure which if any of the other sections represent genuinely old writings. Lengthy sections are from the works of a later authoritative lama of the tradition, Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624), but this source collection also includes many short instructions, some of which — like the sections by Rong zom — may well have been passed down since antiquity. Amongst these instructions is one dealing with the Four Phurpas which is said to represent a teaching of the Indian ācārya, Dhanasamskṛta, which was taught in Tibet by Padmasambhava (*slob dpon padma thod phreng*) and given to the King, Khri srong lde'u btsan.⁴⁵ The problem with all texts said to derive from Padmasambhava is the uncertainty of the historicity. Clearly, most *gter ma* revelations are attributed to Padmasambhava, but without the claim that they have been passed through a transmitted lineage. In the case of *bka' ma* teachings — as indeed also with the *Black Collection* — as I have suggested above (see note 28), it may be that modern scholarship should not be so fast to dismiss the attributions, which may indicate at least that the text (or its parts) might derive from a very early transmission. This section also works through a list of points, such as the characteristics of each of the four, the objects to strike etc., but in this case, all four phurpas are discussed together under each point, so that the presentation gives more of an impression of the four as related aspects to

42 The works of Grags pa Rgyal mtshan contain important teachings, both notes of his own composition, and works on the Vajrakīlaya practice which represent the teachings of his father, Sa chen Kun dga' snying po. These are clearly seminal for the Sa skya Phur pa tradition, but it is in the works of later masters — and especially the commentary by A myes zhabs — that the more extensive explanations can be found. It is worth adding that the Sa skya Phur pa tradition not only relies on a number of Rnying ma root tantras (see, for example, A myes zhabs 1973: 20-2) and other transmitted sources, such as the *Black Collection*, but also preserves its own account of the earliest transmission from Padmasambhava to 'Khon Klu'i dbang po, and records that Grags pa Rgyal mtshan's notes on the Vajrakīlaya practice are based on a textual source, *dkyil chog rdo rje las rim*, written by Padmasambhava (see the introduction to the popular sādhana, *dpal rdo rje phur pa'i bsnyen sgrub gsal byed bdud rtsi'i 'od can* in the *Sgrub thabs kun btus* Volume Pa: 144). Unfortunately, if this *dkyil chog rdo rje las rim* is still extant, I have not been able to locate a copy.

43 See: *dpal rdo rje phur pa'i sgrub skor la/ rong zom lugs kyi phur pa'i gzhung pod bstan pa rgya mtsho'i snying bcud*, Dudjom *Bka' ma* Volume Nya: 5-553. The sections attributed to Rong zom include Volume Nya: 216-30, 230-233, and possibly the following section which ends p.241, but that is less certain; 290-301, 319-38.

44 I have also browsed through other works by Rong zom (such as one of the versions of his *Collected Works*, TBRC: W21617) without finding obvious Vajrakīlaya texts, but I might have missed some materials. It is to be hoped that future research will accomplish studies of Rong zom's tantric practice texts.

45 The section is entitled, *dpal rdo rje phur pa'i spyi thabs bsdu pa'i man ngag gyi sgra bzhi'i bshad pa* (Dudjom *Bka' ma* Volume Nya: 393-413).

be understood in an integrated manner throughout. The discussion also covers the symbolism of different features of the maṇḍala, the various ritual actions involved in the destructive rites, and specific samayas appropriate for each of the four.

If this section from the *Rong lugs* tradition does represent an archaic teaching (or even Padmasambhava's teaching), it may be that by Myang ral's era, various teachings on the Four Phurpas were circulating amongst Vajrakīlaya practitioners. But the caveat must be added that the relative dating of the sources is still uncertain, and also, of course, we can have little sense of how widely distributed these teachings may have been.

The Four Phurpas in the Root Vajrakīlaya Tantra within Myang ral's revealed corpus of the *Eightfold Buddha Word*, *Embodying the Sugatas (bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa)*⁴⁶

Myang ral's *Eightfold Buddha Word* revelation contains a set of root tantras, including one for each of the eight principal tantric deities. I have mentioned above that the root tantras seem to lack explicit discussion of the Four Phurpas. In fact, Myang ral's root Vajrakīlaya tantra is a partial exception to this point in that its Chapter 3 contains a passage in which the four are indicated although not quite explicitly described.⁴⁷ Perhaps Myang ral's revealed root tantras should be considered in a slightly different category from the transmitted tantras. After all, they post-date them, at least in the versions presented as part of Myang ral's revelation, although they doubtless incorporate old materials, and some sections of the Vajrakīlaya tantra describe archaic rituals which it is not easy for representatives of the tradition now to make sense of. However, the version of the root tantras within the *Eightfold Buddha Word* contain explanatory annotations, which seem to go back to the hyparchetype of all extant editions — these annotations have been removed in the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* versions. In the case of this section of Chapter 3,⁴⁸ the annotations help to clarify that the points relate to our set of four phurpas. The passage gives a short statement relating to each of the four, apparently using the order with the bodhicitta phurpa in second place,⁴⁹ and concluding with an interesting list of

46 See Cantwell 2020: 4-5 for background on the collection and the *Eightfold Buddha Word* revelations of subsequent lamas of the tradition.

47 I am grateful to Dylan Esler's philological analysis of this root tantra in our University of Bochum DFG project (2017-2018); see Dylan Esler 2020.

48 Esler 2020: 26-9.

49 Since the four are not presented separately, and the statements are integrated together, the order is not entirely clear, apart from the list of substances.

four symbolic substances to be associated with each.⁵⁰

The Four Phurpas within other sections of Myang ral's revealed corpus of the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas (bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa)*

The multi-volume collections of the *Eightfold Buddha Word* revelation are structured such that the first volumes contain historical and background materials, as well as the root tantras, and also many texts which present integrated teachings on all eight tantric deities. The later volumes contain sections devoted to the eight deities in turn. The specific Vajrakīlaya teachings are given in the *Action Phurpa* part of the collection, consisting of a single text in six sections.⁵¹ This is clearly an archaic text which it appears that Myang ral inherited — the second section of the text is witnessed amongst the Dunhuang materials which pre-date Myang ral's time by at least a century, and here, the entire text is integrated as a single work transmitted by Myang ral. This text differs in some respects from the mainstream or standard works on Vajrakīlaya. It says nothing about the Four Phurpas.

In contrast, the materials relating to Vajrakīlaya in the first volumes where the eight tantric deities are considered as a group, are entirely consistent with the Vajrakīlaya traditions — including established features of the deity and the maṇḍala of deity emanations.⁵² It is amongst these earlier sections of the collection that teachings on the Four Phurpas are found. A Subsequent Tantra (*phyi ma'i rgyud*) found in Volume 1 of the Mtshams brag thirteen volume collection⁵³ works through the appropriate View (*lta ba*) associated with each of the tantric deities. For the Phurpa Action (*phur pa 'phrin las*) section, there is a long list of various types of phurpas striking different objects, including the unchanging bodhicitta phurpa (*mi 'gyur byang chub sems kyi phur pa*); the phurpa of Samantabhadra's display (*kun bzang rol pa'i phur pa*); the self-arisen king of means phurpa (*rang byung thabs kyi rgyal po'i phur pa*);

50 Note that similar although not identical lists to that found here are presented in both the second point of *The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement* given in the *Black Collection* (Boord 2002: 257), and in Shechen Gyaltsap's Commentary (nd: 14; for the Tibetan, see *zhe chen rgyal tshab 'gyur med padma rnam rgyal gyi gsung 'bum* Volume 9: 384). These two sets have items in common with the set here, but all three are rather different.

51 For an analysis of this *Action Phurpa* text, including a critical edition of its second section, see Cantwell 2020a.

52 See the descriptions, for example, in the *rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po* (TSH vol. 1: 68-70); and the *'byed pa lde'u mig gi rgyud* (TSH vol. 2: 130-1). This is discussed also in Cantwell 2020a: 10.

53 TSH vol. 1: 151-82. Note that here I refer primarily to the Mtshams brag collection, not because I privilege this version from a textual viewpoint, but simply for convenience in considering the content of these texts from a general viewpoint. Where readings may be uncertain, or greater clarity is needed, I have also consulted other versions, especially the Kaḥ thog thirteen volume collection. In this case, the Kaḥ thog edition does not appear to have an exact parallel for this text.

the phurpa of resting effortlessly in sameness (*ma brtsal mnyam par gzhas pa'i phur pa*); the dharmaṭā phurpa (*chos nyid phur pa*); the nature of mind phurpa (*sems nyid phur pa*); the sky phurpa (*nam mkha'i phur pa*). It is clear that all of these in their actions connect with the Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa of our fourfold list, and that here, the appropriate View for Vajrakīlaya is seen in much the same terms as found in teachings on this phurpa.

The fourfold list is unpacked in three texts found in Volume 4. These texts cover a range of topics relating to the eight deity system secret mantra practice. The first and most extensive of these texts⁵⁴ supplies a substantial section (pp.293-304) on the Four Phurpas. Mi pham's General Commentary on the *Eightfold Buddha Word* references this text for its detailed discussion of the Four Phurpas, noting that his own presentation is a summary.⁵⁵ Despite its importance, however, this text is of slightly uncertain status. Its colophon makes it clear that it is from O rgyan gling pa's⁵⁶ revelations and therefore a good deal later than Myang ral. However, it claims to accord with Myang ral's writing, and to restore Myang ral's tradition.⁵⁷ Given that *gter mas*, especially those of an early period, may reproduce previous texts, and here we have a statement suggesting a restoration of Myang ral, it has to be said that it is possible that O rgyan gling pa included within his *gter mas* a text of Myang ral's which had been lost to the transmission of the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas*. Be that as it may, we cannot be certain that the text goes back any further than O rgyan gling pa, so I have not included it in my assessment of Myang ral's Four Phurpa teachings.⁵⁸ That said, it is obvious that the presentation of the Four Phurpas in this text is for the most part a more extended treatment of essentially the same material found in the other two texts.⁵⁹

The sections on the Four Phurpas in the two texts which are part of Myang ral's revelation appear to be closely related. The first text is entitled, *The Commands of the Secret Mantra Scriptural Authorities (gsang sngags lung gi bka' bsgo)*,⁶⁰ while the second, which follows immediately, is called, *The Commands of the Scriptural Authorities for the [Tantric] Practice*

54 *Key for the Secret Mantra Buddha Word, gsang sngags bka'i tha ram*, TSH vol. 4: 181-331; Kaḥ vol.4: 99-278.

55 ལུང་པ་ཕྱིན་ལས་ཀྱི་སྒྲུབ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཐལ་འབྱེན་ནས་པ་བཞིའི་དགོངས་པར་འདུས་པའི་ཚུལ་བཤད་པ་ལ། རྒྱལ་པར་འཆད་པའི་ཚུལ་ནི་གསང་མཁས་བཀའི་ཐ་ར་རུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། འདིར་ནི་དོན་གྱི་གནད་མདོར་བསྡུས་ཏེ་བསྟན་ (Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa, Volume Ye: 548-9). In fact, Mi pham's presentation reproduces and elaborates on some points, and then also adds further material from his own root guru.

56 presumably, the famous fourteenth century revealer.

57 ལྷ་རུ་ཨོ་ལྷ་གྲིང་པའི་གཏིར་མ་ཤོག་མེར་གྱི་བུ་ལས་ཞལ་བཤུས་སོ། མངའ་བདག་ལུགས་དང་ཚོག་ལྷ་རིང་ཐུང་ཙམ་ཡོད་ཀྱང་ཡིག་ལྷ་ལྷ་པོ་དོན་མཐུན་པར་ཡོད་པས་ད་ལིན་གྱི་ཕྱི་པོའི་དབང་གི་ལུགས་འདི་ཡི་གར་གྱིས་པའོ། ཕྱིས་ཀྱང་ལུགས་རྟེན་ན་ཐེབས་གཅིག་བཤད་པའི་དོན་འདྲ་བར་ཡོད་པས་གང་ཡིན་པའི་རྟེངས་ནས་ཐེབས་ཀྱང་རུང་གྱི་ཁོ་པོའི་ལུགས་འདི་ལ་ཐུང་ལུགས་སོར་བཞག་ཡིན་ (TSH vol. 4: 331).

58 It is to be hoped that future research will study this interesting source.

59 It also adds sections on the type of person appropriate for each of the phurpas (similar to that found in the *Black Collection*), and the associated practice substances and maṇḍalas.

60 TSH vol. 4: 453-500; Kaḥ vol.4: 417-472. Here, the Mtshams brag version gives *bka' mgo* but I am assuming that *bka' bsgo*, found in the Kaḥ thog version, is intended.

(*sgrub pa lung gi bka' mgo*).⁶¹ As elsewhere in Myang ral's revelation when the Four Phurpas are referred to, the order follows the convention in which the Superior Bodhicitta Phurpa is in second place and the Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa/Compassion Emanation Phurpa⁶² is in third place. Both texts cover a list consisting of the objects for each phurpa to strike; the signs of striking; the faults of not striking; and the companions which effect the successful strike. The points are dealt with in almost identical terms, although the order is different. The first text works through the four phurpas in turn, considering all four points for each phurpa, but the second text is ordered according to the list of points, each of which deals with all four phurpas. The second text includes additional points on its list, although the first two of these — the methods of striking, and the purposes of striking — are largely repetitive of the other points. However, the second text concludes with a lengthy section which is a genuine addition. It deals with the results of striking, in terms of the attainment of the buddha kāyas, and although the treatment is brief in the case of the first three phurpas, there is elaboration of different types of material phurpas, and the different rituals to accomplish with them.

The list of points is reminiscent of that given in the *Black Collection's* instruction within its *Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement* (see p.137 above), and there is some overlap in the content, as indeed there is also in other early sources mentioned above.⁶³ One point which is not found in the *Black Collection* is that on the "companions" (*gros*):⁶⁴ absorption in wisdom accompanying the Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa; conjoined means and wisdom accompanying the Superior Bodhicitta Phurpa; the four Immeasurables accompanying the Immeasurable Compassion/Compassion Emanation Phurpa; and the four sections of the ritual approach and accomplishment accompanying the Symbolic Material Phurpa.

61 TSH vol. 4: 501-565; Kaḥ vol.4: 473-552. In this case, both TSH and Kaḥ give *bka' mgo* but I am again assuming this to be a non-standard or incorrect spelling of *bka' bsgo*.

62 Note that the first text refers to the Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa, while the second mostly speaks of the Compassion Emanation Phurpa (but not entirely consistently).

63 The sections given in the *Light rays from the Sun* commentary of the *Rog lugs* tradition (see p.138 above) and the instruction within the *Rong lugs* source texts (see p.139-140 above).

64 A rather different set of companions is found within the *Rong lugs* instruction (Dudjom *Bka' ma* Volume Nya: 399).

An Instruction on the Four Phurpas within the Transmitted cycle of *The Fortress and Precipice* (rdzong 'phrang), said to be written by Padma Thod phreng rgyal po and transmitted by Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes' student, Gnubs Yon tan rgya mtsho, preserved through copying a manuscript handwritten by Myang ral

In the final section of this exploration of early teachings on the Four Phurpas and Myang ral's contribution to this topic, I turn to an instruction preserved within the transmitted cycle associated with the *Eightfold Buddha Word* teachings known as *The Fortress and Precipice* (rdzong 'phrang). Although Myang ral's revelation was the first major compilation of the system of eight tantric deities, it is clear that the parallel *Fortress and Precipice* cycle pre-dated him.⁶⁵ In fact, it passed through his own gurus and was transmitted by one of his principal gurus, Grub thob Dngos grub, to him. Traditional accounts describe the coming together of the revealed and transmitted texts as a confluence of two streams within Myang ral, when he received *The Fortress and Precipice* transmission following his revelation.⁶⁶ Yet perhaps such a confluence was already witnessed in the previous generation, since Grub thob Dngos grub was also a revealer and apparently had a major role in passing on or bringing Myang ral's revelation to fruition.⁶⁷ In any case, the point here is that Myang ral is at the fount of both the collections of literature representing the revelatory and transmitted *Eightfold Buddha Word* traditions. Here, a limited exploration of what such a confluence might mean is made by looking at this single example of a text or section on the Four Phurpas.⁶⁸

This instruction is found within an early compilation of *Fortress and Precipice* texts said to have been copied from a manuscript in Myang ral's own hand.⁶⁹ There would seem little reason to doubt this provenance, especially since a record is given also of a few of the

65 Here, I would like to acknowledge the advice of Changling Tulku. In the planning stages of our research project at the University of Bochum, Robert Mayer had a discussion with Changling Tulku, who pointed out that *The Fortress and Precipice* (rdzong 'phrang) teachings on the eight tantric deities pre-date Myang ral's *Eightfold Buddha Word* revelation. We therefore included a review of *The Fortress and Precipice* literature within the project schedule. The initial work on that survey was conducted through a reading of the texts with the project's lama consultant, Lopen P. Ogyan Tanzin, during his visit to Bochum in May 2018. Most of *The Fortress and Precipice* texts — and all those in the *Dudjom Bka' ma* — represent compilations by later figures, but fortunately, a very much earlier compilation has survived and been included in the longer *Bka' ma*. This is the work I am considering in this article.

66 I have written at greater length on this topic in Cantwell 2020b: 63-4. See also Dudjom Rinpoche 1991 Volume 1: 757; Dudjom Rinpoche *Collected Writings* Volume Ka: 530.

67 Hirshberg 2016: 104-5, 129; and TSH Volume 2: 341-2, and 349-50.

68 It is to be hoped that future research will be able to study this question more comprehensively. Significant overlaps between the two groups of texts are not obvious at first glance.

69 *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 425.

prominent lamas of later generations through whom the text passed.⁷⁰ Some of the series of instructions found in this compilation supply no further information on their provenance,⁷¹ but many give further information — for example, some are noted to have been a teaching of Myang ral's guru Grub thob Dngos grub.⁷² In particular, a large number of short instructions making up a core of key teachings within this compilation, add that Rdo rje Yang dbang gter entrusted the instruction to Gter bzhad rtsal.⁷³ There is no doubt here that these names refer to Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes and his student, Gnubs Yon tan rgya mtsho. Gnubs chen and his student are early figures in the *Fortress and Precipice* lineage list; and Rdo rje Yang dbang gter and Gter bzhad rtsal are their special tantric names. Mi pham confirms that Gter bzhad rtsal is the secret name for Gnubs Yon tan rgya mtsho.⁷⁴ It seems entirely plausible that these key teachings could have passed through the five intervening lineage lamas to Dngos grub. Gnubs chen is said to have received the *Fortress and Precipice* transmissions from Gnyags Jñānakumara, who received them from the Four Wise Humans (*mkhas pa mi bzhi*).⁷⁵ It seems likely, then, that these instructions represent an authentic preservation of the earliest *Fortress and Precipice* teachings. Furthermore, some of these instructions specify the tantric master who originally formulated them. In the case of the instruction on the Four Phurpas, it is presented in the voice of Padma Thod phreng rgyal po, in other words, of Padmasambhava.⁷⁶ In

70 Specifically, the colophon (425/426) mentions Mnga' ris paṇ chen (1487-1542); Gter bdag gling pa (1646-1714); his son, Padma 'Gyur med rgya mtsho (1686-1718); Padma Mdo sngags bstan 'dzin of Dpal yul (1830-1892); Kaḥ thog Lcam sprul (according to TBRC, he seems to be Lcam sprul Dkon mchog chos 'phel, a nineteenth century teacher of Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho, 1880-1923); Dpal sprul mDo sngags bstan pa'i nyi ma.

71 A large number repeat pertinent points of the final colophon, noting for example, Mnga' ris paṇ chen, Gter bdag gling pa and his son, or simply noting Gter bdag gling pa's son (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 27, 37, 48, 59, 76, 89, 100, 106, 114, 122, 126, 142, 158, 171, 175, 186, 214, 224, 236, 264, 268, 299, 303, 347, 392, 415). Since we have a number of variant colophons on some of the individual sections, I considered the possibility that the final colophon might refer only to the very final instruction. However, this would seem extremely unlikely, especially since the final colophon is extensive — while the final instruction only takes five sides of Tibetan. None of the previous comments at the ends of sections contradict the final colophon — they simply provide partial information.

72 *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 27, 59, 63, 76, 83, 89, 100, 106.

73 *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 122-42, 176-286, 290-319, 324-47, 362-425.

74 *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ye: 614. It is clear, then, that Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes's secret name is Rdo rje Yang dbang gter, and this was confirmed by Dylan Esler, who specialises in the study of Gnubs chen (personal communication, 5th June 2018).

75 Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, Gnubs nam mkha'i snying po, and Vairocana (Gter bdag gling pa's *rdo rje phreng ba* empowerment text, Dudjom *Bka' ma* Volume Pa: 683; Mi pham, *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ye: 612; see also *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 107). Sometimes, g.Yu sgra snying po is given instead of Vairocana (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 294).

76 It seems that the appellations, Padma rgyal po, and/or Padma Thod phreng, are used in some early sources when the Guru is being presented — or presents himself — as the tantric master. The name Padmasambhava or Sambhava tends to be used when presenting accounts of the historical transmission.

fact, given how close Gnubs chen is to Padmasambhava in the lineage list, assuming that this instruction was indeed transmitted by Gnubs chen, it would seem quite likely that this short instruction is indeed by Padmasambhava. If the historical Padmasambhava left any writings at all, it seems to me that this text is a strong, perhaps our strongest candidate.⁷⁷

The first point to make about this instruction is that it is not simply one among many relating to the Vajrakīlaya teachings, but it represents the section on the correct view for Phurpa Action within this *Fortress and Precipice* compilation. An instruction near the beginning of the compilation said to have been given by Slob dpon Grub thob Dngos grub at Myang ral's request⁷⁸ specifies a series of *Enlightened Attentions* (*dgongs pa*) and other aspects appropriate for each of the eight deities, and it is precisely the specified *Enlightened Attention to the Phurpa Perforations* (*phur pa thal 'byin gyi dgongs pa*) which represents the Phurpa Action section. This point is repeated (p.177) within an instruction of Sangs rgyas ye shes.⁷⁹ The group of instructions transmitted from Yang dbang gter to Gter bzhad rtsal contains a consecutive series relating to these *Enlightened Attentions* for each of the first six deities in turn.⁸⁰ Thus, the teaching on the Four Phurpas clearly has a central place in this presentation, in a similar way to that found in the teachings introducing the eight deities in the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* (see p.141-143 above).

The instruction itself is entitled, *Perfecting Phurpa in entirety through Enlightened Attention to the Phurpa Perforations* (*phur pa thams cad phur pa thal 'byin gyi dgongs par rdzogs pa*).⁸¹ It is framed by Padma Thod phreng rgyal po announcing at the beginning his identity with Vajrakīlaya and intention to teach the concise Four Phurpas to liberate all evils

77 Perhaps also we can include other sections of this compilation said to be by him, of which there are several. In particular, another instruction called, *Enlightened Attention to the Sovereign Yoga* (*rnal 'byor dbang phyug gi dgongs pa, Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 361-5), is given in the voice of Padma Thod phreng. Also, although perhaps rather less interesting since it apparently simply paraphrases a root tantra, there is an instruction called, *Concise teaching on Enlightened Attention to the Great Subjugator Neighing Everywhere Three Times* (*dbang chen thams cad rta skad thengs gsum du 'dus pa'i dgongs pa, Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 214-8). This is said to be a summary by Padma Thod phreng from the root tantra relating to Hayagrīva, the *Tantra of the Supreme Horse Display* (*rta mchog rol pa'i rgyud*). There are also two further instructions which are, however, not given in his voice. One is an atiyoga pith instruction said to be by Padmasambhava (*pad 'byung gi man ngag, Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 195-8), and another pith instruction says at the beginning that the teaching was given by Slob dpon Padmasambhava in the Yer ba zla ba cave, to the lady from 'Brom (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 264-9). An additional instruction is said to derive from Padmasambhava (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 286-9), but it does not record the transmission through Gnubs chen and his student, so perhaps here the historical evidence does not seem so strong.

78 *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 59-63.

79 *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 176-9. Here, Gnubs chen's secret name is not used, but his student is given under the name of Gter bzhad (*sic*) rtsal.

80 *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 209-37.

81 *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 230-4.

throughout the three planes of existence,⁸² and at the end, saying that he composed the teaching as a medicine for later generations at the Yang le shod rock cavern.⁸³ The opening section eulogises the way that ultimate truth is perfected through pure awareness striking or being implanted in the spatial field, while the condition of their non-dual sameness is the enlightened mind phurpa. The Four Phurpa materials (*phur pa'i rgyu bzhi*) are then listed and briefly explained in turn, covering each phurpa's object and its purpose. A citation which epitomises each phurpa's function is then given from the "buddha word" (*bka'*). What is most interesting from the perspective of this study is that in the case of the first three of these four citations, they paraphrase a statement found in the short texts on the Four Phurpas in the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* (see p.141-143 above). Thus, "realising vividly is the striking"⁸⁴ of the Purely Aware Primordial Wisdom Phurpa; and when the Superior Bodhicitta Phurpa strikes in the consort's *space*,⁸⁵ "(their) non-duality is union".⁸⁶ The Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa strikes sentient beings, "in order that those who have been cast adrift should be seized by compassion".⁸⁷ Here, then, Padma Thod phreng rgyal po is quoting an authoritative textual source which, it appears, seems closely to share points found later in Myang ral's revelation. I might add that in the case of the first two, similar turns of phrase are found in other early sources on the Four Phurpas, such as the *Black Collection's Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement*.⁸⁸ Yet the imagery here connected with the Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa seizing with compassion those whose rescue rope has been cut, seems distinctive and I have not found it expressed exactly in this manner in other early sources. Moreover, the point made about the purpose of the Bodhicitta Phurpa contrasts starkly with that found in the passages in the

82 བཟླ་ཐོད་ཐེང་རྒྱལ་པོ་ངས། རྩོམ་པ་སྤྲོད་གསུམ་མགོན། ཁྲིད་གསུམ་གདུག་པ་བསྐྱལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། མཛོར་བདུས་ཕུར་པ་བཞི་བྱ་བཏུན། (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 230).

83 གནས་ཡང་ལེ་ཤོད་གྱི་བྲག་ཕྱག་ཏུ། བཟླ་ཐོད་ཐེང་རྒྱལ་པོ་ངས། ཕྱི་རབ་ནམས་ལ་སྒྲན་སྒྲ་བྱ། འདི་བཙམ་ (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 234).

84 ལྷངས་གྱི་རྟོགས་ནས་ཐེབས་པ་ཡིན་ (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 231). The first of the texts in the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* puts it: "the sign of striking is vivid realisation" (ཐེབས་པའི་རྟོགས་ནི་ལྷངས་གྱི་རྟོགས་ནི་ཐེབས་ཏི། TSH volume 4: 491).

85 *Space* (*mkha'*) here is a euphemism for the female genitals.

86 གཉིས་སུ་མེད་ན་སྦྱར་བ་ཡིན་ (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 231). The second of the texts in the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* puts it: "striking *space*, there is non-dual union" (མཁའ་ལ་ཐེབས་པས་གཉིས་མེད་སྦྱར། TSH volume 4: 528).

87 དབྱང་ཐག་ཆད་པ་བྱགས་ཇེས་བརྒྱུད་སྒྲ་བྱ་ (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 231). A close parallel here is found in both the texts in *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas*. The first gives: དབྱང་ཐག་ཆད་པ་བྱགས་ཇེས་ཐེན་ཏི་ (TSH volume 4: 491) and the second, དབྱང་ཐག་ཆད་པ་བྱགས་ཇེས་བརྒྱུད་བའི་ཆེད་ (TSH volume 4: 528).

88 See, for example, the quote attributed to the *Root Tantra, Vajra Wrath* (*rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa*): རིག་པ་ཡི་ཤེས་ཕུར་པ་དེ། ལྷང་གིས་རྟོགས་ན་ཐེབས་པ་ཡིན། (Boord 2002: 260; Dudjom *Bka' ma*, Volume Tha: 438).

Black Collection.⁸⁹ Here, it seems that the reason for the sexual yoga is to produce bodhisattva children.⁹⁰ This is reiterated in the longer text concerning the Four Phurpas which is included in the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* collection, yet is in fact from O rgyan gling pa's revelations, but claiming to restore the Myang tradition, where it states that the quality of the Bodhicitta Phurpa is the production of children.⁹¹ The two shorter texts from the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* which I have discussed above hint at the point, although do not make it quite so explicitly. The second text is clearer, stating that the purpose is to consecrate one's own and others' children.⁹² Both texts list the fault of not striking with the Bodhicitta Phurpa as the cutting off of the maṇḍala, in the case of the first text, the maṇḍala of sugatas is specified, while the second text refers to the samaya maṇḍala.⁹³ It may be of interest to reflect on the appropriateness of this perspective to the mantra practitioner (*sngags pa*) traditions amongst the Rnying ma pa, which of course have the principle of patrilineal descent, but that topic cannot be covered by this paper.

The next part of the instruction elaborates further on qualities of the material phurpa in physically perfecting the wisdom maṇḍala, the upper part the wrathful deity with three faces and six arms, and the lower body an iron phurpa, with a three-sided blade. The final section emphasises the importance of continually abiding in the condition of the unified three kāyas, not degenerating from clarity in the experience of the buddha body, whatever ordinary activities one performs, continually maintaining the buddha speech of the mantra, the mind unwavering from the described enlightened attentions. With buddha qualities and actions, one's own enlightened mind is not transgressed, for there is nothing other than bodhicitta, and the mind is primordially buddha.

89 In *The Ten Steps of Tantric Engagement*, the fault of not striking with the Bodhicitta Phurpa is that one falls prey to self-centred passion and generates a vermin in the womb (ཆགས་པ་རང་རྩུབ་པར་ཤོར་ན་མངལ་གྱི་སྲིན་བྱར་བཞི། *Dudjom Bka' ma*, Volume Tha: 441; Boord 2002: 262). In the separate section on the Four Phurpas, the summary specifies that the semen should not escape (ཐིག་ལེ་མ་ཤོར་ན་ལུས་ལ་ནས་རྩུབ་མེད་པའོ། *Dudjom Bka' ma*, Volume Tha: 479; Boord 2002: 289). Of course, these statements concerning the practices of sexual yoga need not contradict the point about producing bodhisattva children, since the point of the training is to control and transform the process, and choosing to procreate could be consistent with the practice. But there is little doubt that the two types of presentation create a contrast.

90 དེ་ལ་དགོས་པ་ཅི་ཡོད་ན། དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་སྤྲུལ་སྐྱེས་འཛོན་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར་གདབ་སྟེ། (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 231).

91 བྱང་ཆུབ་གྱི་སེམས་ལྷན་པ་ཡུམ་གྱི་མཁའ་ལ་གདབ་པས་སྤྲུལ་སྐྱེས་ཐོན་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་ཡོད་དོ། (TSH volume 4: 295).

92 བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་གྱི་ལྷན་པ་ཡུམ་གྱི་མཁའ་ལ་གདབ་པའི་དགོས་པའི་བདག་སྤྲུལ་དང་གཞན་སྤྲུལ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་བ་པའི་ཆེད་ (TSH volume 4: 528).

93 མ་ཐེབས་པའི་རྩྭ་ནི་བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པའི་དགྲིལ་འཁོར་རྩྭ་ཆད་པ་ཡིན། (TSH volume 4: 491); བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་གྱི་ལྷན་པ་མཁའ་ལ་མ་ཐེབ་ན། དམ་ཆོག་གི་དགྲིལ་འཁོར་རྩྭ་འཆད། (TSH volume 4: 528).

Conclusions

(1) The Four Phurpas

In conducting this investigation into the earliest teachings on the Four Phurpas, my original hypothesis — knowing that there is little explicit discussion of the set in the root tantras — was that the specific set and the practices associated with them developed over time as the Vajrakīlaya teachings were systematised in Tibet. It now seems clear that this hypothesis has been disproven, and that on the contrary, the teaching derives in Tibet from Padmasambhava himself, or from the very earliest generations of Vajrakīlaya masters. Thus, rather than a sequential development, perhaps the root Vajrakīlaya tantras and the Four Phurpa teachings were taking shape during the same era.⁹⁴

Yet as we have seen, in some early commentarial sources, the Four Phurpa teachings do not seem to take centre stage. Even the *Black Collection*, whose passages relating to the Four Phurpas have been extensively drawn on by later commentators, presents the teachings in the latter part of the text. The *Light rays from the Sun* commentary confines the teaching to the section on generating the material phurpas. It is possible that the treatment in the *Eightfold Buddha Word* texts transmitted by Myang ral may have helped to draw attention to the Four Phurpa teachings, and to make them more central.

Nowadays, in oral teachings, the Four Phurpas are often taught in the context of introductions to the tradition, and also as part of advanced teachings. Similarly, in Vajrakīlaya commentaries of more recent centuries, the Four Phurpa teachings are invariably emphasised as crucial to the practice, and are often featured in the opening sections of the actual presentation of the teachings, sometimes following surveys of the history and transmission. For example, A myes zhabs' commentary discusses the Four Phurpas (142-143) after his extensive account of the different transmissions of the Vajrakīlaya traditions, along with his short introduction to the maṇḍala deities and the four "rivers", respectively of empowerment, textual explanations, absorbing the spiritual instructions, and the key pith instructions. The commentary by the eighteenth to nineteenth century commentator from Reb kong, Mag gsar Paṇḍita Kun bzang stobs ldan dbang po, first gives the transmissional histories and background to Vajrakīlaya, and then presents general Vajrakīlaya teachings, starting⁹⁵ with sections on the Essence (*ngo bo*) and Definitions (*nges tshig*). These are followed by a section on Classification (*dbye ba*), which

94 Padmasambhava is considered to have played a part in establishing the Vajrakīlaya tantras. Numerous accounts of his role in bringing the Vajrakīlaya teachings to Tibet note his collection of the texts of the *Vidyotamala 'bum sde*, the source for the Vajrakīlaya tantras. Some of the root Vajrakīlaya tantras are considered to indicate the presence in the maṇḍala's periphery of the guardian goddesses tamed by Padmasambhava, see Mayer 1996: 128-31.

95 Mag gsar 2003: 13-4.

consists of his presentation of the Four Phurpas.⁹⁶ The first few pages of Shechen Gyaltsap's (Zhe chen rgyal tshab) Commentary (1-11; Tibetan 373-81) deal with an overview of the significance of Vajrakīlaya, along with an introduction to the ground, path and fruit Vajrakumāra, the three samādhis, the maṇḍalas and visualisations, empowerment, the samayas, and the fruit. At this point, he turns to the Four Phurpas. Dudjom Rinpoche begins his commentary on the *Meteoric Iron Razor* (*bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri*) Vajrakīlaya tradition by listing the sections which structure the *Black Collection*, and then saying that all these can be summed up in the four Phurpa Materials, which he then discusses.⁹⁷ In fact, the Four Phurpas feature in other sections of Dudjom Rinpoche's works on Vajrakīlaya. I have mentioned above (note 8) his Aspiration verses and his commentary on those verses. The verses are now commonly recited not only with the *Meteoric Iron Razor* Ritual Manual, but also together with that for his *Razor Disintegration-on-Touch* revelation (*spu gri reg phung*). Moreover, the root source text of this revelation features an instruction on the Four Phurpas.⁹⁸ He also integrates a discussion of the four into the empowerment text he wrote for Zil gnon Nam mkha'i rdo rje's Vajrakīlaya revelation.⁹⁹

Perhaps, then, the Vajrakīlaya tradition picked up on the central placement of the Four Phurpas in both the revelatory and transmitted texts on the eight tantric deities which were part of Myang ral's inheritance. The particular content is not always followed by later commentators, although some sources do repeat or paraphrase the presentations in these *Eightfold Buddha Word* materials. Amongst those mentioned above, Mag gsar's explanation¹⁰⁰ consists almost entirely of citations from two revelatory sources, O rgyan gling pa's *Bka' thang sde lnga*¹⁰¹ and the revelatory source (*gter gzhung*), which presumably indicates the source texts for Mag gsar's own tradition of the Stag tshang Vajrakīlaya. Hardly surprisingly given that O rgyan gling pa had revealed a text apparently restoring Myang ral's tradition (see p.142 above) which teaches at length on the Four Phurpas, the passage cited from his *Bka' thang sde lnga* essentially reproduces the material found in the *Eightfold Buddha Word* texts. The approach is

96 Mag gsar 2003: 14-6.

97 Dudjom *Collected Works* Volume Da: 73-4. Dudjom Rinpoche wrote a separate text on the history and transmission (*lo rgyus*, Volume Tha: 11-75), so had no need to reiterate that background in his commentary.

98 Dudjom *Collected Works* Volume Ba: 464-9.

99 Dudjom *Collected Works* Volume Pha: 63-70.

100 Mag gsar 2003: 14-16.

101 Very helpfully, and unusually for this kind of Tibetan literature, Mag gsar tells us the exact section — Chapter 19 of the *lo paṇ bka'i thang yig*, so I have been able to identify the passage (O rgyan gling pa *bka' thang sde lnga*, pp. 378-81 of TBRC's pdf).

moreover reiterated in the revelation source citation added by Mag gsar.¹⁰²

(2) Myang ral's heritage, and Relations between the Revealed and Transmitted Sources¹⁰³

The case study of the Four Phurpas has illustrated that there would seem to be some overlaps or links between some of the materials within the corpus of the revealed *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* and the transmitted *Fortress and Precipice* compilation, both of which passed through Myang ral's hands. The point should not be overstated — clearly, there is much in the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* which is unrelated to any of the *Fortress and Precipice* teachings, and conversely, the extended discussions of the *fortress, precipice, and life-force* which make up a large section of the *Fortress and Precipice* compilation is not paralleled in the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas*. Overlaps would seem to be limited, yet what is interesting is the type of link found — in which the very early *Fortress and Precipice* text discussed above is drawing on an authoritative source which seems also to have made its way into texts of the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas*.

As mentioned above,¹⁰⁴ I have shown that the *Action Phurpa* section of the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* represents a case of a wholesale reproduction of an entire text yet this whole section is framed as a revelation. Here again with the current case study, it is clear that the material on the Four Phurpas within the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* at the very least is dependent on an earlier source. In later times also revelations may not be altogether new — previous research has shown that before the standardised system of Treasure revelations, with its ideas of the revealer recovering the text from his mind, or decoding it from a few symbolic letters,¹⁰⁵ Myang ral's revelations may have included the recovery of old hidden manuscripts and the receipt from or sharing of revelations with his teachers.¹⁰⁶

If *gter ma* revelation at this time begins to look little different from the transmission of other tantric manuscripts, the converse may also in some cases be true — that some transmitted texts may resemble the developing *gter ma* traditions. An interesting feature of a large number of the short instructions included within the *Fortress and Precipice* compilation discussed

102 These quotations include the points mentioned above as distinctive to this branch of the traditions on the Four Phurpas, including the Immeasurable Compassion Phurpa seizing with compassion those whose rescue rope has been cut; and the Bodhicitta Phurpa fulfilling a need for producing consecrated children.

103 An earlier version of this final section of the article was presented at the International Association for Tibetan Studies conference in Paris in July 2019, and I am grateful to those who gave me feedback at that event.

104 See p.141 above. For a full analysis, see Cantwell 2020a.

105 I do not wish to overstate the contrast. There are instances of *mkha' 'gro brda yig* at the beginnings of some of the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* texts, including within the *Action Phurpa* section.

106 See Cantwell 2020c for examples of the re-embedding of earlier materials in revelations in more recent times; and Hirshberg 2016 on Myang ral's life, revelations, and relationships with his mentors; also Cantwell 2020b.

above is that the final words make use of closing statements and secret seals associated with Treasure revelation, adding that the teachings were buried or hidden as Treasure (*gter du sbas*), generally either by or for Gter bzhad rtsal. However, following a close examination of all examples of these text endings, I concluded that the intended sense was most probably simply that these tantric teachings were sealed and protected within Gter bzhad rtsal's mind.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps in these early times, transmitted tantric teachings might use such formulas, which became adopted by the *gter ma* traditions and later confined to them. In fact, some years ago, I had come across a similar example of such wording in a ritual compendium by Ba ri Lo tsā ba (1040-1112) and had been puzzled about the status of the text concerned,¹⁰⁸ but now it seems quite likely to me that the terminology of *gter ma* and *bka' ma* texts may not have been so sharply differentiated as they were later.

The classic contrast between the categories of *bka' ma* or transmitted scriptures, and the revelations or *gter ma*, was clearly a feature of the early period but it seems that it was less stark than the distinction appears to be later. The inclusion of a number of root tantras from Myang ral's *Eightfold Buddha Word* within the various editions of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, as well as various other texts in the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* which have indications that they have been revealed in a *gter ma* like way, makes it clear that the categories were not altogether hermetically sealed. One significant aspect of Robert Mayer's work on early Tibetan tantric traditions has been to highlight continuities in approaches to revelation from transmitted root tantras to early *gter mas*. Both are seen as inspired revelations, and may follow similar templates for production.¹⁰⁹ In the case of the *snga' 'gyur rnying ma* tantras, some may only have appeared in Tibet a few generations before the era of the early *gter stons*. In both cases, Indic materials may be drawn upon, integrated into presentations with new framing which may reference the Tibetan context. The assumption of an opposition between the anonymous revelation of root tantras and the named revealers of *gter mas* may be too simplistic. Mayer, in his 2019 article discussing the work of Ben Williams, points out that tantric Śaivism in ninth to eleventh century Kashmir had an active culture of revelation in which texts were linked to named siddha revealers.¹¹⁰ The same applies to some Buddhist tantras linked with Oḍḍiyāna,

107 Many of the statements are brief, but a few give more detail. At the start of one text, we find the early lineage list, with each of the figures said to bury the text within the heart/wisdom of the disciple recipient (རྒྱ་དང་ཐོད་ཀྱི་མཁས་པ་ མི་བཞི་ཡིས།... ལུ་གཅིག་པོ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གཏིར་དུ་སྤྲུག་ དེས་མོག་པོ་ལྷ་དཔལ་གྱི་ཡི་ཤེས་གཏིར་དུ་སྤྲུག་ དེས་རྩོམ་ཡང་དབང་གཏིར་གྱི་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་གཏིར་དུ་ སྤྲུག་ དེས་གཞུབ་ཁྲ་ལུང་པ་ཡོན་ཏན་རྒྱ་མཚོ་ཡི་གཏིར་དུ་སྤྲུག་ དེས་པལ་དབང་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་གཏིར་དུ་སྤྲུག་, Volume Ha: 126). Clearly, this is describing a lineage transmission, not a *gter ma* like burial. Sometimes there is a suggestion that Gter bzhad rtsal should bury a teaching inwardly (གཏིར་བཞུགས་ཆལ་གྱིས་ཁོང་པར་སྤྲོས།, Volume Ha: 200, 248).

108 Cantwell 2017: 149 note 19; Ba ri lo tsā ba 1974: 231-42.

109 Mayer 1996: 64-90.

110 Mayer 2019: 173-5.

set of the *Eightfold Buddha Word* root tantras.¹¹⁷

In short, we have a situation in which King Khri srong lde'u btsan is linked to these tantras and their associated teachings — at least the associated teachings relating to Phurpa — not through actually transmitting them, but through his manuscript copies which were said to have been hidden. Myang ral himself is considered a rebirth of King Khri srong lde'u btsan, so there is a sense in which he is recovering manuscripts he owned in a previous life.¹¹⁸

In contrast, when we consider the traditions surrounding the *bka' ma* transmissions for the *Eightfold Buddha Word*, as given in *The Fortress and Precipice* cycle, the King is given a rather ambivalent position. He was the intended recipient of the original transmissions from the Four Wise Humans (*mkhas pa mi bzhi*),¹¹⁹ all of whom transmitted the teachings in their entirety to him. However, the story goes that he did not pass them on, so he is not actually in the lineage transmission. Since he failed to transmit the teachings, it fell to Jñānakumāra to receive the teachings from the four masters and to pass them on. Thus, the *Fortress and Precipice* lineage runs from Jñānakumāra to Sog po Lha dpal and Gnubs Sangs rgyas ye shes; to Gnubs Yon tan

117 For example, in Volume 3 of the Mtshams brag edition of the *Eightfold Buddha Word*, the text colophons are for: *zhi ba 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 65; *che mchog 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 133; *dpal khrag 'thung 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 196; *bcom ldan 'das gshin rje gshed 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 258; *dpal dbang chen 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 320; *'phrin las 'dus pa phur pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 387; *ma mo 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 445; *rig 'dzin 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 498; *dregs pa 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 556. In Volume 4, we have: *drag sngags 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 55. In Volume Āḥ of the Rig 'dzin edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, the text colophons are for: *de bzhin gshegs pa zhi ba thams cad 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 22r; *dpal che mchog 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 41r; *dpal khrag 'thung 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 57r; *gshin rje gshed rab 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 72v; *dpal bcom ldan 'das dbang chen 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 87r; *bde bar gshegs pa thams cad kyi 'phrin las 'dus pa phur pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 105r; *ma mo 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 120v; *rig pa 'dzin pa 'dus pa'i rgyud*, the reference to the King's *bla dpe* is not found 132v (but presumably, the omission is a scribal error in this branch of the transmission; the Gting skyes edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, Volume Āḥ: 338, also omits it, but it is found in the Mtshams brag edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, Volume Ya: 882); *'jig rten mchod bstod bsgrub pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 154r; *drag sngags 'dus pa rdo rje rtsa ba'i rgyud*, 170r; *mdo rgyud rtogs pa bsdus pa'i sgron ma*, 186r.

118 Mi pham's account (in the *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* TBRC: W25983 Volume Ye: 438) says that the King requested all the tantras and teachings from Master Padma, and then they were buried as *gter ma* in Lho brag (behind the Vairocana image in Kho mthing temple and elsewhere), where his rebirth, Myang ral, would later discover them (བདེ་གཤེགས་འདུས་པའི་ཆོས་ལྷོ་ལ། ལྷུང་ལུང་མན་ངག་གི་ཆོས་ཚན་བརྒྱ་ལྷུང་བཞུགས་པ་འདི་ནི་མངའ་བདག་ཀླུ་པོས་ཁྱེད་པོ་ལ་སྤོང་བའི་ཆོད་མེད་གིས་གནང་ནས་ལྷོ་བྲག་ཁོ་མཐེང་ནས་ལྷུང་གི་སྐུ་རྒྱུ་ལ་སྤོང་པར་གཏོར་བྱ་སྤོང་པ་ཉིད། མངའ་བདག་ཀླུ་པོས་སྤོང་བའི་བརྒྱ་ལྷུང་པ་མངའ་བདག་ཆེན་པོ་ཉལ་གྱི་མ་འོད་ཟེར་གྱིས་གཏོར་ནས་གདན་དྲངས་གིང་།).

119 Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, Gnubs nam mkha'i snying po, and Vairocana (Gter bdag gling pa's *rdo rje'i phreng ba* empowerment text, Dudjom *Bka' ma* Volume Pa: 683; Mi pham, *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ye: 612; see also *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 107). Sometimes, G.yu sgra snying po is given instead of Vairocana (*Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* Volume Ha: 294).

rgya mtsho, and down to Grub thob Dngos grub, and to his student Myang ral.¹²⁰ In Gter bdag gling pa's Vajra Rosary (*rdo rje phreng ba*) empowerment text, we find the statement:

The four streams of empowerment flowing together in Tibet were bestowed upon King Khri srong lde btsan by Master Padma 'byung gnas; Master Vimalamitra; Pagor Vairocana; and Gnubs Nam mkha'i snying po. The four streams of empowerment of India and Tibet flowed together and went to the King, but he did not bestow empowerment on anyone else, so the stream of empowerment was broken off.¹²¹

In other words, we have an explicit recognition that the transmission was cut off due to the King not passing it on; but that fortunately, Jñānakumāra was able to transmit the stream of empowerment instead. Without making too much of this, it seems striking to me that with the *gter ma* transmission of the *Eightfold Buddha Word*, it is as though the King is brought back into the line, since the teachings are given to him, hidden, and recovered by Myang ral. It is surely too great a stretch to attribute the *gter ma* framing of the texts to the desirability of restoring the King to the lineage of transmission, yet it is interesting that one effect of the *gter ma* narrative in this case is to bring the King back as a central figure in the transmission.

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120 Mi pham, *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* TBRC: W25983 Volume Ye: 613. Dudjom Rinpoche adds the intermediate figures after the two Gnubs: Padma dbang rgyal, Tshul khri ms rgyal mtshan, Ldan brtson, Ye shes dbang phyug, Se ston pa (Dudjom *Bka' ma* Volume Pa: 591). These figures are elaborated further in Gter bdag gling pa's *rdo rje'i phreng ba* empowerment text, Dudjom *Bka' ma* Volume Pa: 684.

121 བོད་དབང་གི་རྒྱ་བོ་བཞི་འདུས་པ་ནི། རྒྱལ་པོ་ཁྱི་སྒྲིབ་ལྟེ་བཅན་ལ། སྒྲོབ་དཔོན་པ་རྩ་འབྱུང་གནས་དང། སྒྲོབ་དཔོན་བེ་མ་ལ་མི་ཏུ་དང། པ་གོར་བེ་ཙོ་ཙན། གཞུབས་ནས་མཁའ་ཁྲི་ལྷིང་པོ། རྒྱ་བོད་ཀྱི་དབང་གི་རྒྱ་བོ་བཞི་འདུས་ཏེ། རྒྱལ་པོར་སོང་བས་གཞན་ལ་དབང་མ་བསྐྱར་ཏེ། དབང་གི་རྒྱ་བོ་ཆད་དོ། (Dudjom *Bka' ma* Volume Pa: 683).

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- ◆ Author: Cathy Cantwell, Mercator Fellow 2018-2019, CERES, Ruhr Universität Bochum. Currently, Associate Faculty Member, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford, and Honorary Research Fellow, School of Anthropology and Conservation, University of Kent.