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Deyadharmā – A Gift of the Dharma:
The Life and Works of Vanaratna (1384-1468)

by

Ryan C. Damron

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

South and Southeast Asian Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Professor Alexander von Rospatt, Chair

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Spring 2021

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Abstract

A Gift of the Dharma: The Life and Works of Vanaratna (1384-1468)

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Ryan C. Damron

Doctor of Philosophy in South and Southeast Asian Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Alexander von Rospatt, Chair

The fifteenth-century Buddhist monk and *paṇḍita* Vanaratna lived a remarkable life that unfolded across the length and breadth of South Asia and crossed the Himalayan range. As a teacher, author, and pilgrim, Vanaratna traveled through and lived among many of the diverse Buddhist communities of his time and witnessed a tumultuous yet vibrant period in the regions' history. Vanaratna's life is particularly compelling for the fact that he counts among the last of the Buddhist *paṇḍitas* of Indic descent to leave an impression in the historical record. Active in eastern India, Sri Lanka, southern and northern India, Nepal, and Tibet, Vanaratna's life is accessible to us through a rich and extensive body of Sanskrit and Tibetan literature, as well as art-historical and material sources. This study is not the first to give Vanaratna the attention he merits, but it does aim to be the first to take into consideration this large body of material available on his life that has previously been underutilized or not considered at all. The primary witnesses for Vanaratna's life examined closely here include the Tibetan biographies (*rnam thar*) of Vanaratna composed by his immediate disciples, the Tibetan biographies of his students and colleagues, his extant works preserved in Sanskrit and Tibetan translation, and art-historical materials that record his life and deeds. These materials will be coordinated with the broader historical record in order to remedy both the dearth of comprehensive studies of Vanaratna's life and the scarcity of primary sources on the political and religious history of fifteenth-century South Asia, Nepal, and Tibet.

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Acknowledgements

My research on the Indian *paṇḍita* Vanaratna began in the Kathmandu Valley, not far from Vanaratna's own home in Nepal, Gopicandra Vihāra in Patan. I had been living in the Kathmandu Valley off and on for the previous decade and a half, and my decision to dive head-first into the vast sea of material on Vanaratna was driven by a wish to engage more deeply with the Buddhist history of my adopted home. Following in Vanaratna's footsteps around the valley revitalized my view of this ancient center of Buddhist culture by connecting me with its still-tangible history and its living tradition. Like Vanaratna, I am a foreign pilgrim and scholar who has thrived in Nepal and was deeply enriched by my experiences there, thus my study of Vanaratna is very much an offering of appreciation and gratitude to the Kathmandu Valley and its residents—friends, colleagues, and strangers alike.

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Sigla and Abbreviations

BA	Roerich, George. <i>Blue Annals</i>
CKK	brTson 'grus seng ge. <i>'Chi med grub pa'i 'khrul 'khor bzhugs bstod</i>
DÑ	gZhon nu dpal. <i>Deb ther ngon po</i>
GKV	<i>Gunakāraṇḍavyūha</i>
MCB	Anonymous. <i>Myang yul stod smad bar gsum gyi ngo mtshar gtam gyi legs bshad mkhas pa'i 'jug ngogs shes bya ba bzhugs so.</i>
NTŚC	Kun dga' grol mchog. <i>Paṅ ḍi ta chen po sã kya mchog ldan gyi rnam par thar pa zhib mornam par 'byed pa.</i>
NTSG	Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi grags pa ye shes. <i>rJe thams cad mkhyen pa lo tsã ba chen po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rgya mtsho.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- NTSG^a: Incomplete <i>u med</i> manuscript. BDRC no. W7487.- NTSG^b: <i>Thams cad mkhyen pa zhwa dmar bzhi pa spyang snga chos kyi grags pa'i gsung 'bum</i> vol. 4, 272-458. Peking: Khrung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang. 2009. BDRC no. W1KG4876
NTSN	Byams chub rnam rgyal dge legs. <i>Byams pa gling pa'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar phreng ba.</i>
NTŹP	Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi grags pa ye shes. <i>dPal ldan bla ma dam pa mkhan chen thams cad mkhyen pa don gyi slad du mtshan nas smos te 'gos lo gzhon nu dpal gyi rnam par thar payon tan rin po che mchog tu rgyas pa'i ljon pa</i>
PLK	Indrabhūti. <i>Phyag rgya'i lam skor</i>
SG	Sönam Gyatso. <i>Chos kyi rje paṅ chen nags kyi rin po che'i zhal snga nas kyi rnam par thar pa,</i>
VC	The “Vanaratna Codex;” RAS Hodgson 35
ŹP	gZhon nu dPal. <i>mKhas pa chen po dpal nags kyi rin chen kyi rnam par thar pa</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- ŹP^a: Thimpu edition of the <i>mKhas pa chen po dpal nags kyi rin chen kyi rnam par thar pa</i>- ŹP^b: Unpublished manuscript of the <i>mKhas pa chen po dpal nags kyi rin chen kyi rnam par thar pa</i> found a single composite manuscript with

Sönam Gyatso's *Chos kyi rje paṅ chen nags kyi rin po che'i zhal snga nas kyi rnam par thar pa*.

Tōh. Tōhoku. Ui, Hakuju, *et al.* *A Complete Catalog of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons*. Sendai: Tohoku Imperial University, 1934.

Ōta. Ōtani.

- *A Comparative Analytical Catalogue of the Kanjur Division of the Tibetan Tripitaka: Edited in Peking during the K'ang-hsi Era, and At Present Kept in the Library of the Otani Daigaku Kyoto*, 3 vols., The Otani Daigaku Library, Kyoto, 1930-1932.
- *A Comparative Analytical Catalogue of the Tanjur Division of the Tibetan Tripitaka, Kept in the Otani University Library and At Present Reprinted under the Supervision of the Otani University*, 9 vols., 1965-1997.

ca. circa

em. emended

f. folio

ms. manuscript

om. omitted

r. recto

v. verso

Introduction

The fifteenth-century Buddhist monk and *paṇḍita* Vanaratna lived a remarkable life that unfolded across the length and breadth of South Asia and crossed the Himalayan range. As a teacher, author, and pilgrim, Vanaratna traveled through and lived among the diverse Buddhist communities of his time and witnessed a tumultuous yet vibrant period in the regions' history. Vanaratna's life is particularly compelling for the fact that he counts among the last of the Buddhist *paṇḍitas* of Indic descent to leave an impression in the historical record. Trained in the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions that were in steep decline on the Indian subcontinent in the fifteenth-century, Vanaratna witnessed first-hand the deteriorating conditions of his religion, conditions that informed and impelled the arc of his career. Faced with the deterioration of Buddhist culture on the Indian mainland, Vanaratna sought out new opportunities in Buddhist lands further afield in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Tibet, constantly adapting and evolving to the circumstances he met along the way. By the time he died in the Kathmandu Valley in 1468, he had gained a group of devoted students and patrons across the Buddhist world, many of whom count among the most prominent religious and political leaders of their time. The details of Vanaratna's remarkable life are accessible to us through the rich literary and art-historical record he left behind, the product not only of his own hand but of the talented Tibetan masters who were his students and colleagues. Foremost among these sources are the biographies written by his immediate Tibetan disciples, which offer us an intimate view of a Buddhist *paṇḍita* of great historical significance and give us a surprisingly detailed perspective into an obscure period in the history of South Asian and Himalayan Buddhism. Complementing the literary efforts of his students is the rich body of Buddhist literature penned by Vanaratna himself, a corpus that reveals not only his own spiritual pursuits and literary talents, but also the priorities of the communities he visited and served.

The study that follows will be, on the level of micro-history, an exploration of the events and relationships that shaped Vanaratna's life, his contributions to Buddhist thought and practice, and his impact on the South Asian and Himalayan communities in which he worked. Taking a broader perspective, the sources on Vanaratna's life will also be used as a lens to focus our view of South Asian and Himalayan Buddhism in the fifteenth century, a period that is little studied and imperfectly understood in the field of Buddhist Studies. This study is not the first to give Vanaratna the attention he merits, but it does aim to be the first to take into consideration the large body of material available on his life that has previously been underutilized or not considered at all. The primary goal of the present study will therefore be to coordinate the biographical data we have on Vanaratna's life with his literary corpus, art-historical and material resources, and the broader historical record in order to remedy both the dearth of comprehensive studies of Vanaratna's life and the scarcity of primary sources on the political and religious history of fifteenth-century South Asia, Nepal, and Tibet.

In expanding the range of material that informs our understanding of Vanaratna and his historical setting, this study builds upon the work of previous scholars who have given him some attention. To date, a number of short studies have been published that either survey the general arc of Vanaratna's narrative or present more focused examinations of key moments in his life, specific texts he composed, or the art-historical and material resources associated with him. Three surveys of Vanaratna's biography have thus far been published (Pal 1989; Ehrhard 2004; Parajuli 2014), each presenting his life in the broadest possible strokes. Franz-Karl Ehrhard's excellent work offers the most comprehensive view of Vanaratna's activities available, including the only study of gZhon nu dpal's biography of Vanaratna (2004). Ehrhard also offers important, albeit oblique glimpses of Vanaratna's activities in his study of Vanaratna's biographer bSod nams rgya mtsho (2002a-b), and

in his work on the biography of Chos dpal bzang po (2017), a text composed by Vanaratna's long-time oral translator 'Jam dpal ye shes. Punya Parajuli has done extensive work on Vanaratna's life based on the biographies, but thus far has only published a single synopsis (2014). General surveys of Vanaratna's activities in South Asia and Tibet have been published by Pratapaditya Pal (1989) and Lobsang Shastri (2002).

A number of more focused studies on Vanaratna's oeuvre and his art-historical record have been also published. Among the most significant is Harunaga Isaacson's 2008 groundbreaking contribution that first brought our attention to the Vanaratna Codex. Sonam Spitz has also studied material from the Vanaratna Codex in his Master's thesis at the University of Hamburg (2015). Shin'ichiro Horii (2018) has published a brief but important study on a collection of manuscripts from Vanaratna's personal collection, while Péter-Dániel Szántó (2010, 2013), Klaus-Dieter Mathes (2008b), and Michael Hahn (1996) have examined specific texts composed by or written for Vanaratna. Pratapaditya Pal (1985), Steven Kossack and Jane Singer (1999), Dina Bangdel (2003), Hubert Decler (2005), and David Jackson (2011) have all published valuable studies of the Nepalese and Tibetan art associated with Vanaratna's Himalayan travels.

The fifteenth century is an opaque and understudied period in South Asian and Himalayan history, with data on Buddhism in India during this period being particularly sparse. This lack of historical perspective has been commendably remedied in a volume edited by Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (2014), and by the broad but excellent survey presented by Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot (2006). Informative regional studies have been published by Richard Eaton (1993) for Bengal, Michael Aung-Thwin (2017) for Burma, John Holt (1991) and H.B.M. Ilanghasinha (1972) for Sri Lanka, and an edited volume by Shree Padma and A.W. Barber (2008) on the Kṛṣṇa River Valley. Arthur McKeown's work on the Indian monk Śāriputra (2019), a near-contemporary of Vanaratna, is the only substantial resource on Buddhism in fifteenth-century India, and offers an important corrective to our understanding of Buddhism's decline and eventual disappearance there. Fifteenth-century Nepal has received specific attention from William Tuladhar-Douglas (2006), and has been well-surveyed by D.R. Regmi (1965) and Luciano Petech (1984). Alexander von Rospatt's work on the Svayambhū Mahācaitya (2011, 2014) is also an important resource for this period in Nepalese history. Our understanding of fifteenth-century Tibet is on stable footing thanks to critical attention of Franz-Karl Ehrhard, Cyrus Stearns, Hildegard Diemberger (1998, 2007), Olaf Czaja (2013), and Roberto Vitali (2009, 2015), among numerous others.

In utilizing the full body of resources on Vanaratna that are available to us, this study also attempts to redress a lamentable but common tendency in scholarship on Vanaratna to ignore the full-length biographies and Vanaratna's own writings and to rely solely on a brief narrative presented in gZhon nu dpal's sweeping historical chronicle, the *Deb ther sngon po* (DÑ). The reasons for the overemphasis of this source are understandable: the DÑ account is short and descriptive, it is widely available in easy-to-read Tibetan block print or modern print versions, and has been translated into English. The DÑ provides a useful and accessible synopsis of Vanaratna's life, but because of its brevity omits key details and lacks the nuance needed to properly understand Vanaratna's travels, the relationships he formed with South Asian and Tibetan masters, and his activities as a teacher and author. Thus, any scholarship that relies on the *Deb ther sngon po* alone is unavoidably superficial, and distorts many aspects of Vanaratna's legacy. The DÑ also contains variant and at times conflicting accounts of the narrative presented in the biographies, deviations which can only be put in proper perspective by consulting all available biographical and textual sources. Over-reliance on the DÑ by modern scholars has led to significant distortions of Vanaratna's narrative, distortions that become increasingly compounded as new studies of Vanaratna come out that continue to privilege the DÑ's account and only reference other scholarship based on the DÑ. The result is an echo chamber of misrepresentations of Vanaratna's

life, misrepresentations that are easy to rectify by consulting the biographies directly.

The shortcomings of the DÑ are significantly amplified by the translation prepared by George Roerich and dGe 'dun Chos 'phel, the *Blue Annals* (BA). Their work has introduced a number of misinterpretations and errors that continue to haunt the scholarship on Vanaratna, errors that are plainly apparent when the full biographies written by gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho are consulted. Among the most sustained errors is an uncited parenthetical insertion made by the translators that declares Vanaratna's birthplace, Sadnagara, to be located in the Chittagong district of what is now Bangladesh.¹ The DÑ itself makes no such assertion, and evidence in the biographies strongly suggests that Vanaratna's early life unfolded some distance north of this maritime city. Nonetheless, because of this casual insertion, Vanaratna is frequently called the "Chittagong Yogi," and his early life erroneously located in Chittagong. A similarly unsupported parenthetical insertion by the translators misidentifies one of Vanaratna's Indian teachers as Narāditya,² mistranslating the Tibetan *mi'i nyi ma* despite the fact that gZhon nu dpal frequently provides the Sanskrit transliteration of Manuṣasūrya in his full biography. Equally problematic is the parenthetical assertion that states Vanaratna received an initiation into the Kālacakra maṇḍala at the Śāntipur temple in the Kathmandu Valley.³ This claim is made despite the fact that neither the DÑ nor gZhon nu dpal's full-length biography state that he received a Kālacakra initiation at this time, while being quite explicit that it was an initiation into the thirteen-deity maṇḍala of Cakrasaṃvara that he received at Śāntipur. It is regrettable that the wealth of resources on Vanaratna's life have not yet been fully utilized, and that even recent presentations of Vanaratna's biography continue to perpetuate these errors.⁴

Sources of a Life

The great value of Vanaratna's narrative, both as the account of a single individual and as a historical resource for his time period, lies in the depth and breadth of materials through which it is made accessible to us. The majority of these sources are works of Tibetan literature, consisting of indigenous biographical texts (*rnam thar*) and historical chronicles (*chos 'byung*), as well as Tibetan translations of Sanskrit material. While much of this material is known to scholars of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, very little of it has been carefully studied, translated, and coordinated to offer a comprehensive telling of Vanaratna's narrative, to determine the extent and nature of his oeuvre, and to establish both Vanaratna and his corpus in their historical context. The *rnam thars* in this collection include both those about Vanaratna composed by his immediate disciples and those about his main disciples and other Tibetan masters who met Vanaratna. Many of these same Tibetan religious and literary masters worked with Vanaratna to prepare translations of his own writings and of other Indic canonical materials. Apart from the Tibetan material there is a small but informative collection of Vanaratna's works extant in Sanskrit, including physical manuscripts written in his own hand and by his commission. Most significant among these is the Vanaratna Codex, a palm-leaf manuscript containing his personal collection of Sanskrit works he copied and Tibetan texts he translated into Sanskrit. Beyond the textual, we have a rich array of art-historical

¹ BA 797.

² BA 798.

³ BA 799.

⁴ This pattern can be seen, for example, in the 2019 publication of an English-language biography of Vanaratna on the website *Treasury of Lives* (<https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Vanaratna/3736>), which entirely ignores the full-length biographies (despite acknowledging them), is based instead on the DÑ and scholarship grounded in the DÑ, and replicates many of the errors of found in the BA.

and material sources connected with Vanaratna, including portraits, statuary, and manuscripts. This wealth of evidence will be examined throughout the narrative that follows, but is summarized briefly here.

The Tibetan rNam thars

The main trunk of the widely branching collection of Tibetan materials consists of a cluster of Tibetan biographies that tell Vanaratna's story through his own eyes and the eyes of his closest Tibetan disciples. Biographical writing has a long and rich history as a popular genre of Tibetan literature, and appears to have been an important mode of literary output for the Tibetan masters associated with Vanaratna. The term *rnam thar* can be loosely translated as "tale of liberation," thus the genre tends to emphasize the spiritual achievements of their subject rather than the historical details of their lives and the period in which they lived. This often results in works that are better defined as hagiography than biography, and which need to be approached with care as historical sources. *rNam thars* are, however, very much products of the specific religious, social, and political contexts in which they were written,⁵ thus even the most fantastical accounts can serve as troves of information not only about their subject and their subject's historical period, but also about the historical setting in which they were composed. The biographies of Vanaratna are no different in this regard, and are at once exemplary representatives of the genre and distinctive expressions of *rnam thar* literature that capture the literary trends prevalent at the time of their composition.

The two most essential works for the study of Vanaratna, and the primary sources for this study, are the *rnam thars* composed by 'Gos Lotsāwa gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481) and Khrimts khang Lotsāwa bSod nams rgya mtsho (1424-82). They are not parallel biographies, but comprise two halves of a single biographical narrative covering the whole of Vanaratna's life. gZhon nu dpal's *Life of the Great Paṇḍita, the Illustrious Vanaratna* (ŽP: *mKhas pa chen po dpal nags kyi rin chen gyi rnam par thar pa*) covers the years 1384 to ca. 1438. It begins with Vanaratna's childhood, includes his years in Sri Lanka, Andhra, north India, and Nepal, and concludes with his second trip to Tibet. bSod nams rgya mtsho's *rnam thar*, hereafter the SG, covers the remainder of Vanaratna's life, 1438-68, including the majority of his time in the Kathmandu Valley and his third and final journey to Tibet. The ŽP is preserved in two handwritten *dbu med* manuscripts, one an independent text held by the National Library of Bhutan, and the other as the first half of an unpublished handwritten composite manuscript of the ŽP and SG that uses the title *The Life Story of the Lord of Dharma, the Great Paṇḍita Vanaratna as Told in His Own Words* (SG: *Chos kyi rje paṇ chen nags kyi rin po che'i zhal snga nas kyi rnam par thar pa*).⁶ This manuscript, which contains the sole witness of the SG, is a clear demonstration that the two *rnam thars* circulated together and were considered complimentary works.

These two works are unique in presenting both Vanaratna's oral recollections and the immediate, first-hand experiences of his biographers. gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho, at points both distinct and overlapping, were members of Vanaratna's personal entourage and would travel with him for long periods and over long distances. Their *rnam thars* are therefore not only a record of their teacher's life as reported to them, but also their first-hand accounts of events they experienced. In their interweaving of Vanaratna's personal testimony with their first-hand reports

⁵ Quintman 2014: 9-10.

⁶ In this study all citations are drawn from the composite manuscript containing both the ŽP and SG. When a distinction is to be made between the two versions of the ŽP, the independent Thimpu edition will be referred to as ŽP^a, and the unpublished manuscript as ŽP^b.

of their own lived experiences, the *ŽP* and *SG* frequently blur the line between biography and autobiography. It is evident that Vanaratna had a strong hand in the creation of his narrative, as both the *ŽP* and *SG* are filled with first-person anecdotes and the inclusion of personal, geographic, and historical details only he could have known and personally reported to his biographers. His voice is most distinct in those parts of his biography not witnessed by *gZhon nu dpal* or *bSod nams rgya mtsho*, including his early life and travels in South Asia, his first two residencies in Nepal. In those parts of the narrative that were experienced by his biographers, however, there is a distinctive change in perspective, one in which Vanaratna's remembrances recede as the narrator's presence becomes more palpable, and neither *gZhon nu dpal* nor *bSod nams rgya mtsho* hesitate to use the first-person voice in sharing their remembrances and reflections on their experiences with Vanaratna. As expected in the *rnam thar* genre, the biographies privilege Vanaratna's spiritual accomplishments and contain their fair share of hagiographical clichés, features which at times conceal or distort the historicity of the narratives they present, but *gZhon nu dpal* and *bSod nams rgya mtsho* also show a remarkable degree of historical awareness and attention to detail. This careful, detailed work in recording Vanaratna's experiences and capturing the historical moment make these biographies critically important as historical documents, offering us a narrative that celebrates Vanaratna's humanity as much as his spiritual accomplishments, and providing us with a rare, on-the-ground perspective to the tumultuous and dynamic times in which his life unfolded.

There are two additional *rnam thars* that are essential points of access to Vanaratna's narrative: the *rnam thars* of *gZhon nu dpal* and *bSod nams rgya mtsho* that were composed by the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos grags ye shes (1453-1524). Chos grags ye shes was student to both *gZhon nu dpal* and *bSod nams rgya mtsho*, and he followed their example by composing biographies that are informative, historically astute, and sensitive accounts of their lives and works. *The Broad Tree of Precious Qualities: the Life of 'Go Lo[tsāwa] gZhon nu dpal that Purposely Announces the Name of the Glorious and Sublime Guru, the Esteemed Scholar, the Omniscient One* (NTŽP: *dPal ldan bla ma dam pa mkhan chen thams cad mkhyen pa don gyi slad du mtshan nas smos te 'gos lo gzhon nu dpal gyi rnam par thar pa yon tan rin po che mchog tu rgyas pa 'i ljon pa*) is available in a number of formats, the oldest of which is an incomplete *dbu chen* manuscript hand-written in gold letters on a dark background. The NTŽP was completed in 1517, some thirty-six years after *gZhon nu dpal*'s death, but despite its late composition is a valuable resource for the years *gZhon nu dpal* spent with Vanaratna and for details of the events surrounding Vanaratna's second and third visits to Tibet. Chos grags ye shes's biography of *bSod nams rgya mtsho*, *A Wondrous Ocean: the Life of Great Lotsāwa, the Omniscient Lord* (NTSG: *rJe thams cad mkhyen pa lo tsā ba chen po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*) was composed only a few months after his teacher's death, and contains a wealth of information on *bSod nams rgya mtsho*'s relationship with Vanaratna.⁷ The NTSG is extant in an unpublished and incomplete *dbu med* manuscript, and a complete modern-print version taken from Chos grags ye shes Collected works.⁸ It is especially important for its account of the year *bSod nams rgya mtsho* spent with Vanaratna in Nepal, and of his diligent efforts to translate, transmit, and preserve Vanaratna's legacy in Tibet. Both of these *rnam thars*, which have not been used previously in the study of Vanaratna's narrative, have been closely consulted here.

Beyond the *rnam thars* of the key actors in Vanaratna's narrative, there is a further body of Tibetan literature in which Vanaratna makes brief but important appearances. These include the

⁷ It is also the focus of Franz-Karl's excellent study of *bSod nams rgya mtsho*'s life and works (2002a).

⁸ Material cited from the manuscript will hereafter be referred to as NTSG^a, and the print edition NTSG^b.

rnam thars of Śākya mchog ldan (1428-1507),⁹ Chos dpal bzang po (1371-1439),¹⁰ bSam sding Chos kyi sgron ma (1422-55),¹¹ and bSod nams rnam par rgyal ba (1401-1475).¹² Unfortunately, the *rnam thar* of Shar kha Kun dga' blo gros rgya mtshan, an important Tibetan teacher of Vanaratna, was not available at the time of writing, but its account of his meeting Vanaratna seems to have been the basis for a vignette in the NTŚC.¹³ The same encounter also appears in the *Myang yul stod smad bar gsum gyi ngo mtshar gtam gyi legs bshad mkhas pa'i 'jug ngogs* (MCB), an anonymous and invaluable chronicle of Nyang stod, a region in south-central Tibet where Vanaratna spent a great deal of time and had experiences pivotal to his narrative.

The Tibetan biographical works that form the core of this study were composed in the fifteenth century by a group of Tibetan masters who were prominent members of the religious and literary elite of central Tibet at the time. For the most part—and specifically in the case of gZhon nu dpal, bSod nams rgya mtsho, and Chos grags ye shes—these figures knew each other, trained with one another, and cultivated their craft as writers and biographers in the same literary milieu. Thus the cluster of *rnam thars* studied here can be taken as representative of trends in biographical writing current in fifteenth-century central Tibet, and are specifically associated with the literary and religious trends of the Phag mo gru court, the center of Tibetan politics during the period. While it is beyond the scope of this study to closely examine the literary trends apparent in this body of literature and their implication for our understanding of the *rnam thar* genre, it is nonetheless clear that stylistic commonalities between the works studied here demonstrate a shared and distinctive approach to the genre, one that gives as much attention to historical as it does to the religious, and to the nuances of mundane human experience as it does the reveries of spiritual attainment. It is therefore hoped that the study of these remarkable works that follows will contribute to our understanding of biographical writing in central Tibet in the fifteenth century.

Texts and Translations

The collection of indigenous Tibetan *rnam thars* yields a tremendous amount of information on Vanaratna's travels, his activities, and the relationships he formed across the Buddhist world, but it is the body of Vanaratna's writings, preserved mostly in Tibetan translation, that give us the deepest insight into his own religious and literary priorities, as well as those of his students and patrons. Here we see a near-total predominance of the Vajrayāna and observe clear patterns of emphasis in his choice of ritual systems. Altogether we have nineteen¹⁴ of Vanaratna's works

⁹ The *Paṇḍita chen po śā kya mchog ldan gyi rnam par thar pa zhib mo rnam par 'byed pa* (NTŚC) composed by Kun dga' grol mchog (1507-1565).

¹⁰ The *bLa chen chos dpal bzang po'i rnam thar* (NTCZ), composed by Vanaratna's long-time collaborator 'Jam dpal ye shes.

¹¹ The *Ye shes mkha' 'gro bsod nams 'dren gyi sku skyes gsum pa rje btsun ma chos kyi sgron ma'i rnam thar* has been studied and translated in Diemberger 2007.

¹² The *Byams pa gling pa'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar phreng ba* (NTSN), composed by Byang chub rnam rgyal dge legs (d.u.).

¹³ The *dPal ldan bla ma dam pa'i rnam par thar pa dngos grub kyi rbya mtsho*, composed by one Rin chen bzang po (d.u.) is presently held by the China Nationalities Library in Beijing (van der Kuijp 1994b: 604, n. 21). In his biography of Śākya mchog ldan, Kun dga' grol mchog indicates that his account of the meeting between Kun dga' blo gros and Vanaratna was based on an unnamed *rnam thar of* Kun dga' blo gros, which may be a reference to this work (NTŚC 56v.6).

¹⁴ This number represents the texts recorded separately in the Tibetan bsTan 'gyur. The actual number of distinct compositions would vary depending on how they are tallied. Two texts (Öta. 3106 and 4666) are different translations of the same work, which is itself an extract of a longer composition (Tōh. 1489). Three works (Tōh. 1768-70) appear to have originally been a single work that was later separated.

preserved in the Tibetan bsTan 'gyur;¹⁵ among these fourteen are tantric ritual texts or explanatory treatises, and five are hymns to Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna deities. We find roughly the same ratio among Vanaratna's collaborative translations of canonical works; of the twenty-eight texts Vanaratna translated with his Tibetan colleagues, twenty-four are Vajrayāna ritual manuals and instructions texts, while four are hymns.

When we group this collection thematically, clear patterns emerge. The largest single body of literature in Vanaratna's collected works is dedicated to the practice of Cakrasaṃvara, and specifically to a thirteen-deity arrangement of its maṇḍala. At the heart of Vanaratna's interpretation of this system is his *Trayodaśātmakaśrīcakraśaṃvaramaṇḍalavidhi* (Tōh. 1489), a ritual manual that lifts heavily from Abhayākara Gupta's *Vajrāvalī*. The treatise is primarily concerned with the preparation of the maṇḍala used in an elaborate initiatory rite, which is also explained in the text. The section on the fourth initiation was extracted from this text, seemingly for Vanaratna's own teaching purposes,¹⁶ and exists independently in two separate translations, the *Caturabhiṣekaprakaraṇa* (Ōta. 3106) and the *Caturabhiṣekavyavasthāna* (Ōta. 4666). Vanaratna also composed a lengthy and technical commentary on Kṛṣṇācārya's *Vasantatilakā*, the *Rahasyadīpakā* (Tōh. 1449), detailing the subtle body yogas associated with the Cakrasaṃvara cycle.¹⁷ Texts among the canonical translations that are closely related to this cycle are the *Śrisaṃvaropadeśa* (Ōta. 4654) and the *Śrisaṃvaratrayodaśātmakārcanavidhi* (Ōta. 4655), both composed by Ghaṇṭāpāda. Vanaratna composed three works dedicated to Vajrayoginī, with a specific emphasis on her form as Vajravārāhī: the *Vajravilāsinīvajravārāhīsādhana* (Tōh. 1602), the *Kramadvayavajravārāhīstotra* (Tōh. 1603), and the *Vajraghoṇasādhana* (Tōh. 1605). To this list we can also add his *Ugratārādevīsādhana* (Tōh. 1726), dedicated to a ferocious form of Vajrayoginī of particular importance in the Kathmandu Valley. Thus, eight of his nineteen extant compositions, over a third of his collection, are dedicated to the Cakrasaṃvara cycle and Vajrayoginī. As will be shown in the narrative that follows, Vanaratna taught on many of these texts and their practices in Tibet.

A second cluster of texts, three in total, concern practices associated with the cult of Yogāmbara prominent among the Buddhists of the Kathmandu Valley. These three texts—the *Anujñāvidhi* (Tōh. 1768), *Dhūmāṅgārīsādhana* (Tōh. 1769), and the *Balividhi* (Tōh. 1770)—feature the wrathful the protectress Dhūmāṅgārī and are explicitly intended to supplement that primary practices of Yogāmbara. These three works were classified separately in the Tibetan canon but were likely composed together as a set of interrelated rites. Not as well represented in Vanaratna's corpus but equally relevant to the Buddhist community of Nepal is the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa cycle, which is reflected in Vanaratna's *Acalābhisamayasuratābhīdhāna* (Tōh. 1783),¹⁸ a full-length *sādhana* divided into four stages that cover all the aspects of *utpatti*- and *utpannakrama* practices for the deity Acala, and secondarily for other deities within the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa maṇḍala. Like the cult of Yogāmbara, the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa system was and is specifically popular among the Newar community, achieving much greater significance there than

¹⁵ Most of Vanaratna's compositions are found in the sDe dge bsTan' 'gyur and have corresponding Tōhoku catalog numbers. A significant number, however, are only found in the Peking Kangxi and related recensions of the bsTan 'gyur and are recorded only in the Ōtani catalog. Many of these are bSod nams rgya mtsho's revisions of earlier translations.

¹⁶ Vanaratna taught on this text at Byams pa gling monastery in 1455 (SG 47r.3; NTSG^a 42v.1-2; NTSN 39v.3-4)

¹⁷ A Sanskrit edition of the *Vasantatilaka* and Vanaratna's *Rahasyadīpakā* has been published by Samdhong Rinpoche and Vrajvallabha Dvivedi (1990).

¹⁸ A Sanskrit manuscript witness of this work is available as Göttingen Xc14/40b, but the images are significantly distorted. It was first identified by Péter-Dániel Szántó (2010), whom I thank for sharing his draft transcription of the nearly illegible images.

in Tibet. And as with the Cakrasaṃvara cycle described above, the practice of Acala from the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa system and of Dhūmāṅgārī from the Yogāmbara cycle were an essential part of Vanaratna’s teaching repertoire. Though none of these texts are mentioned by title in the biographies, Vanaratna repeatedly taught on a practice of Acala “of the highest [tantric class]” (*mi g.yo ba bla na med pa*), and on at least one occasion taught his Tibetan disciples a *sādhana* of a two-armed form of Dhūmāṅgārī, corresponding to the form described in Tōh. 1768.

The cycles of Cakrasaṃvara, Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa, and Yogāmbara are the focus of twelve of Vanaratna’s compositions. Among the remaining texts are two esoteric ritual manuals connected to systems which otherwise barely register in his oeuvre: the *Pañcarākṣārcanavidhi*, a ritual manual for the famous set of five protectresses—Pratisarā, Mahāsāhasrapramardinī, Mahāmāyūrī, Mahāmantrānusārīṇī, and Mahāśītavatī—that was immensely popular in Nepal; and the *Vajrāmṛtābhisamayatritaya* (Ōta. 4785)¹⁹ a treatise on three maṇḍalas of the *Vajrāmṛta Tantra* that are, the text informs us, not found in Abhayākara Gupta’s *Niṣpannayogāvalī*.²⁰ The remaining compositions are hymns to popular Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna deities: the *Buddhastavadaśa* (Tōh. 1154), *Lokeśvararatnamālāstotra* (Tōh. 1174),²¹ *Gaṇeśvarastava* (Tōh. 1175), and Vanaratna’s hymn to his own guru, the *Śabarapādastotraratna* (Tōh 1176/Ōta. 5102).

The emphases we find in Vanaratna’s writings appear to reflect the priorities of the Newar Buddhist community in the Kathmandu Valley, rather than those of his Tibetan disciples. As will be discussed in Part II of this study, textual and art-historical evidence suggests that Vanaratna underwent significant training in the Kathmandu Valley, and that he eventually regarded the valley as his primary residence and spiritual home. His biographies certainly gesture towards this fact, but the clearest evidence for his enduring connection to the Newar Buddhist community of the Kathmandu Valley is to be found in his collected writings, which display a unmistakable emphasis on systems and deities of enduring importance for Newar Buddhists, including his texts associated with the cult of Cakrasaṃvara, Yogāmbara, Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa systems, as well as those focused on specific deities such as the Vajrayoginī/Vajravārāhī, Ugratārā, and the Pañcarakṣā goddesses. His hymns to Gaṇeśa and Avalokiteśvara would also have had specific resonance in the Newar community. A number of Vanaratna’s writings extant in Sanskrit were preserved in the archives of the Kathmandu Valley, including the *Rahasydīpikā* from the Cakrasaṃvara system. Also prominent in Nepal’s archives is Vanaratna’s hymn to Avalokiteśvara, the *Lokeśvararatnamālāstotra*, which he is known to have composed in Nepal and taught to the crown princes. Vanaratna taught on many of these works during his years in Tibet, so they are clearly of relevance to his Tibetan students as well, but it seems more likely that these Sanskrit compositions were originally intended for a distinctly Newar audience and translated into Tibetan at a later time, rather than being composed and translated entirely in Tibet.

The body of translations Vanaratna worked on with his Tibetan disciples presents us with a different picture. The collection is more eclectic and broad than his compositions, and appears to reflect both the priorities of his Tibetan audience and the texts available to him in Tibet. Evidence from the colophons and biographies show two general scenarios for the translations: they were either collaborative projects of Vanaratna and his Tibetan colleagues while he was in Tibet (and rarely, Nepal), or as independent translations made by those same disciples after Vanaratna left Tibet. Though Vanaratna did not have an active hand in all the translated material, his influence was still to be felt through the initial instruction and transmission of the translated text. Remarkably, all of these translations, including those of Vanaratna’s compositions, were prepared

¹⁹ This is the title as given in Sanskrit phonetics by the Tibetan translation. The Ōtāni catalog lists it as the *Vajrāmṛtatrayābhisamaya*.

²⁰ Ōta. 4785 557v.7: rdzogs pa’i rnal ’byor phreng ba las ma gsung pa’i rdo rje’s bdud rtsi gsum po.

²¹ This text is still extant in numerous unpublished Sanskrit witness and one published edition (Pandey 1994).

by four translators who were Vanaratna's direct disciples. Brief biographies and descriptions of their work together are presented below.

A question to be revisited later in this study is the source of the Sanskrit manuscripts from which Vanaratna and his colleagues prepared their translations. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, it is likely that the Sanskrit texts were drawn primarily from the libraries of the Tibetan monasteries Vanaratna visited between the years 1430 and 1455. As we will see, Vanaratna worked out of the Sanskrit libraries of the Phag mo gru monarchy, such as at rTses thang and sNe'u gdong monasteries, as well as other institutions across central Tibet, using the manuscripts he found there as the basis for his teachings and translations. His work in Tibet was therefore shaped by the collections at his disposal, their contents guiding the requests of his Tibetan disciples and the texts they chose to translate together. He was certainly also guided by his own philological instincts, and given the diminished state of Buddhism in South Asia, Vanaratna may have discovered Sanskrit treatises in Tibet not previously available to him on India and Nepal. In teaching, translating, and copying these Sanskrit texts, Vanaratna was at once serving the needs of the Tibetan community and reclaiming aspects of South Asian Buddhism's scriptural and literary legacy, for himself and for future generations of South Asian Buddhists.²²

Like his writings, the translations almost exclusively consist of Vajrayāna material and show patterns of emphasis that reflect the priorities of his patron community, in this case the Tibetans. The most frequently-referenced system is the Hevajra cycle, for which we find six texts: the *Hevajrasādhana* by Ḍombiheruka (Tōh. 1232) and its commentary by *Rūpyakalāśa, the *Hevajrasāadhanapañjikā* (Tōh. 1233); Rāhulagupta's *Prakāśanāmaśrīhevajrasādhana* (Tōh. 1238); the *Viśuddhinidhihevajrasādhana* of Advayavajra (Tōh. 1244);²³ and Āryadeva's *Pratipattiśārasataka* (Tōh. 2334) and its commentary, the *Pratipattiśārasatakavivarāṇa* (Tōh. 2335), composed by Herukadeva. The prominence of this system likely reflects the religious interests of Vanaratna's patrons at the Phag mo gru court and the religious community based there. Vanaratna is known to have taught on and offered initiations into the Hevajra maṇḍala at both rTses thang and sNe'u gdong on his second and third visits, respectively, and it is probable that some of the translated texts were based on Sanskrit manuscripts from the Phag mo gru libraries.

Apart from the Hevajra system, no single tantric cycle is clearly privileged in the collection of translations. There are three texts associated with Cakrasaṃvara system, two elucidating practices involving the full maṇḍala—the *Cakrasaṃvaropadeśa* and *Śrīsaṃvaratrayodaśātmakārcanavidhi*—and one focused on the Vajravārāhī form of Vajrayoginī, the *Sarvārthasādhakavajravārāhīsādhana* (Tōh. 1604). Conspicuous in its near-total absence from Vanaratna's collected works is the Kālacakra system, for which there is only a single text, a translation of Sādhuputra's *Śekkodeśaṭippanī* (Tōh. 1352).²⁴

(Ārya) Nāgārjuna, or someone assuming the literary identity of the tantric exegete, is well-represented in the translations, more so than any other single author. There are five texts attributed to him, including two *sādhana*s featuring Mahākāla, the *Strīprajñāśrīmahākālasādhana* (Tōh. 1758) and the *Caturbhujamahākālasādhana* (Ōta. 4843). The four-armed form of Mahākāla described in the latter of these two works figured prominently in Vanaratna's activities in Tibet. The other three texts by Nāgārjuna consist of the *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga* (Ōta. 4792) from the Guhyasamāja

²² This topic will be revisited in Chapter Seven.

²³ Advayavajra's text is extant in Sanskrit as part of the *Hevajrasādhanasamgraha* (f.65r.1-80v.5), a collection of Hevajra materials studied in Isaacson 2009 (103-4).

²⁴ Magherita Saccone (2014: 520) briefly mentioned the possible existence of a commentary on the *Vimalaprabhā* that she said at the time was "probably by Vanaratna." Since that publication, however, it has been determined that this is likely not the case (Francesco Sferra, personal communication, Oct. 2020).

system,²⁵ and two *praṇidhānas*, the *Praṇidhānaratnarāja* (Tōh. 4395) and the *Vajrapraṇidhāna* (Tōh. 4384). Also of note among the translations are two *sādhanas* featuring Mañjuśrī composed by Mitrayogin (Tōh. 2716 and Ōta. 4837), the Ugratārā *sādhanas* by Śāsvatavajra mentioned above (Tōh. 1727/8), a small, eclectic collection of hymns to Avalokiteśvara (Tōh. 2726 and 2735; Ōta. 3358), and a number of short oral instructions that Vanaratna appears to have received from his own teachers and then taught to his Tibetan students (Tōh.1378; Ōta. 3105 and 3147).

There are also a small number of texts in Vanaratna’s corpus that are more difficult to classify. We have a bilingual collection of instructions and textual citations Vanaratna would use when teaching, which was compiled and translated by bSod nams rgya mtsho under the title *Grub pa’i dbang phyug paṇḍi ta chen po śrī va na ratna’i zhal lung rin po che’i snying po’i phreng ba* (Ōta. 5096). bSod nam rgya mtsho also translated a series of verses Vanaratna composed for a cloth painting of the thirteen-deity Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala, the *bLa ma’i bris thang rgyab yig bzhugs* (Ōta. 4607). Finally, we have a seven-verse Sanskrit eulogy to Vanaratna, the *Vanaratnastotrasaptaka*, composed by an Indian man named Āditya, which was translated twice, once by gZhon nu dpal (Tōh. 1177) and then later by bSod nams rgya mtsho (Ōta. 5101).²⁶

Another text attributed to Vanaratna is the *Gurvārāadhanapañjikā* (Tōh. 3722), the only known commentary on Vāpilladatta’s *Gurupañcāsikā*. The text itself lacks a statement of authorship, but because gZhon nu dpal mentions Vanaratna in the translator’s colophon, it has been reasonably speculated that he was its author.²⁷ An observation made in the NTŽP makes this speculation unlikely, however. When listing the texts gZhon nu dpal translated over his long career, Chos grags ye shes, who otherwise identifies the author of every translated work, states that the Sanskrit manuscript of the *Gurvārāadhanapañjikā* consulted by gZhon nu dpal lacked a colophon,²⁸ and so makes no note of its authorship. Because gZhon nu dpal, and thus Chos grags ye shes, surely would have known if it was Vanaratna’s work, Chos grags ye shes’s observation about the Sanskrit manuscript’s lack of clear authorship strongly suggests that the *Gurvārāadhanapañjikā* was not in fact Vanaratna’s work.

The Vanaratna Codex

Bridging the categories of literary and material sources is a truly remarkable document, a testament to Vanaratna’s craft as a *paṇḍita* and witness to his travels, activities, and relationships in fifteenth-century Tibet. The “Vanaratna Codex,” cataloged as RAS Hodgson 35 at the Royal Asiatic Society in London, is a collection of Sanskrit apographs and Sanskrit translations of Tibetan texts likely compiled by Vanaratna in Tibet. The codex was first brought to our attention by Harunaga Isaacson (2008)²⁹ and has received further study by Sonam Spitz (2015). The contents of this palm-leaf manuscript can be closely aligned with the biographical literature to reveal the details of Vanaratna’s religious activities during his third journey to Tibet in 1453-55 and offer us surprising insights into the relationship between the Indian *paṇḍita* and the Tibetan masters he worked closely with. The Vanaratna Codex and the context of its creation is the focus of Chapter Seven.

Material and Art-historical Sources

²⁵ The colophon to the ’Jam dpal ye shes’s translation includes a list of Vanaratna’s transmission lineage.

²⁶ The extant Sanskrit text of this hymn has been published by Michael Hahn (1996).

²⁷ Péter-Dániel Szántó, for example, suggests that the commentary may have originated in Vanaratna’s circle, if not from his pen (2013: 444, note.4).

²⁸ NTŽP 45r.7: bla ma bsnyen bkur ba’i bka’i grel mdzad byang med pa.

²⁹ It was Isaacson who first dubbed the manuscript the “Vanaratna Codex.”

In addition to our textual sources, Vanaratna also left an impression in the material and art-historical record. The Vanaratna Codex can certainly be included in this category, being as much a material testament to Vanaratna’s craft as it is a record of his literary activities. Another manuscript that yields key data about Vanaratna’s historical context was brought to scholarly attention by Shin’inchiro Hori (2018). This palm-leaf manuscript consists of a collection of works related to the *Kātantra/Kalāpa Sūtra* that was scribed at Vanaratna’s behest and was part of his personal collection. Data from the colophon yields key information about Vanaratna’s time in Magadha, and so will be analyzed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Beyond the purely textual we have several paintings depicting Vanaratna or commemorating his activities. Arguably the most important of these is a Nepalese *paubhā* dating to 1469 that commemorates Vanaratna’s final days and death (image 1). The central figure in the image is a matter of some dispute,³⁰ but the general scene depicted in the painting and described in its inscription tells of Vanaratna’s sponsorship of a large-scale *dāna* rite in Nepal in the year of his death. The closest we may come to a formal portrait of Vanaratna is an image first published and studied in Kossack and Singer 1998, but accurately identified as Vanaratna in Decler 2005 (image 2). The image has been dated to the fifteenth century,³¹ and through the careful work of David Jackson can be confirmed as Vanaratna with strong confidence.³² Jackson has shown that the painting depicts Vanaratna and the transmission lineage of Abhayākaragupta’s *Vajrāvalī*, and may commemorate his teaching of this cycle to the Phag mo gru monarch Grags pa ’byung gnas and his court at sNe’u gdong in 1436.³³ Jackson also believes a bronze statue of a *paṇḍita* dating to 1468 depicts Vanaratna (image 3).³⁴ He bases his argument on his interpretation of an inscription encircling the statue’s base, which reads as follows (my translation):

One will be free when they see the nature of everything contained in the universe, therefore devotedly serve the guru who is known as “universal freedom.” This was commissioned by the monk sGri pa as a memorial for the *paṇḍita* (*paṇ chen*) and as an excellent meditation support of the great translator (*lo chen*). It was fashioned by the artist Rog pa rtsa pa nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan. May there be virtue.³⁵

In supporting his identification Jackson first follows a speculative line of reasoning about a master named Phyogs grol/Muktipakṣa, but he is certainly justified in arguing that the terms *paṇ chen* and *lo chen* could refer to Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho, and that the statue may therefore once have been part of the latter’s personal effects. Thus, through Jackson’s work we know of two potential representations of Vanaratna’s likeness, and though the identifications remain conjectural, the possibility of putting a face to the man whose narrative will be told here is undeniably compelling.

All of the sources surveyed here will be introduced and studied in the pages that follow to contribute to Vanaratna’s story and explore the Buddhist worlds in which he operated. To date, no

³⁰ This dispute will be the subject of further discussion in Chapter Four and the Conclusion.

³¹ The image, presently part of the Kronos Collection, is painted with distemper on cloth, measures 102 x 88cm (Jackson 2011: 94-5).

³² Jackson 2011: 94-7.

³³ See ŽP 19r.5-19v.3 The ŽP also reports that a painting of the *Vajrāvalī* was prepared in preparation for the event, but it is clear that it was a painting of the primary maṇḍala to be used in the rite (ŽP 18r.5-6).

³⁴ Jackson 2011: 96-8.

³⁵ The inscription, as given in Jackson 2011 (97) reads: phyogs su ’dzin pa ji snyed pa | de nyid mthong na grol ba’i phyir | phyogs grol zhes bya ba’i bla ma ni | gus pa yis ni bsten par gyis | paṇ chen gyi dgong rdzogs dang lo chen gyi thugs dam du nye gnas chen po sgri pa dge slong gis bzhengs [pa’i] lha [bzo] rog pa rtsa pa nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan gyis bgyis dge.

attempt has yet been made to bring all these diverse materials together in a single study of Vanaratna or his time period, a fact that renders our knowledge of Vanaratna’s life and his place in fifteenth-century South Asian and Himalayan Buddhism incomplete. Because of Vanaratna’s long and impactful engagement with Buddhist communities in Nepal and Tibet, there are undoubtedly more sources on Vanaratna’s life and times waiting to be discovered. Thus this study is not meant to be exhaustive, and is offered as an introduction to the available materials and as a preliminary assessment of the information they present us with.

Introducing Vanaratna (1384-1468)

Thanks to the careful work of his Tibetan biographers, Vanaratna’s narrative is presented accurately, faithfully, and in astonishing detail. The clarity we gain into his life and times begins with the important question of dates, for which we are generally on stable ground. A clear chronology of Vanaratna’s early life is provided in the *ŽP* by gZhon nu dpal, covering his youth in eastern India through his second journey to Tibet:

His Eminence left his homeland at the age of twenty-one and spent about eight months traveling to Siṃhala. He spent six years each in Siṃhala and Magadha, three years in South India, took two years to reach Western India,³⁶ and spent five years in Nepal.³⁷ Thus he was forty-three when he reached Tibet in the Year of the [Fire] Horse.³⁸

The Year of the Fire Horse,³⁹ which in this case falls within the seventh *rab byung* of the Tibetan calendrical cycle, corresponds to 1426/7. Given that Vanaratna was forty-three at the time, we can calculate the year of his birth as 1383/4, which aligns perfectly with his death at age eighty-five in 1468. The year and day of Vanaratna’s death are provided by two sources, the Tibetan biography composed by bSod nams rgya mtsho and the Nepalese *paubhā* (image 1) that dates to 1469 and contains an inscription commemorating Vanaratna’s passing.⁴⁰ Thus we can say with confidence that Vanaratna passed away at the age of eighty-five during the dark fortnight of Mārgaśīrṣā in Nepal Samvat 588, that is, November-December 1468. When these dates are coordinated with additional dates given in the Tibetan biographies and historical chronicles, we can chart a rough chronology for Vanaratna’s life and travels:

1384 - 1405	Born in Sadnagara; early training at Mahācaitya Vihāra
1405	Ocean voyage from Bengal (Chittagong?) to Sri Lanka via Kāveripāṭṭanam
1405/6 - 1411	Pilgrimage and study in Gampola-period Sri Lanka
1411 - 1414	Pilgrimage and study in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley

³⁶ The time it took Vanaratna to travel from Andhra to Magadha via Kapilavastu and Vārānaśī.

³⁷ Referring to the period of his first residency only.

³⁸ *ŽP* 14r.1-3: de la bdag nyid chen po ’dis dgung lo nyer geig pa la nyid kyi yul nas byung ste | singha’i gling du gshegs pa’i lam du bzla ba bryad tsam zhig dang singha’i gling dang ma ga dhar lo drug drug | rgya gar lho phyogs su lo gsum | rgya gar nub phyogs la lo gnyis su ma longs tsam zhig | bal por lo lnga mams bzhugs nas | nyid kyi dgung lo bzhi bcu rtsa gsum pa rta’i lo la bod du byon.

³⁹ Tib. *me lta’i lo*. Both recensions of the *ŽP* state that Vanaratna reached Tibet in the Year of the Horse. It is in the DÑ (21b.6) that the element is provided to confirm that the year was that of the Fire Horse.

⁴⁰ For this inscription and its translation, see Pal 1985: 236-7. His reading of the inscription, though generally sound, needs some reassessment, which will be provided in the Conclusion.

1414 - 1416	Overland travel to Magadha via Kapilavastu and Vārāṇasī
1416 - 1422	Residency in Magadha, primarily in the area around Bodh Gayā.
1423 - 1426	Reaches the Kathmandu Valley; first residency in Nepal
1426/7	First journey to Tibet
ca. 1427 - 1432	Second residency in Nepal
ca. 1432 - 1438	Second journey to Tibet, including a trip to Bhutan in 1436
1438 - 1453	Third residency in Nepal
1453 - 1455	Third and final journey to Tibet
1455 - 1468	Fourth residency in Nepal; dies in November-December 1468

As this timeline reveals, Vanaratna's career covered a vast amount of terrain and traversed a number of distinct Buddhist cultures. He was born and began his Buddhist training in the Sanskritic Buddhist culture of Sadnagara in far eastern India where, the biographies tell us, he studied a distinctly Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna curriculum at Mahācaitya Vihāra, the local monastery in or near Sadnagara. Despite the predominance of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism in his education, there is also a tangible Theravaṃsa⁴¹ influence in his early training, an influence likely due to Sadnagara's proximity to the kingdoms of Burma and Arakan. Vanaratna received full ordination into what was most likely the Mūlasarvāstivāda Nikāya⁴² at Mahācaitya Vihāra when he was twenty, around the same time he completed his studies and was named a *paṇḍita*. Shortly thereafter he left Sadnagara to continue his studies in Sri Lanka, where he spent a total of six years studying in the island's leading institutions and visiting some of its famed pilgrimage sites. After his long stay on the island, he left Sri Lanka to return to the mainland of the Indian subcontinent to seek opportunities in the rapidly fading Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhist communities there, first in south India and then in the north. After initially spending a few years in a small Buddhist community in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley of Andhra, Vanaratna attempted to establish his career at the heart of the Buddhist world, Bodh Gayā, but departed after six years of disappointment with the impoverished state of Buddhism there. Leaving the subcontinent for the Himalaya, he finally discovered in Nepal and Tibet the Buddhist communities he had long sought. With the support of their ecclesiastic and political leaders, Vanaratna embarked on a religious and literary career of great renown. Vanaratna certainly experienced struggles and setbacks along the way, but by the time of his passing in the Kathmandu Valley in 1468, his life and work was celebrated in both Nepal and Tibet, and he had influenced a generation of Buddhist masters there.

Vanaratna's career as a *paṇḍita* was shaped by the diverse Buddhist cultures he visited and the particular styles of Buddhism they promoted, but it was primarily defined by the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna culture of his youth and of the Himalayan Buddhist communities he later served. Despite discernible traces of Theravaṃsa influence in his early training at Sadnagara and especially in Sri Lanka, there is little evidence of its influence in his teachings or extant writings. During his early years as a teacher, a period largely bracketing his time in and around Bodh Gayā and his first stay in Nepal, he is only reported to have taught on exoteric Mahāyāna topics. It wasn't until his second residence in the Kathmandu Valley, in the 1430s, that he truly emerged as a

⁴¹ The use of this term, here specifically referring to the orthodox Buddhism of Sri Lanka's Mahāvihāra tradition, is briefly revisited in Chapter Two, p. 26 and note 6.

⁴² The clearest evidence we have for Vanaratna's ordination *nikāya* comes from a comment he made to the young Śākya mchog Idan (NTŚC 40r.6), in which he identified himself as belonging to the Sarvāstivāda Nikāya (*sde pa thams cad yod smra ba ka*) which, given the fact that the Sarvastivāda had disappeared as an independent *nikāya* by the fifteenth century, was almost surely meant as a reference to the Mūlasarvāstivāda Nikāya.

Vajrayāna master. It was at this time, during a stay at the Śāntipur Temple near the Svayambhū *stūpa*, that he had a transformative experience while receiving initiation into the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala. Though this scene is deeply couched in visionary language to the point of obscuring its historical realities, it points to the Kathmandu Valley as an important center of Vanaratna's Vajrayāna training, and it was perhaps here that he first truly gained the status of a *vajrācārya*.⁴³

Vanaratna's teaching and literary repertoire was grounded in the tantric cycles popular among the Newar Buddhists of the Kathmandu Valley, with the texts and practices of the Yogāmbara cult, Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa, and above all the Cakrasaṃvara systems being especially prominent.⁴⁴ As we have seen, Vanaratna's corpus is almost uniformly comprised of Vajrayāna ritual and meditation manuals for these systems, and reveals a distinct emphasis on the subtle-body yogas associated with the major Yoginī Tantra cycles. His collected works also include a number of hymns to the pantheon of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna deities popular in the Valley. If it is possible to identify Vanaratna's primary personal practice it would be the thirteen-deity maṇḍala of Cakrasaṃvara he received at Śāntipur, and specifically Vajrayoginī, the main female deity of the Cakrasaṃvara cycle, who is said to have been his primary meditation deity (Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*; Tib. *yiḍ dam*). Vanaratna was also renowned in Tibet as a Kālacakra master. He is reported to have taught often on the six-branch yoga (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*) of this system and offered initiations into the Kālacakra maṇḍala to Tibet's elite. His status as a master of the Kālacakra is thus curious for the fact that there is very little (but nonetheless some) trace of the Kālacakra system in his earlier narrative and in his extant writings.

The range of his travels and the scope of his activities place Vanaratna at the heart of the fifteenth-century South Asian and Himalayan Buddhist universe, a varied constellation of Buddhist communities spread across the region that still looked to Magadha as the source of their tradition, but which had for some time thrived as centers of their own distinctive Buddhist ecumenes connected to the wider Buddhist world through an array of geographical, political, and cultural networks. The historical realities of this Buddhist world reflected the broader realities of the period: South Asia and the Himalayan region were witnessing a period of political realignment, cultural transformation, and religious innovation. Buddhism, long in steep decline in the land of its birth, was under existential pressure from these forces and on the verge of disappearance from the Indian subcontinent. Beyond its ancient homeland, however, Buddhism continued to flourish in the cultures that were increasingly detached and distinct from the Buddhism of India. These broader historical dynamics not only informed, but were a driving force in Vanaratna's life.

Vanaratna in the "Lost" Fifteenth Century

Born at the end of the fourteenth century, Vanaratna came of age and established his career as a Buddhist *paṇḍita* entirely within the fifteenth century. For South Asia, and to some extent the Himalayan region as well, this was a time of great political upheaval and cultural change.⁴⁵ Often called the "lost fifteenth,"⁴⁶ it corresponds to a period that begins roughly with the collapse of the imperial Delhi Sultanate following Timur's invasion in 1398, and ends with the re-founding of the Mughal Dynasty in 1555 by Humāyūn.⁴⁷ Much like the fractious century following the collapse of

⁴³ This point will be discussed further in Part II. There is also clear evidence, omitted from his Tibetan biographies, that Vanaratna received Vajrayāna teachings and initiations while in Tibet, a topic examined in Part III.

⁴⁴ The significance of these systems and the other cycles Vanaratna emphasized to Newar Buddhists, as well as Vanaratna's contributions to them, will be discussed in detail in Part II.

⁴⁵ As will be discussed in Chapter Four and Five, Nepal was a clear exception to this pattern.

⁴⁶ On the use of this term for describing the period, see Orsini and Sheikh 2014.

⁴⁷ Orsini and Sheikh 2014: 1. This edited volume by Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh offers a comprehensive

the Gupta Empire in the sixth century, the dissolution of the Delhi Sultanate in the late 1390s ushered in a century-and-a-half-long period of decentralization, regionalization, and vernacularization, and witnessed the rise of populist religious movements that radically reshaped the political and spiritual landscape across the subcontinent.⁴⁸ Like other “dark” periods, this century earns its designation as “lost” not because of a lack of historical dynamism, but because of a relative absence of the kind of hard evidence—epigraphic, architectural, numismatic—that is produced by enduring, cosmopolitan political regimes, and which form the bedrock of historical scholarship. Despite the dearth of such evidence, the fifteenth century was nonetheless a remarkable time in South Asia and the Himalayan region, one in which religion, literature, the arts, social structures, and politics underwent dramatic transformation.⁴⁹ Vanaratna’s life and career unfolded against this backdrop of political instability and cultural renaissance,⁵⁰ and though our sources for his life do not explicitly record how he negotiated this fraught climate, the realities of fifteenth-century South Asia and Tibet are palpable in his biography. The evidence that Vanaratna’s life story provides us about these times will be explored in detail in subsequent chapters; what follows here is merely an introductory sketch of the larger forces and formations that lie behind his narrative.

A Treacherous Road

At all stages of his long career, Vanaratna had to navigate the shifting, sometimes dangerous political terrain of fifteenth-century South Asia and the Himalayan region. His was a time of high-volume circulation of the population as people traveled extensively seeking employment and economic opportunities, followed pilgrimage routes and religious festival circuits, and joined armies participating in the military adventurism of the period.⁵¹ Though the flow of people was largely unregulated and free, the political instability of the times meant that cross-country travel such as Vanaratna’s could be perilous if careful attention was not paid to regional hostilities. Vanaratna’s travels also took him through diverse linguistic regions, and it would appear that he negotiated these multilingual and diglossic cultures capably. He certainly leaned on his expertise in the Buddhist and Indic cosmopolitan languages of Sanskrit and Pāli, but he surely had some capacity in the colloquial languages of the Bengal delta, Andhra, and the Gangetic plain, the regions of the subcontinent where he spent the majority of his years before departing for the Himalaya. His six years in Sri Lanka likely also granted him some familiarity with Sinhala, and it seems apparent that he spoke Newari well and could translate from classical Tibetan to Sanskrit with reasonable proficiency.

Political intrigue and aggression can be felt in the background of Vanaratna’s narrative and occasionally erupts into full view, but for the most part he seems to have been deft at negotiating the geopolitical realities of the fifteenth century and to find his fortunes within them. Vanaratna’s birthplace, Sadnagara, sat in the shadow of the Ilyas Shāhī dynasty of the Bengal Sultanate, a former satellite of the Delhi Sultanate that wielded independent authority over the majority of the delta.⁵² The Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna culture at Sadnagara indicates that it once looked westwards to

presentation and analysis of this complex and dynamic period. The contributions it contains review the rich sources that are available, and thereby challenges the very notion of a “lost” fifteenth century.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 1, 3.

⁵⁰ The exception to this is fifteenth century Nepal, which from the reign of Jayasthitimalla through at least the reign of his grandson Jayayakṣamalla, witnessed a long period of relative political stability.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Eaton 1993: 40-41; Husain 1997: 34-36. During Vanaratna’s youth the Bengal Sultanate was enjoying a period of

the Bengal Delta and beyond for its Buddhist culture, and possibly its political fealty as well. Sadnagara appears to have once been in the orbit of the Buddhism-supporting kingdoms of the southeast delta, a series of regional houses that can loosely be referred to as Samataṭa. With the expansion of the Delhi Sultanate into Bengal in the thirteenth century, and the subsequent rule of the houses of the Bengal Sultanate, these kingdoms and their Buddhist culture rapidly contracted. This likely pushed Sadnagara, already at the boundary of the eastern India, into a closer cultural and political relationship with the Theravaṃsa kingdoms of Pagan and Ava and the thriving Buddhist culture in Burma's northern Irrawaddy Valley, and perhaps into the orbit of Buddhist Arakan to the south. The historical record suggests that Vanaratna's youth was generally peaceful, but that the broader region had begun to slide into instability by the time he left in 1405. Intrigue and conflict was a constant to the south in Arakan, which was passing through a period of political turmoil and warfare with Ava and Pegu, conflicts which occasionally spilled over into Bengal.⁵³ For the Ilyas Shāhī dynasty, the intrigues that led to the Rāja Ganeśa interregnum were beginning to take shape, and the brief restoration of the rule of the Brahmanical Devas in the southeast delta was on the horizon.⁵⁴ It is doubtful that regional instability was a catalyst for Vanaratna's departure Sadnagara—as we will see, it was more likely a family dispute and the lure of further Buddhist training that compelled him to leave—but Vanaratna was surely cognizant of the increasing unrest in region as he made his plans to leave his homeland.

When Vanaratna left home in 1405, he likely used his ties to the regional Theravaṃsa Buddhist community to open the door to his higher studies in Sri Lanka. Taking a ship from the Bengal coast, Vanaratna traveled via Kāveripāṭṭanam to southwest Sri Lanka, arriving during the volatile Gampola Period (c.1341-1415), a time when minor houses ruled over small, fluid territories.⁵⁵ The most prominent of these houses during Vanaratna's stay was the Alakeśvaras, who governed the kingdom through the puppet Gampola kings. Vanaratna's time in Sri Lanka was marked by constant court intrigue, a blockade of Kōṭṭē by the Chinese navy, the overthrow of the Alakeśvaras, and the installation of Parākramabāhu VI (1415-1467), the powerful king whose long reign finally brought stability and prosperity to the realm.⁵⁶ It is unknown to what degree Vanaratna was directly affected by these events, but there is evidence that he was in residence at Vīḍāgama Monastery at the same time that its abbot granted political asylum to the boy who would soon ascend the throne as Parākramabāhu VI.⁵⁷ Vanaratna would see nothing of the new monarch's reign, however, as he departed Sri Lanka in 1411, the year before Parākramabāhu VI's enthronement.

Returning to the mainland, Vanaratna's first destination was the Kṛṣṇa River Valley in Andhra, a region under the control the Redḍi dynasty that was facing existential threats from Vijayanagara to the west and the Gājapati-Gaṅgas and Bāhmani Sultanate to the north.⁵⁸ There is no indication from the biographies that Vanaratna's travels were affected by these conflicts, but they likely needed consideration when he planned his journey north. Vanaratna spent three years in the south of India, primarily in the vicinity of Amarāvātī but also in Śrī Parvata, whose precise location is not clear from the sources. When he left, he followed a northerly route that passed through the territory of former vassals of the Delhi Sultanate; from the little we know of his journey it likely took him through territory contested by Ghūrīds and Ahmed Shāhīs in the central

stability under thea Ilyas Shāhī dynasty (ca. 1342-1411), which ruled from Sonārgāon.

⁵³ Schwartzberg 1978: 43, plate 7; Berliet 2007: 29-30; Lieder 2004: 35-39.

⁵⁴ Eaton 1993: 54-55. Schwartzberg 1978: 43, plate 7.

⁵⁵ Ilangasinha 1972: 168.

⁵⁶ Holt 1991: 102. Ilangasinha 1972: 60-67; Ray 644-46.

⁵⁷ Holt 1991: 110. Nichols and Paranavitana 1961: 302-4.

⁵⁸ Asher and Talbot 2007: 55-56; Schwartzberg 1978: 39,

highlands, before turning eastwards and passing through the Sharqī Sultanate which frequently skirmished with the Delhi Sultans. His destination was Bodh Gayā, where he spent his final six years on the subcontinent. At this time Bodh Gayā appears to have oscillated between the control of the Sharqīs and the Ilyas Shāhī dynasty of Bengal,⁵⁹ but the biographies contain no indication of instability or open conflict, leaving Vanaratna to pursue his career in relative peace. The obstacles that ultimately prevented him from settling in the ancient Buddhist heartland were not political but religious. As described clearly in his biography, the Buddhist community there was small and unlearned, and the once grand monuments were in ruins, swallowed by jungle. Vanaratna thus decided to leave the subcontinent altogether and seek his fortunes in the Himalaya.

The remainder of Vanaratna's life, from the age of thirty-eight to eighty-five (1422-68) was spent in the Kathmandu Valley and central Tibet. Of the two, Nepal became his more permanent home, which he used as his base for his three journeys to Tibet. Vanaratna first reached the Kathmandu Valley at the end of the reign of Jayajyotirmalla (r. 1408-28), and spent the remainder of his life there under the rule of Jayayakṣmalla (r. 1428-82). Beginning with Jayajyotir's father, Jayasthitimalla (r. 1385-92), and continuing through the reign of Jayayakṣa, Nepal was a unified, stable, and prosperous kingdom at the height of its cultural and religious power. At times, Vanaratna's biography hints at external threats from the south, and the kingdom would splinter internally with the next generation of rulers, but all evidence suggests that Vanaratna's years in the Kathmandu Valley were peaceful, productive, and prosperous. Though his original intention was to use the Valley as a staging ground for his primary objective, a career in Tibet, the large Newar Buddhist community proved to be welcoming and enthusiastic patrons, and he eventually established his primary seat at Gopicandra Vihāra in Patan. In addition to his roles as teacher and *vajracārya* priest to the local Buddhist community, his biography depicts him as an influential *paṇḍita* at the royal court, an advisor to king Jayayakṣmalla, and occasional tutor to the crown princes.

As in Nepal, Vanaratna also formed strong ties to the religious and political authorities of Tibet. His strongest connections were with the monarchs of the Phag mo gru dynasty of the Yar klungs Valley, and specifically Grags pa 'byung gnas (1414-45) and his successor Kun dga' legs pa (r. 1448-82/3). Unlike the relative peace of the Kathmandu Valley, central Tibet witnessed significant intrigue, instability, and conflict during Vanaratna's tenure, much of which he saw first-hand. Though the Phag mo gru were stable and strong when he first arrived at court in 1426, fissures emerged in the ruling family during his second visit in the 1430s, initiating a steep decline in their power. When Vanaratna returned for a third time in 1453 the situation had developed into open conflict, so much so that he was diverted from his intended course to avoid an active warzone. Little of this is mentioned in Vanaratna's biographies, and it is only through the biographies of his students and other contemporary sources that we are aware of the instability and conflict. Vanaratna navigated the complex political landscape of Tibet with skill, and was rewarded with the veneration and patronage of many of Tibet's leading religious and literary figures of the day. Thus, on both sides of the Himalayan range, in Nepal and Tibet, Vanaratna had at last found the support of the Buddhist community he sought but failed to find on the Indian subcontinent.

Shifting Buddhist Ecumenes

Beyond describing the complex and often hazardous nature of the political landscape Vanaratna navigated, this brief sketch alludes to the motivation that compelled him on his long journey: his search for active, thriving Buddhist communities in which to train and serve. In fifteenth-century

⁵⁹ Diwakar 1959: 393-4; Schwartzberg 1978: 39, 194-95.

South Asia this was a challenging and complicated prospect; the traditional Buddhist networks of the Indian subcontinent had largely broken down and were replaced by constellations of Buddhist cultures encircling its historical homeland. Buddhism's fortunes continued to fade in India in the face of popular, vernacular religious movements led by charismatic yogis, sufis, and saints with a shared, if diversely inflected spiritual vocabulary. These religious movements often received the support of local Sultanates and smaller houses, whose patronage did not seem to extend to Buddhist communities. Buddhists were also largely excluded from the emerging religious marketplace that was proving lucrative through its *melās*, pilgrimage circuits, and temple culture.⁶⁰ Indian Buddhism, by contrast, was limited to small intellectually and economically impoverished communities whose once great monuments and pilgrimage centers had fallen into disrepair and neglect. These communities seemed to have little if any political support, and so were very much witnessing their final days. To add to the challenges he faced, Vanaratna was likely perceived as an outsider and perhaps even an interloper in the few Buddhist communities that did remain. Born in what may have been a tribal house on the periphery of the Indic cultural sphere, and the recipient of an elite foreign education in the rival Theravāṃsa tradition of Sri Lanka, Vanaratna was perhaps greeted with suspicion and defensiveness in the struggling Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna communities of the subcontinent.

Vanaratna may have been driven by his personal ambitions and spiritual aspirations, but his destinations were dictated by the shifting realities of Buddhism in fifteenth-century South Asia. The fact that the most vibrant Buddhist communities he found—first in Sri Lanka and then later in Nepal and Tibet—were all located on what could be considered the periphery of the historical Buddhist heartland illustrates these realities. Highly attenuated in its ancient homeland, Buddhism thrived in diverse cultures spread across Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and the Himalaya.⁶¹ Due to the political vicissitudes of the previous two centuries, these Buddhist cultures had grown both culturally and religiously distinct from their Indic Buddhist origins, and were becoming increasingly interconnected through the formation of new religious, mercantile, and pilgrimage networks. These networks reshaped the Buddhist world, opening up multiple centers of Buddhist thought and culture. Thus, for Vanaratna, the Buddhist world was not a single Buddhist ecumene centered in the north Indian Gangetic plains of Magadha, but one of plural ecumenes, many of which he visited over the course of his long career.

The idea of a Buddhist ecumene is borrowed here from the work of Geok Yian Goh,⁶² who defined the term as “a geo-spatial religious and political subsystem that exists within a larger Buddhist commonwealth or world-system.”⁶³ In the context of her research, this specifically applied to the political, cultural, and religious networks that encompassed Burma, Northern Thailand, and Sri Lanka in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries,⁶⁴ but this concept applies equally well to the South Asian and Himalayan networks within which Vanaratna operated. A Buddhist ecumene is, to borrow another scholarly paradigm, an “imagined community.”⁶⁵ It is the creation of writers, teachers, monastics, and lay devotees, is articulated through literary, artistic, and architectural motifs carried by merchants, monks, and pilgrims, and is implemented through

⁶⁰ Orsini and Sheikh 2014: 36-43.

⁶¹ The spread of thriving Buddhist cultures in the fifteenth century clearly extended well-beyond these geographical regions, especially into east Asia. But because these areas do not have an immediate impact on Vanaratna's career, they will not be discussed here.

⁶² Goh 2014: *passim*.

⁶³ Goh 2014: 493.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Goh temporally locates this ecumene specifically between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, but as Vanaratna's narrative suggests, parts if not all of these networks were active in his lifetime.

⁶⁵ Referring, of course to the theory originally advanced by Benedict Anderson (1983).

overlapping social, cultural, and political ideologies.⁶⁶ Reflecting the increasing regionalization and vernacularization that marked the period, much of Buddhist culture was communicated in local and regional dialects while remaining rooted the Buddhist cosmopolitan languages of Sanskrit and Pāli.⁶⁷ Shaped but not defined by geography, these multiple ecumenes had their own centers and peripheries, and together formed constellations within a more broadly mapped Buddhist universe. Each ecumene followed their own trajectory of development, renaissance, and decline due to the unique set of internal and external forces that influenced them, a fact clearly apparent in Vanaratna's journey through the Buddhist communities of the fifteenth centuries that were at dramatically different points in their trajectories.

An ecumene should not be understood as a clearly bounded geographical or cultural space with a single center from which cultural and political power spreads to the periphery. Finbarr Flood has challenged the center-periphery model of cultural circulation for its implication that culture diffuses from a “high” center to more culturally impoverished regions. In cosmopolitan cultures—be they religiously, politically, socially, or culturally cosmopolitan—transmission unfolds through complex processes of negotiation and mediation of shared formations, rather than a unilateral movement from center to edge.⁶⁸ The idea of an ecumene with identifiable centers, nodes, and peripheries need not entail such diffusionism; rather, the concept of a Buddhist ecumene can be used to describe the ideological orientation of a given community: did they regard themselves as the center of the ecumene, as the spiritual, religious, and cultural core of a broader geographical and cultural space, or did they look to another polity or society as the touchstone for their religious, political, and/or cultural values? We must also be sensitive to the shifting values of “center” and “periphery.” Vanaratna likely looked on the Buddhist cultures of Tibet and Nepal, for example, as a peripheral nodes of a Buddhist ecumene he experienced as centered in Bodh Gayā. For Vanaratna's many Nepalese and Tibetan colleagues, however, the Buddhist kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley and central Tibet were at the heart of their respective ecumenes, with India a mythic center now on the geographic and cultural periphery. As we explore the various ecumenes through which Vanaratna moved, we will see that each had their own centers and edges that often shifted and frequently overlapped. They were ecumenes located within distinct but connected networks, and were oriented to the broader Buddhist world based on a unique set of negotiations defined by its physical and ideological relationship to its Indic origins. Vanaratna's career traces the contours of multiple South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Himalayan Buddhist ecumenes. His narrative, articulated in diverse literary and material sources, allows us to follow him like a beacon illuminating the centers, peripheries, and pathways of these ecumenes, and thus bring into sharper relief the realities of the fifteenth-century Buddhist world.

The Tibetan Lotsāwas

As should be evident, Vanaratna's legacy was and is very much in Tibetan hands. Because the picture we have of his life and works, and the historical perspective it provides, comes down to us almost entirely through Tibetan literature, it is important to briefly introduce the key Tibetan agents behind the sources of Vanaratna's narrative. Three Tibetan masters, 'Gos Lotsāwa gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481), Khrims khang Lotsāwa bSod nams rgya mtsho and Chos 'khor Lotsāwa 'Jams dpal ye shes (d.u.) are almost entirely responsible for recording Vanaratna's life in their

⁶⁶ Goh 2014: 496-501.

⁶⁷ Goh 2014: 498.

⁶⁸ Flood 2009: 262.

rnam thars and for sustaining his spiritual legacy through their translations. Vanaratna met and worked with many of Tibet's luminary religious and literary figures, but it was the specific efforts of gZhon nu dpal, bSod nams rgya mtsho, and 'Jams dpal ye shes that make the life of Vanaratna accessible to us. Between them, these three *lotsāwas* composed the two most essential biographies, served as his oral interpreters, and translated nearly all of his extant corpus. The record of Vanaratna's religious and literary achievements is thus also a record of their religious and literary achievements, so this chapter will close with short biographies of these masters that focus on their relationships with Vanaratna and their efforts to preserve his legacy.

'Gos Lotsāwa gZhon nu dpal

It can be argued that among all of Vanaratna's students and colleagues in Tibet, none played as prominent a role in his activities or was more influential for his legacy than 'Gos Lotsāwa gZhon nu dpal. It was not through his work as a translator that he most directly served his Indian master, though his contributions as a *lotsāwa* are significant, but rather through his literary talents as Vanaratna's first biographer and through his influential position in the political and religious environment of central Tibet. His *ŹP* is a literary masterpiece, a work that not only reflects his immense learning and talent, but also the depth of his personal relationship with Vanaratna. Their closeness also manifested in a collaborative spirit that saw them prepare sixteen translations together, mostly while traveling across Tibet. gZhon nu dpal was also instrumental in facilitating much of Vanaratna's travel to and throughout Tibet; as one of the most prominent religious leaders and literary figures of his time, gZhon nu dpal was particularly well-positioned to ensure the success of the master to whom he appears genuinely devoted.

gZhon nu dpal was born in 1392, the year of the Male Water Monkey, in 'Phyong rgyas, located upriver from the Yar klungs Valley and the heart of the Phag mo gru kingdom.⁶⁹ Much of his early training took place at the Phag mo gru monastery of rTses thang, where he received full ordination at the age of nineteen,⁷⁰ and to which he would remain connected as both a student and teacher throughout his life.⁷¹ He traveled widely in central Tibet, studying and training with teachers of diverse sectarian backgrounds, an eclectic and impartial approach that would remain a hallmark of his later career and which makes it difficult to trace any precise doctrinal and sectarian allegiances in his work. As a bastion of the Phag mo gru religious community, he was deeply influenced by the lineages of the bKa' rgyud tradition, but he was also well-versed in the rNying ma, bKa' gdams, and Jo nang systems prominent in the region.⁷² He was particularly close to the abbots of the Phag mo gru monasteries of rTses thang and gDan sa mthil, bSod nams dpal rgyal mtshan bzang (1386-1434) and Ngag gi dbang po (1439-91) respectively.

gZhon nu dpal spent the majority of the 1420s and 30s among the Phag mo gru, splitting his time between gDan sa mthil and sNe'u gdong, teaching often and working on the numerous compositions that make up his oeuvre. He had a close relationship with the reigning monarch Grags pa 'byung gnas (1414-45), and often served as his personal attendant. It was in this context,

⁶⁹ NTŹP 4r.1; Mathes 2000: 132

⁷⁰ NTŹP 5v.3-6.

⁷¹ In the colophon to his translations of the *Vanaratnastotrasaptaka*, he refers to himself as the rTses thang *lotsāwa* (Tōh. 1177: 255v.3).

⁷² van der Kuijp 2006: 7-8; Mathes 2000: 139. Among the many prominent teachers gZhon nu dpal studied with, the foremost include the Sa skya master dMar ston gZhon rgyal (d.u.), Tsong kha pa (1357-1419), the Fifth Karma pa De bzhih gshegs pa (1384-1418), the Jo nang teacher Sangs rgyas rin chen (1339-1424), the rNying ma master Sangs rgyas rin chen (1350-1430), rGod phrug pa Grags pa 'byung gnas (1363-1447), and Ri mi 'bab pa bSod nams rin chen. See NTŹP 7r.4-11r.4, 15r.6-v.2, 18r.3-6, and 30v.5-31r.3

in 1432, that gZhon dpal first met Vanaratna. gZhon nu dpal was present when Vanaratna arrived in the retinue of Rang ston shes bya kun rig (1367-1449), and was among those at court who were initially skeptical of the *paṇḍita*'s qualifications. He eventually recognized the *paṇḍita*'s qualities, and became Vanaratna's lifelong student, colleague, and friend. Apart from the year 1435, which Vanaratna spent in Bhutan, gZhon nu dpal remained close to Vanaratna and often accompanied him on his travels around central Tibet. This gave gZhon nu dpal ample opportunity to receive teachings and personal advice, and to listen to Vanaratna's life story and compile the material that would eventually go into the *ŽP*.⁷³

The *ŽP* was composed sometime after Vanaratna departed Tibet at the end of his second trip in approximately 1438, thus all of the material that went into it must have been compiled between 1432-38, the approximate years of Vanaratna's second journey to Tibet. In the colophon to the *ŽP*, gZhon nu dpal writes that it was written at the encouragement of Nam mkha' bzang po (d.u.),⁷⁴ the governor of Yar 'brog, who appears to have made the request at the instigation of his own teacher Bo dong pa Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1376-1451).⁷⁵ We do not know the precise date that the *ŽP* was completed, but it seems to have been in circulation prior to Vanaratna's third visit to Tibet in 1453. Vanaratna was formally invited at that time by the young Phag mo gru monarch Kun dga' legs pa (1448-82/3), whose is reported to have developed faith in Vanaratna based on reading a textual account of his life story.⁷⁶ gZhon nu dpal was still close to the court at this time, and was a leading advocate for Vanaratna's invitation, thus it seems reasonable that it was also his *rnam thar* of Vanaratna that inspired the king.

Despite his poor health, gZhon nu dpal personally traveled across central and southern Tibet to secure support for Vanaratna's third visit from prominent political and religious leaders. He eventually formed a reception party and set out for the borderlands, where he would await Vanaratna's reply and arrival. gZhon nu dpal composed the invitation letter himself in Sanskrit and sent it to Nepal in the hands of seven companions. The letter, as translated into Tibetan in the *NTŽP*, reads:

I, Kumāraśrī,⁷⁷ devotedly bow at the lotus feet of the glorious and sublime guru whose compassion is boundless. I make this request to you: Lord, may your body, speech, and mind never waver from the innate state of bliss. This lucid petition [has been sent] so that we Tibetans may understand a tiny fraction of your qualities of body, speech, and mind that are equal to those of the buddhas. Specifically, the Dharma King Kun dga' legs pa has also developed great faith in you based on the stories he heard in the presence of the Dharma King Grags pa 'byung gnas which were rooted in true, heart-felt devotion. With that intense

⁷³ *NTŽP* 27r.1-27v.5.

⁷⁴ *ŽP* 32r.2-4: mtshan brjod par dka' ba dpal dlan bla ma dam pa thugs rje chen po can dri ma med pa'i ye shes mnga' ba'i kun du spyod pa mdo tsum du byas pa 'di ni | chos kyi rgyal po chen po phyogs thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba'i bka' lung dang | drung nam mkha' bzang po bas kyang dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'i rgyud dang 'grel ba'i glegs bam gnang nas bskul ba na chos smra ba'i brtsun pa gzhon nu dpal gyis yi ger bkod pa'o.

⁷⁵ The person referenced here is not entirely clear. The text reads *chos kyi rgyal po chen po phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba*, which, if read as an epithet, could refer to the Phag mo gru monarch Grags pa 'byung gnas, as put forward by Ehrhard (2000: 252, n. 14). However, Nam mkha' bzang po and his nephew Kun dga' rgyal mtshan were the close students and leading patrons of Bo dong pa Phyogs las rnam rgyal. There is no indication in *ŽP* that Bo dong pa met Vanaratna, but given the close relationship Vanaratna had to the Yar 'brog governors and the time he spent in the region, a meeting between them was certainly possible. It would not be surprising for Phyogs las rnam rgyal to encourage his students to commission gZhon nu dpal's *rnam thar* of Vanaratna, even if the two masters never met in person.

⁷⁶ *SG* 39v.6-7: bdag po sna po kun dga' legs pa'i zhal nas | gong nas snga ma mchog tu gus pa'i tshul dang | gzhan yang che ba'i yon tan mang po gsan dang | khyad par rnam thar gyi yi ge gzigs pa'i rkyen gyis shin tu thugs dad nas...

⁷⁷ Here gZhon nu dpal is referring to himself using his Sanskritized name.

faith, he has commanded a series of messengers to invite you. I, along with my students and attendants, hoped you would come last year, but most of our messengers never reached your presence, and until now you have not returned with those that did arrive, for whatever reasons. Over the past many days a letter, composed by the Precious Jewel (? : Kun dga' legs pa) has been shown to those from southern and northern La bstod, Rin dpungs, and sNe'u gdong. The precious Dharma King thinks it is not right that you have not yet returned to Tibet. Therefore, for the sake of this invitation, I and my disciples and attendants faithfully took up the cause, and at the command of the Dharma King Kun dga' legs pa, have reached southern La stod. Being overweight and no longer young, I cannot make the journey to Nepal. My students Nam mkha' dpal 'byor, bSod nams bkra shis, and bKra shis rgyal mtshan who have long-trained in the profound Dharma, have been sent into your presence, holder of the secret truth, with the invitation. Everyone, including the Dharma King Kun dga' legs pa, Nor bu bzangs po of Rin dpungs and his brother, and the two kings of northern and southern La stod ask for your compassionate guidance. Specifically, the king of Shal dkar said:

'For a long time now I have sent many fine items with the hope of inviting the Dharma Lord, and have supported many of the messengers sent from dBus, both previously and now. I felt a great sense of responsibility for the present reply, and am certain that the Dharma Lord will arrive as the guru Vajradhara. You must succeed in making the invitation at any cost, agreeing to whatever he offers in response.'

After he gave us this urgent directive and requisites for the journey, we left [Shal dkar] with the request that we return somehow, either through skill, strength, or magical power. You, Dharma Lord, know what we should do about the king of Bhaktapur. If we do not receive a reply, all of us—the kings and eminent people of dBus and gTsangs, as well as us, master and followers—will be disappointed. It will be difficult for us to invite you in the future, so please, in short, think of the teachings of the Buddha. Hold the faithful conduct of your patrons in your heart, and within the next twelve months send us word and we will come quickly by any means. When your message reaches us, we will come to receive and assist you from Shal dkar. So please think of us. On the twenty-sixth day of the eleventh month, this written request was offered from La stod sGang dkar. May all be happy and auspicious!"⁷⁸

⁷⁸ NTĀP 34v.1-35v.6: dpal ldan bla ma dam pa dmigs pa med pa'i thugs rje chen po can gyi zhabs kyi pad mar ku mā ra śrī gus par phyag bgyis te zhu ba | rje nyid sku gsung thugs bde ba chen po'i rang bzhin las g.yo ba med par bzhugs mchi | zhu yig gsel ba'i de na rje khyed kyi sku gsung thugs kyi yon tan sangs rgyas thams cad dang mnyam par bzhugs pa las de'i phyogs tsam zhig bod yul ba rnams kyis shes | khyad par chos kyi rgyal po grags pa 'byung gnas kyis thugs su chud nas gus pas brten pa'i gnam sku drung na yod pa rnams kyis zhus pa la brten | chos rgyal dkun dga' legs pa yang khyed la shin tu dad pas sbyan 'dren pa'i pho nya ba snga phyr mang du mngags | bdag slob 'bangs rnams kyang na nying nas phebs par re ba la | pho nya ba phal cher sku drung ma slob | slob pa rnams kyis kyang rkyen ci rigs la brten nas da bar ma phebs | kha sang nas nor bus de nas kyi bka' yig la stod lho byang | rin dpungs | sne gdong rnams su rim pas 'phrod | de la chos kyi rje rin po che khyed bod kyi yul du ci nas mi phebs su mi rung | nges pa kho nar spyang 'dren pa'i don du bdag dpon slob rnams kyi dad pas blangs | chos rgyal kun dga' legs pas kyang bka' lung gnang nas stod lho'i bar du slebs pa lags | bdag lus lci ba nyid kyi bzhon pa med par lam mi bgrod pas bal yul du ma slob na'ang bdag gi slob ma nam mkha' dpal 'byor bsod nams bkra shis | bkra shis rgyal mtshan rnams sngar nas zab chos gnang ba'i slob ma lags shing | gu hya artha dha ra nga shabs drung du spyang 'dren pa la btangs lags | de la chos rgyal kun dga' legs pa | rin dpungs nor bu bzang po sku mched | lho byang gi rgyal po gnyis dang bcas pa thams cad kyis thugs rtse gcig tu zhal ta'ang gnang | khyad par shal dkar rgyal pos | chos rje spyang 'dren pa'i don la snga

Vanaratna accepted this invitation, and arrived in Tibet for the final time in 1453. He and gZhon nu dpal were reunited in Ding ri, from where the Tibetan *lotsāwa* escorted his Indian teacher back to the Phag mo gru palace at sNe'u gdong. gZhon nu dpal remained at sNe'u gdong for Vanaratna's teachings and initiations, which lasted the better part of 1453 and 1454, and it was there they parted for the final time when Vanaratna began his journey home to Nepal.

The time gZhon nu dpal and Vanaratna spent together was productive; not only do we know that the ŽP began to take shape between 1430-38, it is also apparent from the biographies and colophons that most of their translations were collaborative and were completed during their travels together between 1432-38 and 1453-4. The years 1432-38 witnessed their translation of Sādhuputra's *Sekoddeśatippaṇī* (Tōh. 1352), which was prepared at bSam yas in 1436.⁷⁹ According to the NTŽP this was immediately followed by a focused period of translation activity while both Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal remained in residence sNe'u gdong.⁸⁰ This was likely when gZhon nu dpal translated a cluster of Hevajra sādhanas with Vanaratna, including Ḍombi Heruka's *Hevajrasādhana* (Tōh. 1232), Rāhulagupta's *Prakāśanāmaśrīhevajrasādhana* (Tōh. 1238), *Rūpyakalaśa's *Hevajrasādhanapañjikā* (1233), and Advayavajra's *Viśuddhinidhināmahevajrasādhana* (Tōh.1244). The colophons to both Tōh. 1238 and 1244 report they were translated by Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal at sNe'u gdong under king Grags pa 'byung gnas's patronage;⁸¹ the colophon to Tōh. 1232 states it was translated by the pair in the presence (*sbyan sngar*) of Grags pa 'byung gnas but does not state the location;⁸² and, the same colophon states that Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal relied on Tōh. 1234 when preparing their translation, suggesting it was translated at the same time. It was also possibly in this year that gZhon nu dpal and Vanaratna completed their translation of Vanaratna's *Rahasyapradīpakā* (Tōh. 1449), which Vanaratna taught earlier at rTses thang, but which the colophon indicates was translated at sNe'u gdong with Grags pa 'byung gnas's support.⁸³

Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal also used their time together in 1453-4 productively. Their collaborations resumed as soon as they were reunited in Ding ri, where they prepared their translation of Vanaratna's *Śabarapādaśtotraratna* (Tōh. 1176).⁸⁴ After Ding ri they proceeded to La stod where they were shown great hospitality by rNam rgyal Grags pa bzang po (1395-1475), the governor of Byang.⁸⁵ Though not reported in the NTŽP, this is possibly when gZhon nu dpal and Vanaratna prepared their translation of Ghaṅṅāpā's *Samvaropadeśa* (Öta. 4654), which was

phyir spyad dngos mang du gtang | dbus nas sleb pa'i pha nya ba snga phyi mang po'i 'thun rkyen yang sbyar | da lan kyang thugs khur shin tu che bar bsnams bla ma rdor 'dzin pa la chos rje nges par 'byon | khyed kyis kyang spyen 'dren pa'i khas blangs phul 'dug pa bzhin da lan ci kyang spyen 'dren thub pa gyis gsungs pa'i bka' lung nan can dgos cha dang bcas pa gnang brdzangs pa lags pas thabs dang stobs dang rdzu 'phrul gyi stobs kyis ci na'ang 'byon par zhu | khyad par | kho khom rgyal po'i phyogs la ji ltar bgyi ba yang chos rje nyid mkhyen pa lags | gal te da lan ma phebs na dbus gtsang gi rgyal po mi che ba bdag cag slob 'bangs thams cad yi mchad | phyis nas spyen 'dren pa yang shin tu dka' bar 'dug mdor na sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la dgongs | yon bdag mams kyi dad pa'i spyod lam thugs la bzhag nas zla ba bcu gnyis pa'i nang du phrin du phebs pa cig ci nas kyang byon byon | phrin du phebs dus shal dkar nas bsu ba dang zhab stog kyang yong par yod pas dgongs par zhu | zla ba bcu gcig pa'i nyi shu drug la la stod sgang dkar po nas phul ba'i zhu yig bde legs su gyur cig.

⁷⁹ NTŽP 27r.2-3; Tōh. 1352 302a.6-7.

⁸⁰ NTŽP 27r.6.

⁸¹ Tōh 1238 126r.7-126v.2; Tōh 1244 189.2-4. Grags pa 'byung gnas died in 1445, before Vanaratna returned to Tibet a third time. Thus even if this text was not translated together with Vanaratna in 1436, it would have been translated sometime between 1436 and 1445.

⁸² Tōh. 1232: 47v.7-48r.1.

⁸³ Tōh. 1449 348v.7-349r.3.

⁸⁴ NTŽP 36r.1; Tōh 1176 255r.3. This would later be revised by bSod nam rgya mtsho as Öta. 5102.

⁸⁵ NTŽP 36r.2-3.

translated at the request of the governor.⁸⁶ Shortly thereafter they reached gTsang rong ra nga, where both the NTŽP and the translator’s colophon corroborate their translation of Ghaṅtāpā’s *Samvaratrayodaśātmakārcanavidhi* (Ōta. 4655).⁸⁷ The NTŽP also tells us they translated Carpaṭi’s *Avalokiteśvarastuti* (Tōh. 2762) on the same occasion, but the text’s colophon offers no additional confirmation.

The translations known to have been, or likely to have been, translated by Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal in either 1430-38 or 1453-4 account for eleven of the sixteen translations attributed to them. Of the remaining five, only one provides information on its origin: the colophon to Tōh. 1489, gZhon nu dpal’s translation of Vanaratna’s *Trayodaśātmakāśrīcakrasaṃvaramaṇḍalavidhi* states that it was translated by gZhon nu dpal at bKra shis mgon pa in lJang, and was made at bSod nams rgya mtsho’s request.⁸⁸ gZhon nu dpal is known to have stayed at this hermitage in lJang in approximately 1464, and it is reported that bSod nam rgya mtsho visited him there at that time,⁸⁹ which would suggest that in at least this one instance gZhon nu dpal translated a work by Vanaratna independent of the *paṇḍita*. Vanaratna’s *Acalābhisamaya* (Tōh. 1783) may also have been translated at a later date, as it is said to have been sponsored by Amoghasiddhi, or ‘Jigs med ’bangs of Yar ’brog (d.u.), who did not emerge as a patron of gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho until after Vanaratna’s final departure. This leaves only two of gZhon nu dpal’s translations—Vanaratna’s *Pañcarakṣārcanavidhi* (Tōh. 3128) and the *Navagrahavidhi* (Tōh. 3129)—unaccounted for in the Tibetan biographies.

Among the Tibetan *lotsāwas* with whom Vanaratna worked, gZhon nu dpal appears to have had the weakest ability in Sanskrit, but he was nonetheless a gifted translator. Though his translations are not always accurate, they are consistently highly literate and elegantly composed. The imprecision in some of his work may be the reason that bSod nams rgya mtsho revised three of gZhon nu dpal’s translations, including Vanaratna’s *Trayodaśātmakāśrīcakrasaṃvaramaṇḍalavidhi* (Ōta 4651) and *Śabarapādastotraratna* (Ōta. 5043), and Āditya’s *Vanaratnastotrasaptaka* (Tōh. 1177/Ōta. 5101).⁹⁰ bSod nams rgya mtsho’s revisions of gZhon nu dpal’s work caused some consternation in the community, as revealed in an anecdote from the NTSG: bSod nams rgya mtsho was revising gZhon nu dpal’s translation of the *Śabarapādastotraratna* in Lho brag when some ill-intentioned monks spread a rumor that gZhon nu dpal was unhappy with bSod nam rgya mtsho’s efforts. bSod nams rgya mtsho was distressed at the news, and wanted to abandon the project, but word had reached gZhon nu dpal, who promptly composed a letter supporting his student and extolling the importance of revision.⁹¹ In this and similar ways gZhon nu dpal showed unwavering support to his student, despite their sometimes competing roles in the translation and preservation of Vanaratna’s legacy.

gZhon nu dpal died in 1481 at the age of eighty-eight,⁹² thirteen years after the death of his Indian master. Vanaratna had close relationships with his other translator-disciples, bSod nams rgya

⁸⁶ Ōta. 4654 215r.7-215v.2.

⁸⁷ NTŽP 36v.1-2. Ōta. 4655 256v.6-7.

⁸⁸ Tōh. 1489 155v.6-7.

⁸⁹ Ehrhard 2002a: 63.

⁹⁰ As discussed below, bSod nams rgya mtsho also retranslated or revised many of ’Jam dpal ye shes’s translations with Vanaratna.

⁹¹ NTSG^b 370.3: paṅ chen rin po ches mdzad pa’i sha ba ri’i bstod pa rin po che’i ’gyur bcos kyang nang pa’i skabs der gra pa sems gya gyur spyod pa dag gis bcos nas | sha ba ri’i bstod pa’i ’gyur bcos mdzad pa la | rje ’gos kyi zhal snga nas ma dgyed pa ’dug zer ba gsan pas | de ma thag ’gyur bcos mdzad pa’i dpe mams bsodus te | bla ma de’i dgongs yul du mi ’bab na cis kyang dgos pa med gsung nas dpe mams med par mdzad rtsis kyi lo rgyus rnams rje ’gos kyi gsan nas | tshul de lta bu’i thugs dgongs ’khrung yod pa ’dra | bdag la slob ma ’gyur bcos pher ba byung ba de ’dod chos can yin pas | ’gyur bcos mdzad pa nyid kyi phrin las slpel ba rigs gsung ba’i bka’ shog phebs.

⁹² NTŽP 73v.3-4.

mtsho and 'Jam dpal ye shes, but he seems to have held gZhon nu dpal in especially high regard. Nowhere is this more evident than in statement recorded in the NTŽP, where Vanaratna declares gZhon nu dpal to be among the most gifted masters he met anywhere in South Asia and the Himalaya. Chos grags Ye shes writes:

Vanaratna once said, “I have visited about two-thirds of Jambudvīpa, and found that the great *paṇḍita* Maṇuṣāsūrya has the greatest knowledge. After him, I have not found anyone who has greater knowledge than Kumāraśrī.”⁹³

Khrims khang Lotsāwa bSod nams rgya mtsho

Khrims khang Lotsāwa bSod nams rgya mtsho entered Vanaratna's life at a rather late date, which is surprising considering the influence he would have on Vanaratna's legacy. Whereas Vanaratna first met 'Jam dpal ye shes in 1426 and gZhon nu dpal in 1430, bSod nams rgya mtsho does not enter the frame until 1453, the beginning of Vanaratna's final journey to Tibet. bSod nams rgya mtsho was nonetheless immediately integrated into Vanaratna's entourage, and accompanied the *paṇḍita* for the remainder of his final visit to central and southern Tibet. They began collaborating on translations during this time, and after Vanaratna departed Tibet in 1455, bSod nam rgya mtsho became a prominent translator of his texts and exponent of his teachings. bSod nams rgya mtsho would eventually travel to the Kathmandu Valley to meet with Vanaratna near the end of the *paṇḍita*'s life, an experience that was both transformative for him personally, and deeply informative for the biography he would compose on his teacher's life. Following Vanaratna's death in 1468, bSod nams rgya mtsho continued his efforts to preserve and promote Vanaratna's legacy through his translation and teaching efforts, as the custodian of Vanaratna's relics, and through his composition of the SG.

bSod nams rgya mtsho's life is told in great detail in Chos grags ye she's NTSG, which was written in 1482, shortly after bSod nams rgya mtsho passed away.⁹⁴ He was born as dPal 'byor rgya mtsho in 1424 in bTsan thang, located in the lower reaches of the Yar klungs Valley.⁹⁵ Thus like gZhon nu dpal, his early life and training unfolded within and was closely tied to the Phag mo gru kingdom. He took novice ordination at the age of seven when attending Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367-1449) at bSam yas,⁹⁶ and received full ordination in 1447 with gZhon nu dpal in the role of *karmācārya* (*las kyi slob dpon*).⁹⁷ His common epithet, Khrims khang Lotsāwa, is derived from his family associations with the Khrims khang temple at bSam yas, where his grandfather was caretaker.⁹⁸

After early training with his father at bTsan thang, bSam yas, and elsewhere around Lha sa, bSod nams rgya mtsho formally entered the monastic college at rTses thang in 1436. He quickly attracted the attention of the king, Grags pa 'byung gnas (1414-45), who personally sponsored his studies.⁹⁹ Their close relationship brought the young student into the orbit of the court, and the

⁹³ Kūmaraśrī is, of course, gZhon nu dpal. On the Indian *paṇḍita* Maṇuṣāsūrya see Ch. Three. NTŽP 27v.4: paṅ chen rin po che'i zhal nas ngas dzambu'i gling gi sum gnyis tsam du phyin pa la paṅḍi ta chen po mi'i nyi ma shes rab che bar mthong | de'i 'og na ku mā ra śrī las shes rab che ba ma mthong zhes gsung ba yang zer.

⁹⁴ NTSG^b 458.6-7. See also Ehrhard 2002a: 27-8.

⁹⁵ NTSG^a 5r.1-4.

⁹⁶ NTSG^a 6r.4-v.1.

⁹⁷ NTSG^a 24v.5-25r.1.

⁹⁸ NTSG^a 4r.1-4.

⁹⁹ NTSG^a 9v.4-11v.5.

many eminent masters who frequented it.¹⁰⁰ Among them were his two most important Tibetan teachers, gZhon nu dpal and *mahopādhyāya* Kun dga' rgyal mtshan of rTses thang.¹⁰¹ Both these masters had already been deeply influenced by Vanaratna, and so imparted the teachings and practices of the Indian *paṇḍita* to their disciple. They separately passed on to him a number of Vanaratna's instruction lineages, and encouraged him to find an opportunity to study with the *paṇḍita*.¹⁰² gZhon nu dpal is quoted telling his disciple:

If you seek the definitive [transmission of] the six yogas, there is really no other choice but to serve the precious great *paṇḍita*. It's still possible he may come to Tibet again, but if he doesn't it would be good to go to Nepal.¹⁰³

The opportunity to meet Vanaratna finally came in 1453 when the *paṇḍita* accepted Kun dga' legs pa's invitation and returned to Tibet a final time. Vanaratna had already arrived at the Phag mo gru court by the time bSod nams rgya mtsho reached sNe'u gdong, and bSod nams rgya mtsho reported feeling immediate, overwhelming devotion upon meeting him. He joined Vanaratna's teachings to the general assembly, but also quickly developed a personal connection with him.¹⁰⁴ As with gZhon nu dpal, they began their fruitful collaboration almost immediately. In 1453/4, the year Vanaratna spent among the Phag mo gru, bSod nams rgya mtsho served as his ritual assistant,¹⁰⁵ personal attendant, and translation colleague. At sNe'u gdong they prepared a translation of what is likely Vanaratna's *Vajravilāsinīvajravārāhīsādhana* (Tōh. 1602),¹⁰⁶ and began working on a translation of Nāgārjuna's *Vajraprañidhāna* (Tōh. 4384) at the Kun bzang nags khrod hermitage above gDan sa mthil.¹⁰⁷ bSod nams rgya mtsho also escorted Vanaratna around central Tibet during a lengthy side trip in 1454, including a visit to bSod nams rgya mtsho's ancestral shrine at bSam yas, Khrimis khang gling.¹⁰⁸

When, at the end of 1454, Vanaratna departed sNe'u gdong for his return journey to Nepal, bSod nams rgya mtsho accompanied him and continued to serve him in numerous capacities. While en route they worked on a number of their translations, including two unnamed texts at Byams pa gling,¹⁰⁹ as well as Herukadeva's *Pratipattisāraśatakavivaraṇa* (Tōh. 2335), Koṭālipā's *Ātmayoga* (Tōh. 2339), and Carpaṭi's *Sarvasiddhikara* (Tōh. 2340) at Ngam ring, all in conjunction with Vanaratna's instructions.¹¹⁰ During their travels bSod nams rgya mtsho also

¹⁰⁰ Ehrhard 2000a: 37.

¹⁰¹ bSod nams rgya mtsho also studied with a number of other prominent masters throughout central Tibet, including Rang ston Shes bya kun rigs, Dwags po bKra shis nram rgyal (1399-1458), dMar ston rGyal mtshan 'od zer (d.u.), and Gu śrī Don grub 'od zer (d.u.) of mTshur pu.

¹⁰² NTSG^a 23r.6-24r.2; 30r.3-6.

¹⁰³ NTSG^a 24r.1-2: khyed nges par sbyor drug don du gnyer na | paṇ chen rin po che la bsnyen pa las gzhan pa'i gnas gang yang med | da dung bod du phebs pa'ang srid dam | ma phebs na bal por yang bgrod rigs pa.

¹⁰⁴ NTSG^a 40v.2-4.

¹⁰⁵ NTSG^a 42v.1-2. At sNe'u gdong bSod nam rgya mtsho helped Vanaratna prepare the maṇḍala of Mañjuvajra from the *Vajrāvalī* for use in the full initiation he offered into the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*.

¹⁰⁶ NTSG^a 40v.6-41r.1. This would be the first of six revisions or retranlations of a work previously translated by 'Jam dpal ye shes.

¹⁰⁷ NTSG^a 41r.1-2; NTSG^b 308.11-12. They continued to work on this translation during Vanaratna's return journey to Nepal the following year.

¹⁰⁸ NTSG^a 41r.3-5.

¹⁰⁹ NTSG^a 42v.1. Neither the NTSG nor the colophons of any of the extant translations indicate they were translated by bSod nams rgya mtsho at Byams pa gling. We do know that Vanaratna translated a number of texts with the abbot of Byams pa gling, bSod nams nram rgyal, but there is no clear record of the texts Vanaratna and bSod nam rgya mtsho translated on this occasion.

¹¹⁰ NTSG^b 308.17-19. The colophon for Tōh 2335 confirms that it was translated in Ngam ring: [299v.2-3: rgya gar

continued to act, as he did at sNe'u gdong, as Vanaratna's ritual assistant. The NTSG specifically reports that he prepared the maṇḍala for a Cakrasaṃvara initiation Vanaratna conferred on the Rin spung governor Nor bu bzang po (1403-66) at bSam grub rtse.¹¹¹ He also acted as Vanaratna's personal attendant and occasional oral translator throughout this period of travel.¹¹²

During their travels bSod nams rgya mtsho also continued a practice he began at sNe'u gdong of taking notes on Vanaratna's oral instructions.¹¹³ Among numerous general statements in this regard, the NTSG specifically mentions that he produced notes for Vanaratna's teachings on the four initiations at Byams pa gling, practical notes for participants in the initiatory rites for a nine-deity maṇḍala of Amitāyus given at Lhun grub lha rtse, and teaching notes on Vanaratna's instructions on the *śaḍaṅgayoga* at sNa dkar rtse.¹¹⁴ None of these notes are presently available, but we may get a hint of bSod nams rgya mtsho's note-taking activities in a collection of Vanaratna's favorite citations that he compiled. The *Grub pa'i dbang phyug paṇḍita ta chen po śrī va na ratna'i zhal lung rin po che'i snying po'i phreng ba* consists of a bilingual collection of Indic citations frequently taught or recited by Vanaratna when teaching on specific topics.¹¹⁵ The NTSG describes the conditions under which it was compiled, a description that also attests to the closeness between the *paṇḍita* and his Tibetan disciple:

He would hear [Vanaratna] use a few different *ślokas* from Indian *paṇḍitas* and *siddhas* to establish a spiritual connection with the many religious masters he met on the road, and so would translate them just as he heard them. He would also [hear Vanaratna] recite them in the mornings and evenings, when resting, oiling his feet, and so forth at stops along the way. He translated them immediately, and compiled them in a volume with the title *An Arrangement of Precious and Essential Saying of the Sublime Dharma*.¹¹⁶

The NTSG also gives us some insight into bSod nams rgya mtsho's Sanskrit training. None of the available sources detail when or with whom he began studying Sanskrit, but it is apparent that his studies continued under Vanaratna. In one of his translator colophons he credits his (self-professed) limited knowledge of Sanskrit to Vanaratna's kindness,¹¹⁷ and he is known to have trained in Sanskrit while in Vanaratna's company. The NTSG mentions that, while traveling between stops, bSod nams rgya mtsho would use the time to practice Sanskrit meters aloud by

shar phyogs sadnagara'i paṇḍita chen po śrī va na ratna'i zhal sngar | dge slong chos smra ba bsod nams rgya mtsho sde zhes bya bas dpal ngam ring gi yang rtser mnyan zhing bsgyur ba las | physis legs bar brtags shing zhus te gtan la phab pa'o.

¹¹¹ NTSG^a 44r.5-6; NTSG^b 308.8-12. It was not always easy to perform this work. bSod nams rgya mtsho spent the evening before the initiation drawing the maṇḍala, only to see it partially damaged during the ordinary morning busyness at the monastery. The NTSG tells us that bSod nams rgya mtsho repaired it during breakfast so that the initiation could continue as scheduled.

¹¹² bSod nams rgya mtsho would step in when 'Jam dpal ye shes was "unable translate." The implications of this statement will be examined in the following section.

¹¹³ NTSG^a 40v.2-4.

¹¹⁴ NTSG^a 42v.2-4; 43r. 1.

¹¹⁵ Ōta 5096. In the NTSG it is referred to with the title *Zhal lung rin po che'i snying po dam pa'i cho lo sgrigs*.

¹¹⁶ NTSG 308.13-17: lam de dag tu dge ba'i bshes gnyen mang po la chos 'brel du 'phags yul gyi paṇ grub nmams kyi ślo ka re tsam gngang ba nmams ji ltar gsan pa dang | snga rgongs gzims chung nmams su zhabs byug dang sku mnyel phul ba'i dus sogs su gngang ba nmams 'phral du bsgyar bar mdzad nas | zhal lung rin po che'i snying po dam pa'i cho lo sgrigs shes bya bas'i bstan bcos kyi lus su sgrig pa gngang.

¹¹⁷ Tōh. 4384 316.3-4: rgya gar shar phyogs kyi paṇḍita chen po dngos grub brnyes pa'i dbang phyug dpal nags kyi rin chen gyi zhal snga nas dang | de nyid kyi bka' drin las legs par sbyar pa'i tshul cung zad rig pa | dge slong chos smra ba bsod nams rgya mtsho'i sde zhes bya bas dpal kun tu bzang po'i nags khrod du bsgyur ba'o.

singing the different melodies of the *Śabarapādastotra*.¹¹⁸ bSod nams rgya mtsho's interests in Sanskrit metrics is also attested by his descriptions, quoted in the NTSG, of the meters Vanaratna would use in his Sanskrit compositions. Through him we know, for example, that Vanaratna composed the *Śabarapādastotra* using a series of interconnected verses in the *indravajra*, *upendravajra*, *puṣpitāgra*, and *mālinī* meters,¹¹⁹ and he informs us that Vanaratna's *Buddhastavadaśa* was composed entirely in the *toṭaka* meter.¹²⁰ Thus it is only through bSod nams rgya mtsho's keen literary sensibilities that we gain valuable information about Vanaratna's poetic style that otherwise was completely lost in translation.

bSod nams rgya mtsho escorted Vanaratna all the way to Chu bar on the Tibet-Nepal border, and would have continued on to Nepal with him had Vanaratna not forbidden it.¹²¹ Instead he returned to Tibet and sent messages to Vanaratna from time to time in hopes that a future trip could be arranged. Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho kept in regular contact in the decade after their parting, corresponding through letters carried between them by the many merchants and pilgrims who traveled between central Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley. We have two of these letters—one concerning Vanaratna's safe arrival in Nepal and another requesting advice about the route bSod nam rgya mtsho should take on his own journey to Nepal—and know from the NTSG that a handful of additional letters passed between them.¹²² One such letter included a copy of a new work by Vanaratna, the *Gaṇeśvarastāva* (Tōh. 1175), which bSod nams rgya mtsho immediately translated and put into practice.¹²³ Another letter contained a gift from Vanaratna, a protective talisman of Vajravārāhī.¹²⁴ Most of the letters, however, concerned either invitations requesting Vanaratna to make a fourth visit to Tibet, which never materialized,¹²⁵ or seeking Vanaratna's permission for his own journey to Nepal.¹²⁶

Between the years of 1455 and 1465, when he would finally reunite with Vanaratna in Nepal, bSod nams rgya mtsho's stature as both a religious and literary master in Tibet grew exponentially. He developed an eclectic and non-sectarian repertoire of texts and teachings, and won the patronage of many of central Tibet's political and religious leaders. Among the many connections he cultivated in these years, the most significant for both his personal career and his stewardship of Vanaratna's legacy was his relationship with the ruling family of Yar 'brog, the governor (*drung*) Nam mkha' bzang po (d.u.) and his nephew, the *khrid dpon* Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (c.1425-c.1478). In the years that followed Vanaratna's final departure from Tibet, bSod

¹¹⁸ NTSG^b 308.12-13.

¹¹⁹ SG 37v.2-3: dpal sha ba ra dbang phyug gi bstod pa rin po che zhes bya ba | dbang po rdo rje dang | nye dbang rdo rje dang | mchod pa'i me tog dang | phreng ba can gyi sdeb sbyor rnam kyis rim par bcing pa'i snyan ngag...

¹²⁰ NTSG^b 312.9-10.

¹²¹ NTSG^b 308.19-309.10.

¹²² In total we have four letters written by bSod nams rgya mtsho to Vanaratna, but two of them are to Vanaratna's reincarnation, rather than the Indian master himself. These letters, published in Ehrhard 2002a-b will be examined more closely in Part III.

¹²³ NTSG^b 314.22-3. The translator's colophon confirms bSod nams rgya mtsho as the translator, and also describes the text as a gift from Vanaratna sent to him from Patan. [Tōh 1175 253v.2-4: slob dpon dpal nags kyi rin chen zhabs kyis mdzad pa yang dag par gang ba'o | 'di ni dngos grub brnyes pa'i dbang phyug paṇḍita chen po de nyid kyis dpal bal po yul gyi grong khyer chen po ye rang gi dgon pa śrī go bi candra nas | dngos grub mchog gi bka' drin gyis btsa' ba'i phyir skye su stsal ba | dge slong rnal 'byor spyod pa rgya mtsho'i sde shes bya ba'i spyi bor thob pa las | mi 'phrog pa'i gus pa dang yid dga' ba mu med pas | skal pa chen po'i snyim par gzung zhing yi dam du bgyis te | nor bu rgyas pa'i gtsug lag khang chen por bod kyi skad du bsgyur nas gzhan la'ang sbyin par bya ba'i chos su bgyis pa'o.

¹²⁴ NTSG^b 340.8-10.

¹²⁵ NTSG^b 331.1-8. In addition to Vanaratna's reluctance to make the journey, bSod nams rgya mtsho had trouble securing royal permission for Vanaratna's return. It seems that despite being favorably disposed to the visit initially, the Phag mo gru monarch Kun dga' legs pa cooled to the idea and withdrew his support.

¹²⁶ NTSG^b 329.3-8; 341.18-21.

nams rgya mtsho spent an increasing amount of time at sNa dkar rtse deepening his relationship with this influential family. In addition to offering him significant financial and institutional support, it was Nam mkha' bzang po and Kun dga' rgyal mtshan who encouraged bSod nams rgya mtsho (as they did gZhon nu dpal before him) to compose his *rnam thar* of Vanaratna.¹²⁷ Perhaps more influential for bSod nams rgya mtsho's career was the support he received from Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's younger brother, a man named 'Jigs med 'bangs (d.u.), who was more commonly known as Amoghasiddhi.¹²⁸ Amoghasiddhi became a lifelong patron of bSod nams rgya mtsho, supporting him in all aspects of his religious works, including his efforts to translate and transmit Vanaratna's teachings. Amoghasiddhi is listed as the patron for one of bSod nams rgya mtsho's translations,¹²⁹ and along with his brother and uncle, supported bSod nams rgya mtsho's travel to Nepal.¹³⁰ In honor of their support, bSod nams rgya mtsho is reported to have sought advice on their behalf from Vanaratna while in Nepal, and to have shared the *pañḍita's* words and teachings with them upon his return.¹³¹

The influence of Vanaratna is clearly felt in bSod nams rgya mtsho's teaching and literary endeavors during this period. Between the years 1455 and 1465 bSod nams rgya mtsho translated Vanaratna's *Buddhastavadaśa* at bSam yas, the *Ganeśvarastotra* mentioned above, the *Kramadvayavajravārāhīstora* (Tōh. 1603),¹³² a series of *dohas* not by Vanaratna but translated based on his instructions,¹³³ and a series of *ślokas* Vanaratna composed to accompany a painting of the Sixteen Elders (*gnas brtan bcu drug gi ras bris*).¹³⁴ He prepared the last translation in this list at the request of his patrons at Rin dpungs while in residence there. On this same occasion he also fulfilled their request to draw a set of *Vajrāvalī* maṇḍalas based specifically on Vanaratna's lineage.¹³⁵ Despite their short time together, Vanaratna's influence on bSod nams rgya mtsho was strong, and he was committed to preserving the *pañḍita's* legacy in Tibet, but bSod nams rgya mtsho was not settled with the idea of never seeing his guru again. Thus when it was clear Vanaratna would not cross the Himalayan range a fourth time, he set in motion his plans to travel to Nepal and meet Vanaratna there.

In 1465 bSod nams rgya mtsho finally received a letter from Vanaratna consenting to his visit to Nepal.¹³⁶ bSod nams rgya mtsho and his party set out immediately, reaching Chu bar and the border the same year. From there they followed an eastern route that Vanaratna had advised in the same letter, a route that was arduous and life-threatening despite Vanaratna's assurances otherwise. The route passed through Listi,¹³⁷ and took them up frigid mountain passes and down through

¹²⁷ SG 60v.3-6.

¹²⁸ NTSG^b 328.6.

¹²⁹ The *Kramadvayavajravārāhīstora* (Tōh. 1603), a revision of 'Jam dpal ye shes's work.

¹³⁰ NTSG^b 345.7-15. In addition to giving bSod nams rgya mtsho provisions for his journey, the ruling family of Yar 'brog agreed to store his precious collection of Sanskrit manuscripts while he was away. In an amusing anecdote, the *khrid dpon* Kun dga' rgyal mtshan was concerned that bSod nams rgya mtsho would not have sufficient access to tea while in Nepal, and so to avert such a calamity, gave him a large amount of tea suffused with molasses. [345.13-15: nang so khrid dpon pas kyang lam gyi rkyen du 'byor ba'i zhabs tog dang | khyad par bal por gsol ja mi thub na 'o rgyal po 'ong gsung nas ja mang po'i khu ba khan dar sgril ba'i rul bu mang du phul.]

¹³¹ NTSG^b 367.25-368.1; 370.3-4.

¹³² NTSG^b 328.17.

¹³³ NTSG^b 320.21-24. The translation in question appears to have been lost.

¹³⁴ NTSG^b 310.13-17. We have no record of this translation, but we do have a similar set of translations bSod nams rgya mtsho made based Vanaratna's verses connected to a painting of the *Trayodaśātmaka* Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala, the *bLa ma'i bris thang rgyab yig bzhugs* (Öta. 4607).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ For the images of the handwritten copy of this bilingual letter, see Ehrhard 2002(b): 1-4. For a transcription of the Sanskrit and Tibetan text, as well as a translation, see Ehrhard 2002(a): 101-3 and 109.

¹³⁷ Tib. *li ti*. This is likely approximate with modern Listikot, which is located above the Bhote Kosi in

sweltering, precipitous ravines. Because of these dangers the track was free of bandits, but it often required them to negotiate vertical cliff faces made passable only by rickety ladders and the natural lattices of tree roots. bSod nams rgya mtsho and his party eventually reached Dolakhā, where they made a short rest in Charikot.¹³⁸ From there their travels went smoothly, and they were treated with kindness and respect along the way.¹³⁹ Their onward journey to the Kathmandu Valley included a stop among the Temal,¹⁴⁰ a people with whom Vanaratna had established close ties. bSod nams rgya mtsho was received warmly there, and they performed a *gaṇacakra* together before he continued on to the Kathmandu Valley.¹⁴¹

After this long and at times difficult journey, bSod nams rgya mtsho and his entourage finally arrived in the Kathmandu Valley at Bhaktapur. The fact that bSod nams rgya mtsho traveled to Nepal and spent the better part of a year there has tremendous bearing on the detail and nuance of his biography of Vanaratna, the SG. Not only did he have firsthand knowledge of the events he narrated from the year of his visit, his experiences from that time deeply informed his accounts of the earlier periods in Vanaratna’s life in the Kathmandu Valley he did not witness. Though bSod nams rgya mtsho went to Nepal expressly to visit his guru, while there he often traveled around the Valley independently and established his own relationships with the local Buddhist community and the Kathmandu Valley nobility. Thus, when we contrast his highly detailed narrative with the largely superficial and succinct accounts of Nepal offered by gZhon nu dpal in the *ŽP*, it is easy to see not only gSod nams rgya mtsho’s greater familiarity with Nepal, but perhaps a greater affinity for it as well. His experiences there inform not only the narrative he wrote for the SG, but also the many stories he told his disciple Chos grags ye shes, who recorded them in remarkable detail in the NTSG. Taken together, the SG and NTSG thus provide an outstanding view into the religious and political culture of fifteenth-century Nepal.¹⁴²

Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho were quickly reunited at the *paṇḍita*’s seat at Gopicandra Vihāra, a joyful encounter bSod nams rgya mtsho captured in verse:

I disregarded the hard trials of travel,
 And made my way to the distant land of Nepal.
 With just a glimpse of your face I brightened,
 Experiencing devotion so that our minds mixed as one.
 Upon merely hearing your voice I lost my composure,
 And for a moment lost focus, collapsing in a swoon.¹⁴³

Sindhupulchowk, near the border with Tibet. Given that it was called the “eastern route” in Vanaratna’s letter, it likely departed from the eastern bank of the river, and progressed through the peaks and ravines to the southeast towards Dholakhā, and to Charikot, which is also mentioned in this passage of the NTSG.

¹³⁸ The town of this name is presently the district headquarters of the Bhimeshwar Municipality, which is the same district containing Dolakhā.

¹³⁹ In Charikot the local ruler was a man named Jate (*ja te*) who doubled as the a tax collector for the kingdom of Nepal. He was known to extract high levies on Tibetan travelers, but he treated bSod nams rgya mtsho with unexpected fairness (NTSG^b 351.13-15).

¹⁴⁰ *Te mal*. Possibly the modern Timal or Temal of Kavrepalanchowk District to the east of the Kathmandu Valley. This area is still an active Buddhist pilgrimage site, with many caves associated with Buddhist masters, particularly Padmasambhava. We will discuss the people of Temal and their relationship with Vanaratna in more detail in Part II, but suffice it to say here that the people of Temal visited Vanaratna in Patan often, and would escort him along the road between the Kathmandu Valley and Tibet. It was their chieftain whom Jayayakṣamalla entrusted with Vanaratna’s relics after his cremation in 1468.

¹⁴¹ NTSG^b 352.5-8.

¹⁴² About which more will be said in Chapter Five.

¹⁴³ NTSG^b 352.25-353.7: lam bgrod dka’i sdug bsngal khyad bsad nas | sa thag ring bal po’i yul du bsnyegs | zhal mthong ba tsam gyis snang bar ’gyur | yid gcig tu ’dres pa’i mos gus syes | gsung thos pa tsam gyis rang tshugs shor |

After offerings were made and pleasantries exchanged, Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho wasted no time in reestablishing their spiritual connection and resuming their literary collaborations. Vanaratna offered his Tibetan disciple a number of teachings and initiations, including instruction on his personal practice of the six yogas and a full initiation into the thirteen-deity Cakrasamvara maṇḍala.¹⁴⁴ They performed numerous *ganacakras* at Gopicandra, and distributed the feast offerings to the local community.

bSod nams rgya mtsho's time Kathmandu was extremely productive from a literary point of view. Taking advantage of his limited time with his guru, he and Vanaratna are reported to have collaborated on a new translation of the *paṇḍita's Trayodaśātmakaśrīcakrasamvaramaṇḍalavidhi* (Ōta. 4651),¹⁴⁵ which seems to have been prepared in conjunction with the initiation mentioned above. Around the same time they also prepared a translation of Vanaratna's hymn to Avalokiteśvara, the *Lokeśvarastavaratnamālā*,¹⁴⁶ and a praise to the *paṇḍita*, the *Vanaratnastotrasaptaka*,¹⁴⁷ composed by Āditya.¹⁴⁸ bSod nams rgya mtsho had also brought at least one translation question for Vanaratna from gZhon nu dpal.¹⁴⁹ gZhon nu spal was curious about some extraneous verses he found in one of Vanaratna's texts, and asked bSod nams rgya mtsho to clarify the text with the *paṇḍita* when meeting him in Nepal.¹⁵⁰ We are unfortunately not told the resolution of his issue, but the scene again demonstrates the collegiality that existed between bSod nams rgya mtsho and gZhon nu dpal, a relationship that could easily have become competitive and contentious as they vied to uphold Vanaratna's legacy.

bSod nams rgya mtsho's year in the Kathmandu Valley was thus productive and personally enriching. He was able to meet Vanaratna a final time, receive the teachings and initiations he desired, and work on a number of his translations at the feet of his guru. Beyond these more intimate experiences between teacher and student, bSod nams rgya mtsho made a strong impression on the population, and earned the admiration of many influential people, including two of the Bhaktapur princes and other local officials.¹⁵¹ Finding such a conducive and fruitful environment in the Kathmandu Valley, bSod nams rgya mtsho wished to remain there with his teacher, but Vanaratna encouraged him to return to Tibet and carry out his religious activities there. In early 1466 he said his final farewells to Vanaratna and returned to Tibet via Dolakhā and Chu bar.

Once back in Tibet, bSod nams rgya mtsho spent the remaining sixteen years of his life alternating between periods of retreat and composition and extensive travel throughout southern and central Tibet. During this time, he continued to dedicate himself to preserving Vanaratna's

yid gtad med du brgyal ba dar cig byung.

¹⁴⁴ NTSG^b 354.4-23.

¹⁴⁵ This is a retranslation of a text previously translated by Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal (Tōh. 1489).

¹⁴⁶ Toh 1174. The colophon of the Tibetan translation confirms that this was translated by bSod nams rgya mtsho at Gopicandra Vihāra in Patan.

¹⁴⁷ The colophon confirms the occasion: "In the presence of the very object of this praise, the great *paṇḍita* himself, this was translated by the vagabond they call rGya mtsho sde at Gopicandra Vihāra, a petal of the glorious city of Patan in Nepal. It was later revised slightly." [Ōta. 5101 135r.2-3: bstod pa'i yul dam pa paṇḍi ta chen po de nyid kyi spyang sngar dā ri drang rgya mtsho sde zhes bya bas yul ye rang gi grong khyer chen po'i 'dab dpal go pi candra'i gtsug lha khang de bsgyur ba las cung zad kyang bcos.]

¹⁴⁸ More details concerning Āditya's identity will be presented in Chapter Five.

¹⁴⁹ NTSG^b 353.23-5.

¹⁵⁰ The instruction in question is on the yogic practice of joining the tip of the tongue with the palette (*Ice rtse rkan sbyar*). This could be referring to Śabaripā's *Hṛdayavajrapāda* (Tōh. 1378), a text on this topic translated by bSod nams rgya mtsho.

¹⁵¹ NTSG^b 357.22-358.

legacy through his translation work and the transmission of Vanaratna's instruction lineages. Between bSod nams rgya mtsho's return to Tibet and his death in 1482 his engagement with Vanaratna's corpus seems to have intensified. As we have already discussed above, it was in this period that he retranslated Vanaratna's *Śabarapāḍastotraratna*. It was also in this period, in 1468 to be precise, that he translated a series of verses Vanaratna composed for lineage masters of the *Trayodaśātamaka* maṇḍala of Cakrasaṃvara, collection of *ślokas* preserved in the *bLa ma'i bris thang rgyab yig bzhugs* (Öta. 4607). During this latter period of his life bSod nams seemed to take a particular interest in Vanaratna's lineage of a two-faced form of Vajravārāhi. Though we cannot link this practice to a specific text in Vanaratna's extant corpus, bSod nams rgya mtsho is said to have given teachings and initiations into it once in Tsa ri,¹⁵² once at Yar rgyab in the Dol Valley,¹⁵³ and once at Byams pa gling.¹⁵⁴ He even composed his own *homa* rite connected to this practice.¹⁵⁵ On the same occasion that he gave these teachings at Yar rgyab he also taught more broadly from the lineages he received from Vanaratna, including an *utpannakrama* practice of Vajravārāhi, the thirteen-deity Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala, Nāgārjuna's *sādhana* for the four-armed Mahākāla, Āryadeva's *Pratipattisāraśataka*, as well as the practices of Dhumāṅgārī, Ugratārā, and the five goddesses of long life (*tshē ring mched lnga*).¹⁵⁶ He would also incorporate Vanaratna's instructions into his own compositions, as he did when writing his commentary on Vāgīśvarakīrti's system of Cakrasaṃvara.¹⁵⁷

We do not know precisely when bSod nams rgya mtsho completed the SG. The NTSG reports that bSod nams rgya mtsho gave a reading transmission for an “arrangement of two biographies of the precious great *paṇḍita*” at Lho brag in the early months of 1468,¹⁵⁸ a statement that Ehrhard suggests “obviously refers to the account of Vanaratna's life written by 'Gos lot-sā-ba and its continuation from the pen of bSod-nams-rgya-mtsho.”¹⁵⁹ We can be confident, however, that the SG was not yet fully complete at this time, as it was only many months later that bSod nams rgya mtsho learned of Vanaratna's passing. The news was brought to him along with Vanaratna's relics by a Tibetan named 'Phags pa bstan 'phel who present at Vanaratna's cremation,¹⁶⁰ and who was entrusted to bring a portion of Vanaratna's relics to bSod nams rgya mtsho in Tibet. 'Phags pa bstan 'phel and other members of his party provided bSod nams rgya mtsho with oral and written accounts that he explicitly states he used to complete the SG.¹⁶¹ Thus while it was likely the case that much of the SG was complete by 1468, it did not reach its final form until sometime in 1469. This does not preclude the possibility that bSod nams rgya mtsho transmitted the SG in 1468 as suggested by Ehrhard, but it would be surprising for him to transmit a text he had not yet finished writing.

Though he had already had a premonition of Vanaratna's death,¹⁶² bSod nams rgya mtsho was profoundly affected by the news, and immediately clasped the relics to his heart. After meditating on them for some time he wrapped them up, fixed them with a seal, and commanded that seal should not be broken for three years.¹⁶³ His command was followed, thus it was years later when

¹⁵² NTSG^b 382.11.

¹⁵³ NTSG^b 422.12-22.

¹⁵⁴ NTSG^b 434.20.

¹⁵⁵ NTSG^b 429.9-10.

¹⁵⁶ NTSG^b 422.12-22.

¹⁵⁷ NTSG^b 427.12-13.

¹⁵⁸ NTSG^b 372.23-4: paṇ chen rin po che'i nam thar gnyis pa rnam sgrig pa gñang.

¹⁵⁹ Ehrhard 2002: 76.

¹⁶⁰ NTSG^b 376.22-24.

¹⁶¹ SG 59r.3-4.

¹⁶² NTSG^b 371.16-372.13.

¹⁶³ NTSG^b 376.24-377.4.

bSod nams rgya mtsho finally broke the seal and distributed the relics, which he did at Byams pa gling monastery, a site important to Vanaratna's narrative and home to Vanaratna's close disciple, the Byams gling *paṇ chen* bSod nams rnam rgyal.¹⁶⁴

In late 1478, word reached bSod nams rgya mtsho that a reincarnation of Vanaratna reincarnation was discovered in Nepal, prompting him to send messengers to determine if this was true. After they returned and confirmed the accounts, bSod nams rgya mtsho and the young reincarnation began an exchange of letters and gifts that lasted for two years, from 1479 to 1481. We have copies of the two letters bSod nams rgya mtsho sent to the rebirth of his master, but unfortunately none of his replies. We do know from the NTSG, however, that the boy sent bSod nams rgya mtsho some of the items of his predecessor, including Dharma robes and ritual implements connected with the deity Acala.¹⁶⁵ They would unfortunately never meet, and nothing else is known of Vanaratna's reincarnation.¹⁶⁶

The final years of bSod nams rgya mtsho's life were largely spent at his personal retreat house in Yar rgyab. During this time he often dreamt of the *paṇḍita*, and the NTSG reports that a fine painting was made based on the content of his dreams.¹⁶⁷ It was during these years that he first met his future biographer, the fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos grags ye shes, who from this point onwards makes frequent appearances in his own NTSG.¹⁶⁸ As his death approached, bSod nams rgya mtsho was moved to Lhun grub lha rtse in the Dol Valley, and was given a small cottage where Vanaratna had previously stayed and where bSod nams rgya mtsho had received much personal guidance from him.¹⁶⁹ It was here, in this cell once occupied by his Indian guru, that bSod nams rgya mtsho passed away in 1482. Chos grags ye shes presided over his teacher's cremation in Yar rgyab and composed a hymn in his memory.¹⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter, at Lhun grub lha rtse in Yar rgyab, Chos grags ye shes composed the NTSG, completing it in just two months.

All available evidence identifies bSod nams rgya mtsho as a man of great literary talents. As a linguist he had mastered Sanskrit, perhaps better than his peers among Vanaratna's students. Altogether he translated (or revised translations of) twelve of Vanaratna's own works and twelve canonical texts, making him Vanaratna's most prolific collaborator. An accomplished author and teacher, he wove the instructions and lineages of his guru into his own repertoire, thereby preserving not only Vanaratna's words but the living lineage of his practices. And, with his masterful command of literary Tibetan and his astute historical sensibility, he crafted the SG, a masterpiece of the *rnam thar* genre. Of bSod nams rgya mtsho's literary abilities Chos grags ye shes fittingly writes:

“His Eminence [bSod nams rgya mtsho] had thoroughly mastered both word and meaning, and was a great scholar and peerless translator. His translations were therefore both excellent and accurate. Discerning people would praise him, saying, “It didn't even matter if the Sanskrit text was composed well or poorly, it is impossible for this Lord to produce a poor translation.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁴ NTSG^b 391.4-6. Byams pa gling and bSod nams rnam par rgyal ba will be introduced in Chapter Seven.

¹⁶⁵ NTSG^b 430.3-431.1.

¹⁶⁶ We will explore the implications of Vanaratna's reincarnation in the Conclusion.

¹⁶⁷ NTSG^b 429.10-430.3

¹⁶⁸ Erhard 2002(a): 93-97.

¹⁶⁹ NTSG^b 455.11-18.

¹⁷⁰ Ehrhard 2002(a): 27.

¹⁷¹ NTSG^a 43r.4-5: dam pa 'di ni dgra don dpyis phyin pa bsgyur ba la zla med pa'i mkhas pa chen po yin pas | 'gyur ba gnang ba rnam kyang ches bzang zhing don dang 'byor bar nang la | rgya dzhung gi rtsom pa bzang ngan ci byung yang | tje 'dis 'gyur gnang phyin legs po min pa mi srid pa 'dug ces gnas 'dir blo gros 'jug pa thams cad bsngags par byed do.

Far less is known about Chos 'khor Lotsāwa 'Jam dpal ye shes than gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho, but that does not diminish his significance for Vanaratna's legacy. Also known as sTag tshang Lotsāwa and by his Sanskrit name Mañjuśrījñāna, 'Jam dpal ye shes makes only rare appearances in the biographical literature, but his impression on Vanaratna's activities is nonetheless tangible. His primary role was as Vanaratna's oral translator, a service he performed for the majority of Vanaratna's career in Tibet, but they also collaborated on textual translations of six of the *paṇḍita's* compositions and six canonical texts. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, among Vanaratna's three *lotsāwas*, 'Jam dpal ye shes was the most instrumental in first securing Vanaratna's fortunes in Tibet.

What we know of 'Jam dpal ye shes comes from the *bLa chen chos dpal bzang po 'i rnam thar* (NTCZ),¹⁷² a biography he composed about one of his own teachers, Chos dpal bzang po (1371-1439) of rDzong dkar in Gung thang. 'Jam dpal ye shes's precise dates are uncertain, but we know he first met Vanaratna in 1426 while a student at sTag tshang chos 'khor sgang in central Tibet, and that he was still living as late as 1478, when he is reported to have conferred ordination on a member of the royal family of Gung thang.¹⁷³ Thus it is safe to assume his life encompassed much of the fifteenth century, but likely not beyond. In an autobiographical passage in the NTCZ we learn that 'Jam dpal ye shes studied at the monasteries of Bo dong and Shab dpal ldings in central Tibet. At the latter he trained extensively in the literary arts under Drung Lotsāwa Thugs rjes dpal bzang po (d.u.). From the ŽP we know that he was already a resident of sTag tshang chos 'khor gang when he traveled to meet Vanaratna, but it is not clear when his association with the monastery began or how long he was affiliated with it. The fact that he was known by the titles sTag tshang Lotsāwa and Chos 'khor Lotsāwa suggests it was a significant association.

The first meeting between Vanaratna and 'Jam dpal ye shes occurred in 1426, near the end of Vanaratna's first journey to Tibet. Vanaratna considered this first trip a failure in large part because he was unable to establish connections with the royal patrons and religious leaders as he had hoped. The key reason for this, as stated in the ŽP,¹⁷⁴ was his lack of an oral translator capable of communicating on more than a transactional level.¹⁷⁵ Without a translator skilled in the higher registers of Sanskrit needed to impart teachings, he could only engage in small talk, and so was regarded as little more than a curiosity by the many influential Tibetans he met. The language barrier is explicitly pointed out as the reason he did not make a stronger impression on the Phag mo gru monarch Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1374-42) when they met in 1426.¹⁷⁶ This would be their only meeting, and though Vanaratna would go on to form strong relations with the next two throneholders, he felt this important initial opportunity had been squandered.

Dejected by his failed aspirations, Vanaratna was on his way back to Nepal when he paused at rGyal rtse. While there, word of the Indian *paṇḍita's* return reached the nearby monastery of

¹⁷² This Tibetan master and his *rnam thar* are studied in Ehrhard 2017. It contains a passage several folios in length describing 'Jam dpal ye shes experiences with Vanaratna in and around sKyid rong and between sKyid rong and the Kathmandu Valley, This material will be discussed in more detail in Part II.

¹⁷³ Ehrhard 2017: 4.

¹⁷⁴ ŽP 14v.6-15r.3.

¹⁷⁵ Early in Vanaratna's first journey to Tibet, Si tu rab brtan kun bzangs (1389-1442), ruler of rGyal rtse, provided Vanaratna with a translator who was "knowledgeable in a number of colloquial languages," but as is clear from the remaining description of that journey, this unnamed translator's abilities were insufficient in the more formal, religious contexts in which Vanaratna frequently found himself. [ŽP 14v.2-3: phyag phyir lo tsā wa 'ng 'phral skad du ma re shes pa gcig btang nas...]

¹⁷⁶ ŽP 14v.3-6.

sTag tshang chos 'khor sgang, prompting Seng ge rgyal mtshan to send his pupil, 'Jam dpal ye shes, to rGyal rtse to study under Vanaratna.¹⁷⁷ Seng ge rgyal mtshan told him, “Because you know grammar well, go see the exceptionally eminent *paṇḍita* who is currently staying in Nyang stod, serve him, and learn from him.”¹⁷⁸ Heeding his teacher’s advice, he duly set out for rGyal rtse and entered Vanaratna’s service, thus beginning a relationship that would last for the *paṇḍita*’s entire career in Tibet. In the NTCZ, 'Jam dpal ye shes reports that he immediately began training in translation arts under Vanaratna and mastered translation terminology (*skad dod*) within three months. Vanaratna was delighted, and is said to have remarked, “Finally, my translator has arrived.”¹⁷⁹ 'Jam dpal ye shes also confirms what is clear from the ŽP and SG, that he served as Vanaratna’s translator for all of his teachings and activities in dBus and gTsang.¹⁸⁰ By all accounts 'Jam dpal ye shes and Vanaratna formed a close relationship. Even gZhon nu dpal remarked on their connection; discussing Vanaratna’s return to Tibet in 1432, he writes:

The *lotsāwa* Mañjuśrī came to meet His Eminence. The *lotsāwa* regarded His Eminence as an actual buddha and had strong faith in him. He would translate conversationally when the need arose, and could translate scripture. His Eminence, for his part, was very fond of him.¹⁸¹

After reuniting immediately upon Vanaratna’s return in 1430, 'Jam dpal ye shes escorted the *paṇḍita* to Srin po Ri where they met up with Rong ston Shes bya kun rig. From there Vanaratna and 'Jam dpal ye shes traveled in Rong ston’s entourage to the Phag mo gru court, where Vanaratna finally made the connection with a Tibetan king he had long hoped for, now with the assistance of 'Jam dpal ye shes.¹⁸² The *lotsāwa* remained Vanaratna’s constant companion and primary Tibetan voice for the entirety of his second, highly successful journey across central Tibet, and when Vanaratna left for Nepal at the end that visit, 'Jam dpal ye shes escorted him from sKyid grong all the way to Patan in the Kathmandu Valley.¹⁸³ When Vanaratna returned in 1453 'Jam dpal ye shes immediately went to meet him in La stod, and remained with him throughout his final years in Tibet.¹⁸⁴

One gets the impression that the bulk of their work together was completed between the years 1430 and 1438; bSod nams rgya mtsho revised a significant number of 'Jam dpal ye shes’s translations, indicating they were completed prior to his work with Vanaratna which began in 1455. There seems to have been some tension between bSod nams rgya mtsho and 'Jam dpal ye shes, at

¹⁷⁷ Little information available about Seng ge rgyal mtshan, apart from the fact he was abbot of Chos 'khor sgang in the fifteenth century. Chos 'khor sgang was a Sa skya monastery founded in gTsang in the fourteenth century by Lo chen sKyabs mchog dpal bzang (Ehrhard 2004: 248, note 8; 2015: 4, note 5).

¹⁷⁸ ŽP 14v.6-15r.2: de'i tshe chos 'khor sgang nas rin po che seng ge rgyal mtshan pas lo tsa ba mañju śrī la | khyed kyis sgra legs po shes pas myang stod na paṇ chen khyed par 'phags pa gcig bzhugs yod 'dug pa'i drung du song la zhabs tog dang slob gnyer gyis gsung nas gnang sbyin mdzad de brdzangs | khong gis kyang gsung bzhin du paṇ chen bod du bzhugs ring lo tsa mdzad.

¹⁷⁹ NTCZ 31v.3-5: da 'dis nged rang gi lo tsa ba yong pa 'dug gsung nas thugs dges tshor mdzad pa byung.

¹⁸⁰ NTCZ 31v.5-6. gZhon nu dpal also explicitly notes that 'Jam dpal ye shes served as Vanaratna’s translator for his entire time in Tibet (ŽP 15v.2)

¹⁸¹ ŽP 16r.3-5: de'i tshe lo tsa ba mañju śris kyang bdag nyid chen po'i sku mdun du phebs | lo tsa ba yang bdag nyid chen po sangs rgyas dngos kyis 'du shes dang ldan pa'i dad pa brtan zhing 'phral phan tshun skabs su bab pa'i gleng slangs pa dang | bstan bcos bsgyur ba gnyis ka la zhabs tog tu 'gyur ba zhis snang zhing | bdag nyid chen po yang shin tu thugs kyis 'dzin par 'dug.

¹⁸² ŽP 16r.6-16v.4

¹⁸³ NTCZ 33r.2-5. When they parted in the Kathmandu Valley, Vanaratna gave 'Jam dpal ye shes a large painting (*thang ka*) of the Kālacakra maṇḍala as a gesture of appreciation.

¹⁸⁴ NTZP 36r.1.

least from bSod nams rgya mtsho's side. In one passage from the NTSG he is quite critical of 'Jam dpal ye shes's abilities, considering him a colloquial translator incapable of handling advanced teachings.¹⁸⁵

[At sNa dkar rtse bSod nams rgya mtsho] acted as translator when Chos 'khor Lotsāwa was unable to translate. He said, "That translator is proficient with the colloquial language, as if he spent a lot of time with common yogis (*jo ki rnams*). But because he doesn't know anything at all about the general structure of Buddhist scripture and relies entirely on terminological equivalents (*skad dod*), the meaning is lost. Thus I served as translator when higher scriptural teachings were given."¹⁸⁶

bSod nam rgya mtsho's opinion of 'Jam dpal ye shes almost certainly informed his decision to revise many of the latter's translations. Altogether bSod nams rgya mtsho revised or retranslated half of 'Jam dpal ye shes's known translations, three of Vanaratna's works and three of their canonical translations.¹⁸⁷ Whatever bSod nams rgya mtsho's agenda, his assessment of 'Jam dpal ye shes seems harsh. 'Jam dpal ye shes appears to have been a learned and respected *lotsāwa* in fifteenth-century central Tibet, one who served Vanaratna continuously in a number of demanding and high-profile settings. The translations he composed with Vanaratna read like the work of a capable and knowledgeable translation, and his only other known work, the NTCZ, shows the signs of an accomplished scholar and author.

After Vanaratna left Tibet for the final time in 1455, 'Jam dpal ye shes continued to cultivate his connection to rDzong dkar in Gung thang, and with the religious and political leaders there. Biographical data is sparse, but it appears he had begun studying closely with Chos dpal bzang po when he returned from escorting Vanaratna to Nepal in 1438 and continued his tutelage until the master passed away in 1439. After Chos dpal bzang po's death he remained at rDzong dkar until 1442 at the wish of its ruler, Khri Lha dbang rgyal mtshan.¹⁸⁸ Only then did he return to central Tibet, where he was residing when word reached him in 1453 that Vanaratna had returned and that his services were needed again. It is likely that 'Jam dpal ye shes once again visited Gung thang after Vanaratna's final departure. He completed Chos dpal bzang po's *rnam thar* there in 1466, which Ehrhard reasonably speculates he wrote primarily at rDzong dkar, and is known to have given precepts to members of the royal family in 1478.

Lasting from their first meeting in 1426 until Vanaratna's final departure in 1455, 'Jam dpal ye shes's relationship with the *paṇḍita* was longer and more constant than that of his other major collaborators, gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho. While 'Jam dpal ye shes did not seem to achieve the same religious and literary status as those *lotsāwas* in the crowded environment of fifteenth-century central Tibet, his integral role in Vanaratna's success is undeniable. As Vanaratna's primary oral translator, and as a translator of Vanaratna's compositions, the bulk of 'Jam dpal ye shes literary output spoke with Vanaratna's voice. Thus, for many of Tibet's preeminent figures of the time, 'Jam dpal ye shes was the primary channel through which their

¹⁸⁵ Despite Chos grags ye shes's incorporation of this quote in the NTSG, he remarks in the NTŽP that gZhon nu dpal had to briefly act as a Dharma translator when 'Jam dpal ye shes has not yet arrived in 1453. This suggests that Vanaratna preferred Jam dpal ye shes as his Dharma translator as well as interpreter. (NTŽP 36r.1-2).

¹⁸⁶ NTSG^a 43r.2-4: der chos 'khor lo tsa bas 'gyur ma thub pa nams la lo tsa yang mdzad | bka' las kyang | lo tsa ba khong 'phral skad la ches byang ba jo ki rnams dang 'dres 'gro ba lta bu yod na'ang | chos che ba bsgyur ba la gsung rab spyi'i babs rgyus yod pa cig med na skad 'dod rkyang pas don mi 'byor 'dug pas | gsung chos babs che ba rnams gnang ba'i lo tsa bdag gis byas pa yin gsung.

¹⁸⁷ Ōta. 3106/4666, Ōta. 4843, Tōh. 1489/Ōta. 4651, Tōh. 2716, Tōh. 1603, Tōh. 1727/28.

¹⁸⁸ Ehrhard 2017: 20.

connections with the *paṇḍita* were established and sustained.

Structure of the Study

The study of Vanaratna's life and works that follows is divided into three parts corresponding to the three broad geographical areas in which Vanaratna's narrative unfolds. The chapters in each section follow the relative chronology of his narrative, but because of the overlap between Vanaratna's years in Nepal and Tibet, that chronology is not strictly observed. Part I covers Vanaratna's early years in Sadnagara and east India (Chapter One), his first ocean voyage and six years in Sri Lanka (Chapter Two), and his return to the mainland and subsequent residencies in Andhra and Magadha (Chapter Three). Part II focuses entirely on Vanaratna's time in the Kathmandu Valley and the religious and political relationships he formed there (Chapters Four and Five). Part III covers Vanaratna's three journeys to Tibet, first by providing a narrative and historical overview of his first two journeys (Chapter Six) before presenting a close study of the Vanaratna Codex and the picture it gives us of Vanaratna third and final trip to Tibet (Chapter Seven). This study concludes with an account of Vanaratna's last year and death in the Kathmandu Valley, and a final assessment of his life and deeds (Conclusion).

The study of Vanaratna presented here covers eighty-four years of the fifteenth century and encompasses eastern India, Sri Lanka, southern, central, and northern India, the Kathmandu Valley, the Himalayan range, and the Tibet plateau. Vanaratna's narrative that unfolds over this long period and across this vast terrain is told in an equally extensive body of materials that includes textual, material, and art-historical sources. The texts that inform us are composed in multiple languages, cover numerous genres, and are the products of diverse literary and religious communities. Likewise, the art-historical and material witnesses are expressions of multiple styles, crafted with diverse media, and are the products of distinct cultures. Given the vast scope of time, territory, and sources, this study can only be, and is intended only to be, a preliminary, descriptive, and at times speculative account that lays the groundwork for future in-depth studies of Vanaratna, his oeuvre, and his historical milieu. The account that follows takes the Tibetan *rnam thars* as its primary witnesses and uses their narrative chronology to coordinate the rest of the available sources and map them collectively against the historical backdrop in which they were created. In doing so this study will at once use the data available to us to tell Vanaratna's story, contextualize his life, and to use his narrative to elicit fresh perspectives on his historical period. Because of the depth and richness of Vanaratna's record, and because of the breadth of materials from the period that support research into his milieu, this study is not intended to be exhaustive; while the materials this study coordinates are indeed extensive, it is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg, and it is genuinely hoped that what follows here will inspire future studies, garner deserved critique, and lead to new discoveries and insights about both Vanaratna and his fifteenth-century Buddhist world.

Part I

Vanaratna's Early Years

Sadnagara • Sri Lanka • Andhra • Magadha

Chapter 1

Sadnagara: 1384-1405

We begin Vanaratna's story in Sadnagara (*grong khyer dam pa*),¹ the town of his birth and the site of his early training. gZhon nu dpal's narrative provides us with the details of Vanaratna's often difficult family life, the training he received at the local Buddhist college at Mahācaitya Vihāra, and the deliberations that lead him to renounce his family, leave home to continue his Buddhist training, and establish his career far from his homeland. As we unpack gZhon nu dpal's account of Vanaratna's early life we will use the details gleaned from it to explore the historical backdrop against which his childhood unfolded and the status of the Buddhist culture in which he trained. The data his narrative provides is welcome evidence for the status of Buddhism in the region and the forces behind the shifting centers and peripheries of the Buddhist community in India and Southeast Asia. Specifically, details of Vanaratna's Buddhist upbringing and education explicitly suggest that Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism endured in the region, even if it was rapidly waning. We will also see, however, that key lacunae in the narrative suggest a slightly more complicated story about both Vanaratna's training and the status of Buddhism in eastern India, details that either Vanaratna or his biographer gZhon nu dpal seemed keen to omit.

In this section of the *ŽP*, we learn that Vanaratna was born into the ruling family and educated in the local monastic college. Orphaned at a young age after his father died and his mother succumbed to alcoholism, Vanaratna took up the vows of a novice renunciant (Tib. *rab tu byung ba*; Skt. *pravrajita*) at the age of eight and entered Mahācaitya Vihāra. After receiving a comprehensive education in both the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna at the *vihāra*'s monastic college, he was awarded his *paṇḍita* degree and at the age of twenty took full ordination (Tib. *bsnyen par rdzogs pa*; Skt. *upasampāda*). Facing the prospect of a messy if not violent succession struggle, he took the additional vows of an ascetic (*avadhūta*), thereby renouncing his home and claim to the throne. Having thus cut his ties to his family and the place of his birth, Vanaratna left home to seek higher studies in Sri Lanka, thus beginning his life of as itinerant monk, scholar, and meditator.

After a brief eulogy to Vanaratna in both verse and prose, gZhon nu dpal begins his narrative by orienting us to Sadnagara and Vanaratna's life there.

This sublime being is from a place known as Sadnagara, a faultless place rich in the Dharma located three-months travel to the east of Vajrāsana, the place of the Tathāgata's awakening. [Ruled] for generations by a royal family genuinely of the solar line, it was wealthy and extensive. The unrivaled royal palace was quadrangular, each side taking half a day [to traverse].² [Sadnagara's] distinctive affluence is illustrated by the five hundred gold and silver lamps that were offered each night. [Vanaratna] was born a prince to parents of this royal line; his father was the king Udayakīrti and his mother was named Kumārī. At the age of eight he entered the local monastic estate at Mahācaitya. The preceptor was Buddhaghoṣa, who supervised over 400,000 monks there.”³

¹ In most instances the Sanskrit *sadnagara* is transliterated in Tibetan, and only occasionally translated with *grong khyer dam pa*. In only the rarest of instances are the rules of Sanskrit *sandhi* applied to render it *sannagara*.

² Conj.: ngos re la nyi ma phyed tsam gru bzhir gnas pa.

³ *ŽP* 2v.4-3r.1: de yang skye bu dam pa 'di de bzhin gshegs pa mngon par byang chub pa'i gnas rdo rje gdan las shar phyogs su zla ba gsum gyis bgrod par bya ba'i sa | grong khyer dam pa zhes bya bar chos dang ldan zhing kha na ma

This passage introduces Vanaratna in terms familiar to Buddhist literature, and which in its broad strokes echoes the narrative of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni. Like the Buddha, Vanaratna is said to have been born into a royal family of the solar line (*sūryavaṃśa*), become weary of worldly life, and then renounce his kingdom to become an illustrious, realized master. Such parallels are only evident in the broader strokes of the narrative, however, and suggest only that gZhon nu dpal may have taken creative liberties in accentuating these aspects of Vanaratna’s early life to make the coincidences more pronounced. A similar inclination towards exaggeration—either by gZhon nu dpal or Vanaratna himself—is evident in the description of Sadnagara and the monastic community there. These hyperboles seem to serve a dual function, at once confirming for the Tibetan audience the vibrancy of the Indic, Buddhist communities in which Vanaratna was raised and establishing the basis for his future authority as Buddhist master. gZhon nu dpal moves well beyond these hagiographic tropes to provide us with the kinds of specific detail that reveal the historicity of Vanaratna’s early narrative. Thus, while one may be distracted by the narrative’s heavy-handed myth making, we should not lose sight of what the ŽP can tell us about the Buddhist culture of eastern India in the fifteenth century and of Vanaratna’s place within it. This material needs to be unpacked carefully, but it is nonetheless possible to distinguish obvious exaggerations from the genuine personal and historical insights Vanaratna’s narrative offers.

Locating Sadnagara

The task of geographically locating Sadnagara is challenging, but not impossible. Based on the available evidence we cannot pinpoint Sadnagara’s location with precision, but we can demarcate a relatively small region that likely encompasses the site of Vanaratna’s early biography. Any degree of geographical specificity we gain is invaluable, as it brings us closer to Vanaratna’s lived reality and the wider Buddhist world to which he was historically and spiritually connected. Through Vanaratna’s early narrative we enter a region at the far-eastern edge of the Bengal delta, close to or in the hills of Tripura and Manipur that border Burma, and so catch a fleeting glimpse of the Buddhist culture sustained there. It is thus critical to locate Sadnagara as precisely as possible so as to give us the best view into this obscure corner of fifteenth-century Buddhist South and Southeast Asia.

A town by the name of Sadnagara does not appear in the historical record outside of the materials on Vanaratna, and among these it is only the ŽP that offers any data to help us locate the town of Vanaratna’s birth.⁴ In the passage cited above gZhon nu dpal informs us that

tho ba med pa | nyi ma’i rigs las yang dag par byung ba’i rgyal rigs rabs dang rabs su ’byor pa dang rgyas pa dang | phas kyi rgol ba med pa’i rgyal po’i pho brang ni | ngos re la nyi ma phyed tsam gru ba bzhir gnas pa | ’byor pa ni mtshan re zhing mar me’i snum gyi yo byad la gser srang kha lnga brgya re rtag tu spyod na long spyod kyi khyad par gzhan dang gzhan dag ni des mtshon nas shes par bya ba yin te | de lta bu’i rgyal rigs las yab rgyal po u da ya kī rti zhes bya ba dang | yum ku mā rī zhes bya ba gnyis kyi sras su ’khrung pa ni | dgung lo brgyad bzhes pa’i tshe | rang nyid kyi yul de nyid na ma hā cai tya zhes bya ba’i dge ’dun gyi gnas gzhi chen po yod pa der | mkhan po ni gnas de na rab tu byung ba ’bum phrag bzhi lhag tsam ’du ba | de thams cad kyi gtso bor gyur cing...sangs rgyas dbyangs shes bya ba.

⁴ In addition to the *nam thars*, Vanaratna is explicitly stated to hail from Sadnagara in the Tibetan colophons to the following texts and translations prepared by his immediate disciples: *Pratipattisāraśataka* (Tōh. 2334), *Pratipattisāraśatakavivarāṇa* (Tōh. 2335), *Āyuhśādhana* (Tōh. 2336), *Ātmayoga* (Tōh. 2339), *Vinayakārikā* (Tōh. 4123), *Prāṇidhānaratnarāja* (Tōh. 4395), *Buddhodaya* (Öta. 3147/4665), and the *Zhal lung rin po che’i snying po’i phreng ba* (Öta. 5096).

Sadnagara lies a three-months' journey to the east of Bodh Gayā. It would be unrealistic to estimate how much terrain gZhon nu dpal believed one could cover in three months of travel in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century South Asia, but we can be reasonably confident that Sadnagara was located at least as far eastwards as the Bengal delta, and perhaps even beyond in the mountainous region along the border between Bengal and Burma. An additional passage from this section of the *ŽP* also provides useful information:

At twenty-one years of age [Vanaratna] lead an entourage of about thirty attendants who, carrying abundant essential supplies, traveled by boat and other [means] along the southern route out of Sadnagara. They progressively made their way through a number of realms, including [the kingdom of] Chakma (*tsag ma*), until they reached the bay of the ocean that lies between Bengal (*bhañ ga la'i yul*) and their destination, where they boarded a ship.⁵

A few small but important details stand out. gZhon nu dpal tells us that when Vanaratna left Sadnagara he took the “southern route” (*lho phyogs kyi rgyud*),⁶ informing us that Sadnagara was north of the port in Bengal from which Vanaratna departed. We also learn that he traveled by “boat and other [means]” (*gzings la sogs pa*), suggesting that it was a journey of multiple stages, possibly involving different means of transport. The journey definitely involved boat travel which, given the other geographical information, would likely refer to a riverine rather than ocean-going vessel. This seems all the more certain given that Vanaratna is said to have passed through the realm of the Chakma, which is generally believed to encompass the hills around Chittagong. gZhon nu dpal's use of *la sogs pa'i yul* suggests that Vanaratna reported passing through more realms than just Chakma, which in combination with the evidence of his multi-stage river journey would suggest a journey of some length.

From these broad descriptions we learn, at a minimum, that Sadnagara was located in the far east of the Indian sub-continent in a region some distance to the north of the Bay of Bengal. To reach the Bengal coast, Vanaratna traveled over a long distance through multiple kingdoms considered foreign to his own, including that of the Chakma people who surround the port-city of Chittagong. Based on this evidence, it would seem that Sadnagara is to be found somewhere to the east of the Bengal delta,⁷ possibly around Sylhet, or else further east-by-southeast in the Tripura or Manipur hills. This would locate Sadnagara north or northeast of Chittagong, which, as will be argued below, was his likely port of departure. Lying on the historic trade routes between Bengal and southeast China via Burma's Irrawaddy valley, this region would have historical and cultural ties to both the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna kingdoms of Samatāṭa in the southeast delta and the Theravaṃsa kingdoms of Burma and Arakan

⁵ *ŽP* 5r.4-6: de nas dgung lo nyer gcig bzhes pa'i thse 'khor sum cu tsam phyag phyir khrid | gzings la sogs pa la nyer bar mkho ba'i yo byad mang du bsams nas | grong khyer dam pa'i lho phyogs kyi rgyud tsag ma la sogs pa'i yul rnam su rim gyis gshegs nas | phyogs de dang bhañ ga la'i yul gyi bar du phyi'i rgya mthso'i lag cig yod pa la gzings la byon.

⁶ This could alternately be read as “the southern mountain ranges,” which would in fact strengthen the argument presented here insofar as a series of north-south mountain ranges, separated by river valleys, lie directly to the north of the Bengal coast in the modern Indian state of Tripura.

⁷ As noted by Richard Eaton (1993: 19-20), the Gaṅga and Brahmaputra rivers shifted considerably over the centuries, and that during the period under examination the main delta was still to the west of modern Sylhet. Thus the phrase “Bengal delta” should be understood to refer the modern reach of the delta, and not to its position during Vanaratna's lifetime.

In the Tibetan literature, Vanaratna is frequently said to hail from “eastern India” (*rgya gar shar phyogs*), or from “Sadnagara in eastern India.” (*rgya gar shar phyogs sadna ga ra*). The designation “eastern India,” which at first appears to be a little more than a generic directional orientation, may in fact describe a region of Buddhist culture understood, by Tibetans at least, as constituting a distinctive Buddhist ecumene. The Tibetan historian Tāranātha, writing little more than a century after Vanaratna’s death, provides us with a lengthy description of the Buddhist culture of eastern India, which he (and presumably his informants), also called Koki (*ko ki*). Writing about the region in his history of Buddhism in India (TĀR),⁸ Tāranātha identifies Koki as a broad area to the east of the “central land” of Magadha, with Bengal (*bhaṅg ga la*) and Oḍisha (*o ṭi bi śa*) at its western boundary and the mountainous (*gi ri varta*) regions of Kāmārūpa, Tripura, and Assam at its northeastern reaches. Moving eastwards, Koki included the foothill (*ri ngos*) kingdom of Naṅgata (*nang ga ṭa*),⁹ and the Burmese kingdoms of Pagan (*pu khan*),¹⁰ Balku (*bal ku*; unidentified), Arakan (*ra khang*), Myanaung (*mu nyung*), Pegu/Haṃsavati (*hām sa wi ti*) and Mrauk-U (*mar ko*).¹¹ Describing Buddhism in the region, Tāranātha writes:

“The lands of Koki are known of from the time of King Aśoka, with monastic communities established there. They grew over time until they became quite large. Prior to Vasubandhu, [Koki supported] only the Śrāvaka tradition, but some followers of Vasubandhu’s tradition spread the Mahāyāna there, which continued uninterrupted. From the time of King Dharmapāla many of the students in Magadha were from this area. Particularly, at the time of the four Senas about half of the monastic community present in Magadha was from Koki. Thus the Mahāyāna spread widely there, so that it became indivisible from the Hīnayāna, as it did in Tibet. During the time of Abhayākara[gupta], the tradition of secret mantra also spread there. When Turkish armies invaded Magadha most of the learned masters of the Buddhist heartland went [to Koki], and again the teachings spread.”¹²

As will be explored below, this description, inaccuracies and embellishments aside, aligns well with the picture we are given in Vanaratna’s narrative. Most significantly, however, is the fact that Tāranātha also holds up Vanaratna as an example of a famous master who hailed from this eastern region.¹³ Given that Tāranātha lived within 150 years of Vanaratna’s lifetime, it is

⁸ The *Dam pa’i chos rin po che ’phags pa’i yul du ji ltar dar ba’i tshul gsal bar ston pa dgos ’dod kun ’byung*.

⁹ This perhaps corresponds to roughly to modern Nagaland, or Naganchi in local languages.

¹⁰ Which presumably would include Pagan’s successor state, Ava.

¹¹ TĀR 131v.6-132r.2.

¹² TĀR 132r.2-5: de ltar ko ka’i yul de mams su rgyal po mya ngan med kyi dus tsam nas bzung ste dge ’dun gyi sde byung la | phyis je ’phel du song ba ste shin tu mang bar yod pa la | dbyigs gnyen ma byon gong du nyan thos kho na yin | dbyigs gnyen gyi slob ma ’ga’ zhig gis theg chen dar bar byas nas cung zad tsam rgyun mchad bar yod pa las | rgyal po dharmāpā la man chad du yul dbus su de dag gi slob gnyer ba shin tu mang zhing | lhag par se na bzhi’i dus su | ma ga dhar ’tshogs pa’i dge ’dun gyi phyad tsam ko ka’i yul nas byung ba tin te | de’i phyir theg chen shin tu dar ba gyur nas bod kyi rgyal khams bzhin du theg pa che chung gi dbye ba med par song | a bha yā ka ra byon pa’i dus tsam nas sngags kyi theg pa yang je dar la song | ma ga dha tu rushka bcom pa’i tshes yul dbus kyi mkhas pa phal cher yul der byon pas bstan pa lhag par dar te.

¹³ TĀR 132v.1. Vanaratna was not the only Buddhist master from this region in fifteenth-century Tibet. The NTSG reports bSod nam rgya mtsho’s encounter with a Buddhist *paṇḍita* from Haṃsavati (Pegu) named Lokottara (*lo kotta ra*) who was wandering Tibet without a translator in the 1460s (NTSG^b 347.21-348.4). The same figure also appears in the NTSC (see for example 55r.1).

reasonable to assume that the memory of Vanaratna's homeland was still fresh in the Tibetan historical awareness. And though he does not say precisely where in this region Vanaratna was from, this information, combined with the data provided in the *ŽP*, allows us to focus our attention more closely on the area in the far eastern Bengal delta and mountains of Tripura and Manipur.

If correct, locating Sadnagara in this region would put it in the historic orbit of Samatāṭa, a complex of kingdoms and dynasties that ruled over a territory stretching from the Meghna River to the north and west, the hills of Tripura and Manipur in the east, and the Bay of Bengal to the south and southeast. Samatāṭa, which also broadly includes the realms of Harikela and Śrīhaṭṭa,¹⁴ was ruled by a succession of dynasties, beginning with the Khaḍgas (c.650-700), and followed by the Rātas (c.700-750), the Devas (c.750-800), and the most successful dynasty of the southeastern delta, the Candras (c.850-1050).¹⁵ Though the borders of Samatāṭa shifted, expanded, and contracted over the centuries, its primary center remained the Lalmai ridge, a line of low hills at Maināmatī outside modern-day Comilla, Bangladesh.¹⁶

Alternately known as Devaparvata, Maināmatī, and Paṭṭikerā,¹⁷ the royal houses of the Lalmai ridge supported both Buddhist and Brahmanical communities, ruled over an extensive permanent population with agricultural and material surplus, and were well positioned on overland and maritime trade routes.¹⁸ Through these routes Samatāṭa maintained close political and cultural ties with the kingdoms of northern Burma, particularly Pagan.¹⁹ Epigraphic evidence shows that all of these dynasties supported Buddhism, with many of their monarchs assuming the epithet *paramasaugata*, and sponsoring the construction and maintenance of Buddhist monasteries and shrines of a distinctly Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna variety.²⁰ The Gunaighar copperplate, the earliest from the region, records the patronage of Mahāyāna Buddhism as early as 506,²¹ while the last known land grant, the Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikāladeva copperplate of 1220, was issued in support of a temple to Durgottārā in Paṭṭikerā.²² This reference to a cult dedicated to a tantric goddess, along with an illustration of a shrine to Cundā in Paṭṭikerā found in an eleventh-century Nepalese manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, affirm the popularity of the Buddhist Yoginī Tantras and their pantheon in the region.²³ Archeological

¹⁴ The precise location of Harikela is unknown and subject to wide disagreement, but general the consensus is that it was centered Chittagong and was a tributary of the Candra dynasty in Samatāṭa. Less is known about the historical boundaries of Śrīhaṭṭa, but it appears to be located in the area around Slyhet, with which the name Śrīhaṭṭa appears to be cognate (Majumdar EI vol. 26: 315-6; Bhattacharya 1993: 328-9; Sanderson 2009: 86, note 152).

¹⁵ Husain 1997: 2-14; Nath 2011: 118; Sanderson 2009: 80.

¹⁶ Husain 1997: 76-86, 131-48; Lee 2009: 297-8, 312. To date, seven Buddhist monasteries dating to the 7th to 13th centuries have been excavated and identified on the Maināmatī-Lalmai ridge, and there are over twenty-five additional sites that remain unexcavated but show clear signs of ancient remains.

¹⁷ Husain 1997: 6-14, 268-71. This list of titles would also include the Khaḍga capital of Karmānta and the Deva capital of Vasanaṭapura.

¹⁸ Morrison 1970: 153; Prasad 2011: 122.

¹⁹ Paṭṭikerā had specifically close ties to Pagan. King Kyanzitha (r. 1084-112) and his son Alaungsitthu (r. 1113-67) both took queens from Paṭṭikerā, and there are folk tales of a doomed romance between a prince of Paṭṭikerā and Kyanzitha's daughter (Bhattacharya 1933: 235; Acri 2016: 20, note 67).

²⁰ EI 12: 138; EI 38: 201-13.; Husain 1997: 32-58, 87; Lee 2009: 296-7; Sanderson 2009: 84-86.

²¹ Bhattacharya 1930: 45-60; Majumdar 1971: 41; Griffiths 2015: 312. The inscription records a land grant by the former Gupta governor Vainyagupta to a Buddhist teacher named Śāntideva, who is therein identified as a *mahāyānikaśākyabhikṣu*, a "Mahāyāna Buddhist monk." His monastery was dedicated to the deity Avalokiteśvara, and there is mention of a *mahāyānikavaivarttikabhikṣusamgha*, a "community of *vaiivarttika* Mahāyāna

²² Bhattacharya 1933: 282-3; Morrison 1970: 52; Husain 1997: 271; Bautze-Picron 2016: 169, note 33.

²³ *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, Cambridge University Library MS Add. 1643, f. 176v. A note beneath the image

surveys on the Lalmai ridge and its immediate vicinity have revealed statuary of deities from the Mahāyāna pantheon including Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī, as well as tantric deities associated with all major phases of Indian esoteric Buddhism, such as the five *dhyāna* Buddhas, Vajrasattva, and Heruka.²⁴ With epigraphic and archeological evidence recording the patronage of Buddhism for seven centuries, Samatāṭa is among the longest enduring Buddhist cultures on the subcontinent. This description aligns well with Tāranātha's account of Buddhism in Koki, which he says was predominantly Mahāyāna, with an increasing Vajrayāna influence through at least the twelfth century.

Evidence from the Lalmai ridge and the Samatāṭa kingdom ceases in the early-thirteenth century. There is no epigraphic or archeological evidence to suggest its sudden or calamitous end; it simply vanishes from the historical record.²⁵ This was likely due in part to the Ghūrid invasions of the western delta, followed by the conquest and rule of the region by the Delhi Sultanate and its later iterations as the Bengal Sultanate. The arrival of Turkic forces would have created instability in region, disrupted the economic and political bases of Samatāṭa power, and facilitated the spread of Brahmanical culture into the region, thereby eroding Buddhist patronage and popularity.²⁶ The collapse of the Samatāṭa kingdom following the Turkish conquest would have driven a large number Buddhist refugees eastwards, where they likely lingered for some time before eventually merging with the Buddhist populations of northern Burma.²⁷ Tāranātha reports precisely this in his TĀR, writing that the Turkish invasions had driven Buddhists from as far as Magadha into the eastern realms, and that this had a significant effect in spreading Buddhism there.

Sadnagara, located on the eastern frontier of the erstwhile Samatāṭa area, would have absorbed this eastward push, which in turn would have prolonged Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna culture there well after the end of the Samatāṭa period. The Ilyas Shāhi dynasty (c.1342-1480) of the Bengal Sultanate ruled the delta from Sonārgāon during Vanaratna's adolescence in Sadnagara,²⁸ and it is possible that the town, located to the east of the center of Sultanate power, had grown increasingly isolated from the other Buddhist communities that remained on the Indian subcontinent. At the periphery of the Bengal delta, Sadnagara was likely in close proximity to the Buddhist culture of northern Burma, which had experienced a period of renaissance at approximately the same moment as Buddhism was contracting in India, and may also have ties to the southern Buddhist realm of Arakan. Based on its general position, Sadnagara was located on or near major overland trade routes that linked the Bengal delta, and specifically the port at Chittagong, with Arakan, the Burmese kingdoms of the Irrawaddy valley, and China's Yunnan region.²⁹ This would have allowed for a relative ease of movement and cultural exchange between Sadnagara and these diverse regions.

of Cundā in this manuscript identifies it as the statue of the deity found “in the esteemed shrine to Cundā in Paṭṭikerā” (*paṭṭikere cundā varabhuvane cundā*).

²⁴ This list is far from exhaustive. For a comprehensive presentation of Buddhist archeological finds in Samatāṭa and throughout the Bengal Delta, see Lee 2009: 379-472, and appendix 1.

²⁵ Morrison 1970: 154; Husain 1997: 62.

²⁶ This argument is most succinctly expressed in Eaton 1993: 13-21.

²⁷ Frasch 2002: 68.

²⁸ Eaton 1993: 40-47; Husain 1997: 34-36. Asher and Talbot 2007: 41-43. During Vanaratna's years in Sadnagara, the Ilyas Shāhi dynasty was ruled by Sultan Sikander Shah (r. 1358-90) and Sultan Ghiyas al-Din Azam Shah (r. 1390-1411).

²⁹ Stargardt 1971: 44-55. The map Stargardt provides on p. 39 traces a direct route between the Manipur and Tripura hills and Chittagong. Though it is difficult to precisely map such route in the known terrain, it does demonstrate the existence of established routes such as the one Vanaratna followed after his departure from Sadnagara.

During Vanaratna's lifetime, the northern Irrawaddy Valley of Burma was governed by the Ava (Innwa) dynasty. Ava had emerged as the successor to Pagan (849-c.1300), which had gone into decline at the end of the thirteenth century. Prior to this decline, Pagan had ruled over a powerful and prosperous Southeast Asian Buddhist kingdom, and though there is evidence of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism there,³⁰ their formal affiliation was with a distinctively Sri Lankan branch of Theravaṃsa Buddhism.³¹ Pagan's patronage extended to thousands of Buddhist monasteries, temples, and universities, turning the kingdom into a center of cosmopolitan Buddhist learning and culture and a preeminent pilgrimage destination.³² Pagan's political power eventually faded, but these Buddhist institutions endured in Ava, albeit on a reduced scale.³³ King Thadominbya (r. 1364-67) first established his capital at Ava in 1364, but it was his heir Minkyiswa Sawkai (1367-1400) who truly founded the kingdom. Minkyiswa Sawkai ruled for much of Vanaratna's time in Sadnagara, and was replaced by his son Anawratha Min Saw, also known as Minguang the First (r.1400-21). This transition was not entirely smooth, and involved an assassination, which possibly brought some instability to regional politics. Ava was also frequently in conflict with its southern rival Pegu, a conflict that at times involved proxy wars in Arakan.³⁴ It is unclear what effect these tensions and conflicts had on Vanaratna, but it would seem reasonable that he was aware of them and may have had to consider them when planning his overland travels. Because Ava sustained many of the political, cultural, and religious paradigms of Pagan, the Irrawaddy Valley continued to be a vital center of political power and cosmopolitan Buddhist culture during Vanaratna's early life.³⁵ The kingdom remained a firm supporter of Sri Lankan Theravaṃsa Buddhism,³⁶ which located this powerful Southeast Asian kingdom in the Pāli-Theravaṃsa Buddhist ecumene in which Sri Lanka was a primary node.³⁷

The situation would likely have been similar, but on a reduced scale, to the south of Sadnagara in Arakan, a lesser player in the geopolitical landscape, but one where Buddhism also predominated. Lying to the south of Chittagong along the Bay of Bengal, Arakan's proximity to Sadnagara may have put the latter in its political and cultural orbit, thus flagging Arakan as a region whose Buddhist culture potentially exerted a degree of influence on Sadnagara's religious culture.³⁸ Sadnagara's location in relation to Ava and Arakan thus gave its population, including Vanaratna, access not only to kingdoms with a shared Buddhist culture, but also to the Theravaṃsa-Pāli Buddhist ecumene. As we will see below, it may have been Vanaratna's

³⁰ Aung-Thwin 2012: 83-86; Aciri 2015: 19-21.

³¹ Ilanghasinha 1972: 272-77. Sinhala sources state the Pagan monarchs Aniruddha (1044-77) and Kyanzitha (r.1084-1112) who transitioned Pagan from a Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna form of Buddhism to Theravaṃsa Buddhism and helped establish the Sri Lankan tradition along with a group of Burmese monks who had recently returned from studies on the island.

³² Aung-Thwin 2012: 89-99

³³ Aung-Thwin 2017: 107.

³⁴ Leider 2004: 35-39; Leider and Htin 2015: 388; Aung-Thwin 2017: 54-88, 257.

³⁵ Aung-Thwin 2012: 89.

³⁶ Aung-Thwin 2017: 127.

³⁷ It was Pagan's support of Sri Lankan Theravaṃsa Buddhism that saw Sri Lankan Buddhism through its near collapse following the Cōla invasions of the island in the eleventh-century. From that time onwards Pagan, and Ava after it, held a powerful position in the Theravaṃsa Buddhist ecumene in South and Southeast Asia. Ties between the island and northern Burma were maintained over the centuries through religious missions, shared religious protocols, political alliances, and trade (Frasch 2017: 70-72).

³⁸ Very little is yet known about Arakan's Buddhist culture at the turn of the fifteenth century. Future research on the region may reveal that Arakan had a greater influence on Vanaratna's childhood experiences and Buddhist training than is accounted for in this study.

connections to the Theravāṃsa Buddhism of Ava and/or Arakan that facilitated his travels and study in Sri Lanka.

If the proposed location of Sadnagara is accurate, Vanaratna's childhood and early Buddhist training unfolded against this historical backdrop. Sadnagara was likely a principality or fiefdom of small to moderate size located in the hills in the eastern reaches of the Bengal delta. As such it may have been most closely affiliated with the kingdoms Tripura or Chakma, both of which were by this time vassals of the Bengal Sultanate,³⁹ but whatever the precise arrangement, it seems probable that Sadnagara maintained some degree of political and economic alignment with the Sultanate. Tibetan accounts suggest that Sadnagara was culturally oriented towards India, which is especially true of the mode of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism it supported. This Buddhist culture, inherited through historical ties to the kingdoms of Samatāṭa, was by Vanaratna's lifetime in long decline in India, and Sadnagara was increasingly isolated from the remaining Indian Buddhist communities because of its peripheral location at the far eastern limit of the Indian cultural sphere. Because of this, Sadnagara may have come under the increasing influence of its neighbor to the east, the kingdom of Ava in northern Burma, and Arakan to the south, regions whose cultural values and religious priorities were closer to its own. Situated as it was on trade routes that connected the eastern Bengal delta to northern Burma Arakan, Sadnagara would have had relatively easy access to these regions and may have been increasingly turning towards them as a touchstone for its Buddhist culture. This hypothetical scenario does not find explicit confirmation in Vanaratna's biography, but we do nonetheless catch fleeting glimpses of these historical forces and the cultural realignments they triggered. This makes Vanaratna's narrative, when approached with care, a potentially valuable resource for understanding this moment in the history of this largely unstudied region.

Life in the "Royal" Family

Vanaratna was born into this historical landscape in 1384 as the son of Udayakīrti and Kumārī, who were, at the time, the ruling family of Sadnagara. It is likely an overstatement to call Sadnagara a "kingdom" (*rgyal srid*) and Udayakīrti the "king" (*rgyal po*) as gZhon nu dpal does, but it is reasonable to assume that Vanaratna was born into a land-holding family who administered the area around Sadnagara on behalf of a larger regional polity. Which polity this would be precisely is not clear, as the ŽP does not offer any details on Sadnagara's relationships with its neighbors, but given its general location it seems probable that Sadnagara was aligned with the Bengal Sultanate or one of its vassals. Accounts from Portuguese travelers and historians of the early sixteenth century report that the kingdoms of both Tripura and Chakma were tributaries of the Sultanate with some degree of autonomy over their own territories,⁴⁰ thus it is possible Sadnagara was in the orbit of one of these regional houses.

gZhon nu dpal claims that Vanaratna's family belonged to the "solar line" (*sūryavaṃśa*), the mythic line of Indic kingship descending from the solar deity through Ikṣvāku, the first of the Mithilā kings of Ayodhyā, to Rāma and onwards through generations of royal lineages spread across the subcontinent. Like the parallel "lunar line" (*candravaṃśa*), royal genealogies tracing

³⁹ Pires 1944: 89.

⁴⁰ Pires 1944: 88-91. Writing in the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese diplomat Tomé Pires (1468-1540) noted that both the kingdoms of Chakma and Tripura were tributaries of the Bengal Sultanate, but had some autonomy at the local level and frequently initiated conflicts with their neighbors. Pires specifically notes that the kings of Tripura were the most powerful among local Sultanate vassals in the early fifteenth century.

descent from the solar line were often newly-created as part of efforts to legitimize ascendant houses by establishing them in the mythic and cultural paradigms of Indic civilization. This was especially true of peoples on the geographic or social margins who were assimilated into the hegemonic cultural paradigm through the territorial expansions and political realignments triggered by imperial collapse and political decentralization.⁴¹ It is impossible to say if Vanaratna’s family had recently acquired their royal status or had, as gZhon nu dpal claims, held it for numerous generations, but given Sadnagara’s location in the far-eastern delta or among the hill tribes of Tripura and Manipur, their “royal” lineage may not have a long pedigree.

Despite gZhon nu dpal’s use of this stock Indic trope, evidence from the *ŽP* does suggest that Vanaratna was born into the ruling house of Sadnagara, and that his early life was determined by his elite status. His father Udayakīrti died during Vanaratna’s childhood, at which point rule of Sadnagara passed to his father’s younger brother who had two sons of his own. Vanaratna’s mother is described as an alcoholic who was entirely unfit to raise a child, leaving his maternal grandmother to raise him.⁴² His grandmother is said to have supported him throughout his studies at Mahācaitya Vihāra and would send him gifts and food to share with other monks.⁴³ Vanaratna was very fond of his grandmother, a devout Buddhist who he credits with awakening his own religious inclinations. In a first-person remembrance, Vanaratna describes his grandmother’s influence:

“I met with the Dharma at a young age...this is entirely due to the kindness of my grandmother. These days my grandmother still comes to me in dream and tells me to act in certain ways, offering predictions on what I should adopt or avoid. Even if these predictions don’t come to pass, her mere appearance in my dreams increases my virtuous activities, and I am specifically enabled to be of more benefit to others. My grandmother was no ordinary person.”⁴⁴

Though Vanaratna entered Mahācaitya Vihāra at a young age, it appears that he did not immediately give up his status or wealth. This is revealed to us in a brief but intriguing anecdote in which Vanaratna took advantage of his position as “prince” to access the treasury so he could spend substantial amounts of money on entertainment for himself and his fellow monks. We are told that Vanaratna would, from time to time (*bar du bar du*), spend hundreds of measures of silver to buy fireworks—“rockets” (*me mda’*) and “fire flowers” (*me’i me tog*)—and put on displays at the monastery.⁴⁵ This amusing account is, if accurate, useful evidence for the spread of gunpowder technology in South and Southeast Asia and helps us further locate Sadnagara along trade routes connecting China and India. Gunpowder is believed to have first arrived on the subcontinent in the fourteenth century, imported from China via both maritime and overland

⁴¹ Thapar 1989: 9, 16-17; Orsini and Sheikh 2014: 2-4.

⁴² *ŽP* 4r.5: khyad par bdag nyid chen po ’di’i yum de chang dad shin tu che bas | sras skyong ba’i tshul la mi khas na’ang | rmo mos legs par bskyangs pas shin tu drin che.

⁴³ *ŽP* 4r.2-4v.2.

⁴⁴ *ŽP* 4r.6-4v.2: chung ngu nas chos dang ’phrad pa rmo mo ’di’i drin yin gsung | deng sang du’ang rmo mo de mnal lam du byon nas ’di ltar gyis shig ces bjug ldog gu bya ba rnams lung ston | lun bstan ma byung na’ang mnal lam du byung ba tsam gyis rang nyid dge sbyor ’phel ba dang | gzhan la phan thogs pa la sogs pa’i bya ba khyad par can re cis kyang ’ong bar ’dug pas | nged kyo rmo mo de phal pa min pa ’dra gsung |

⁴⁵ *ŽP* 3r.5-6: rgyal po sras su song bas | bar bar du dngul gyi srang kha nyis rgya sum rgya tsam gyis me mda’ dang me’i me tog (*ŽP*^a; *ŽP*^b me’i om.) la sogs pa’i chas nyos nas rtse mo ’ga’ re’ang mdzad.

trade routes.⁴⁶ The overland networks connecting Yunnan and Bengal via the Irrawaddy Valley served as one of the primary arteries for its trade, and there is evidence that Ava possessed firearms as early as 1404 and that non-military applications of gunpowder preceded them by decades.⁴⁷ The account of Vanaratna's occasional but repeated access to fireworks suggests an active and ongoing trade in gunpowder in the region, and gives us some indication of their cost (200-300 measures of silver seemed to suffice for a good show). Given the use of gunpowder weapons in Ava at around this time, it seems most likely that gunpowder reached Sadnagara via Ava on the overland route from Yunnan, but we cannot discount the possibility that it was brought to Sadnagara from merchants connected to ocean trade via ports in Bengal.

Despite Vanaratna's willingness to use family money to provide entertainment for his fellow monks, his relationship to his family and his political position is predictably vexed. Using Buddhist tropes of weariness with *samsāra* and the lure of renunciation, the *ŽP* describes the reflections that would eventually lead Vanaratna to take full ordination and leave home. These themes are first introduced when Vanaratna is fifteen:

After receiving [instructions] on the six-branched yoga and putting them into practice, all the signs described in the tantras appeared. He had an acute feeling of weariness for the whole of existence, and made the firm decision not to seek kingship. With this resolve His Eminence took great interest in the Dharma and observed purity in his conduct. His uncle's wife, who had two sons, was delighted to think that His Eminence wanted one of her own sons to assume the kingship, and so generously supported him in all his endeavors to train and increase his realization.⁴⁸

If there is historical fact to distill from this account, we learn that Vanaratna's father had passed away no later than his fifteenth year, and that rule had passed to his father's brother and thus the junior line.⁴⁹ This may have put Vanaratna in an awkward, potentially threatening situation. With his father dead and his uncle—with two sons of his own—now in de facto rule of Sadnagara, Vanaratna's place in the line of succession would have become highly unstable. He was the last living member of the senior line, the only person standing in the way of his uncle's family taking full control of the family's titles, lands, and wealth. The *ŽP* naturally frames Vanaratna's decision to enter the local monastery and take up the religious life as an act of personal spiritual conviction and weariness with the world—themes that strongly resonate with the narrative of Śākyamuni and other illustrious Buddhist figures after him—but one cannot help but read between the lines and see Vanaratna's entrance to Mahācaitya Vihara as a less-than entirely voluntary act intended to sideline the heir apparent while his uncle and family consolidated power. As we will see below, it is also possible that Vanaratna's decision to receive

⁴⁶ Sun 2003: 495. Around the same time, gunpowder and gunpowder weaponry were also being imported via northwest India and were used by the militaries of the Sultanate in their campaigns in the Deccan (Khan 2004: 18-32).

⁴⁷ Sun 2003: 503-4.

⁴⁸ *ŽP* 3v.6-4r.1-2: yan lag drug gi rnal 'byor gnang nas bsgoms pas rgyud las gsung pa'i mtshan ma rnams mngon du gyur cing | khyad par srid pa mtha' dag las yid 'byung ba'i skyo shas drag po skyes nas | rgyal srid dang du mi len pa'i yid dam brtan po mdzad | de 'dra ba la bsten nas bdag nyid chen po 'di thugs chos la gzhol zhing | kun tu spyod pa shin tu gtsang bar mthong nas | yab kyi mched zla'i chung ma bu gnyis dang ldan pa zhig yod pa'i rtog pa'ng | bdag nyid chen po 'di'i ngang tshul las na bdag rang gi bus rgyal po tob par 'gyur ro snyam nas dga' ba skyes te | bdag nyid chen po la'ng thugs dam 'phel ba dang | slob gnyer la brtson pa'i skabs gang yin pdu zhabs tog cher byed pa zhig yod par snang.

⁴⁹ We specifically learn that Vanaratna's uncle was his father's younger brother (*gcung po*) at *ŽP* 4v.5.

full ordination when he came of age, take the additional *avadhūta* commitments and renounce all ties to Sadnagara, and perhaps even his decision to travel far from home were motivated in part to avoid a messy, if not lethal succession struggle. We may see a glimpse of this early maneuvering in the description of Vanaratna’s aunt, who sees an opportunity to secure the throne for her own sons, and so enthusiastically supports Vanaratna’s religious studies.

It would be another five years before Vanaratna took full ordination, and when he did the motif of renunciation and details of family tension reappear in the narrative, driving Vanaratna’s decision to abdicate, take full ordination, and ultimately leave Sadnagara:

His Eminence regarded the kingdom like an infected boil, and so never wanted to be king. Thus it was the elder of his uncle’s two sons who was enthroned and given rule over the kingdom. In his uncle’s queen’s estimation, [Vanaratna] had an extraordinary strength of character from a very young age, and was beloved by the people. Even though he did not wish to be king, there may come a day when a group of people become dissatisfied with [her son’s rule], in which case [Vanaratna] may want to rule. This sense of rivalry was unbearable [for her]. She began to form evil thoughts, and immediately stopped showing [him] the same veneration as before. [Vanaratna] thought, “If I ease everyone’s mind by becoming an ascetic (Tib. *bya bral mdzad*; Skt. *avadhūta*) it will become possible for me to follow the path of the Vajrayāna and awaken in this very life.” He then asked the great *paṇḍita* Buddhaghōṣa if his reasons were sound. His guru, recognizing that this was ultimately the best outcome, assented. Tears of joy immediately streamed from his eyes now that he could adopt an ascetic life.⁵⁰

Once again, there appears to be a level of detail in the passage that suggests a core of historical fact embedded within familiar tropes. It is here that we learn Vanaratna’s uncle had not one but two children, and that the moment had arrived for rule of Sadnagara to be passed on to the next generation. Rule would normally have fallen to Vanaratna as Udayakīrti’s only son, but power had now been in his uncle’s hands for many years, and it seems there was an expectation that it would pass to his own son, not to Vanaratna. The clearest hint of a succession struggle, or potential for one, is articulated in the character of Vanaratna’s aunt, who had previously encouraged his religious studies, but now viewed him as a threat to her son’s rule. The language of the *ŽP*, which emphasizes Vanaratna’s piety rather than internecine strife, frames Vanaratna’s decision to take full ordination at the age of twenty—the precise year he was first eligible for *upasampāda* ordination as prescribed in the Vinaya—as the result of his own weariness with *samsāra*. But when it is clear that this was not enough for his uncle’s wife, who feared a future coup, he sought to “ease everyone’s minds” by adopting the lifestyle of an ascetic, an *avadhūta*

⁵⁰ *ŽP* 4v.6-5r.4: de la bdag nyid chen po 'di ni rgyal srid me 'bar ba'i 'bes lta bur gzigs pas | rgyal po'i go 'phang ni nam yang mi bzhed pas | khu bo'i sras gnyis kyi che ba rgyal por dbang bskur ba'i bkod pa mdzad nas rgyal srid skyong du bcug | de lta na yang khu bo'i btsun mo de'i rtog pa la dam pa 'di ni nyid sku shin tu gzhon pa nas thugs kyi mthu phun sum tshog shing | skye bo thams cad kyi yid phrogs yod pa'i tshod du gda' bas | 'di dang lta rgyal srid mi bzhed pa 'dug na'ang | nam zhig skye bo mang pos 'di'i thugs g.yor nas gal te rgyal srid bzhed pa'i skabs byung srid na | 'gran pa tsam du yang mi bzod ps sems gnags te | 'phral gyi zhabs tog sogs sngar ltar mi byed par snang ba thugs kyi dgongs shing | de rnams kyi sems kyi gdung ba bsal ba dang | rang nyid kyang bya bral mdzad na rdo rje theg pa'i lam gyis tshes gcig la byang chub pa 'di ni bdag la'ang srid do snyam su dgongs nas | mkhan po chen po sangs rgyas dbyangs la don de rnams legs par zhus | bla ma des kyang phugs su de kho na legs par dgongs nas legs po'i bka' gngang | 'phral du dam pa 'dis thugs phrog pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis bya bral di 'byon par spyen chab mang po phyung.

(*bya bral ba*), one that by definition necessitated that he renounce all ties to land, titles, and wealth. This commitment seems to have been more than a useful trope to underscore the theme of Vanaratna's renunciation; not only was it conferred through the formal permission of his preceptor, it is a status Vanaratna would invoke throughout his life. At this point, however, it does effectively serve as a key moment in his narrative, marking a clear break between the circumstances of his birth and his now total commitment to the Buddhist path. That path would now lead him away from Sadnagara and the potentially dangerous machinations of his family, and on to higher studies in Sri Lanka, studies that he was well prepared for after his education at Mahācaitya Vihāra.

Education at Mahācaitya Vihāra

Vanaratna entered the monastic college at Mahācaitya Vihāra at the age of eight and studied there for thirteen years from 1392-1405. If accepted as reported, his studies comprised a thorough education in Sanskrit grammar and poetics, the classic treatises of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the ritual and meditation systems of the Vajrayāna. Vanaratna also received both novice and full ordination at Mahācaitya, most likely in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Nikāya, as well as his bodhisattva vows and *avadhūta* commitment. Thus, the description provided in the *ŽP* presents Mahācaitya Vihāra as a vibrant center of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism of the type most familiar to gZhon nu dpal's Tibetan audience. It is less than clear, however, that the historical milieu would have supported an institution such as is described in the *ŽP*, and when we probe Vanaratna's narrative more carefully, we find the strong suggestion of a Pāli and perhaps Theravaṃsa influence on his training. Taken together, the evidence presents a considerable challenge in determining Mahācaitya Vihāra's precise status and raises questions about the nature of Vanaratna's studies there.

We are given no reliable information on the scale, extent, or site plan of Mahācaitya Vihāra. gZhon nu dpal claims it housed 400,000 monks, but this is surely a massive exaggeration. We could allow that gZhon nu dpal was conflating the general monastic population of the region with the population at Mahācaitya,⁵¹ but the large number seems purely hyperbolic and intended to enhance the luster of the Indic institution for a Tibetan audience. gZhon nu dpal describes Mahācaitya as a "monastic estate," (*dge 'dun gyi gnas gzhi chen po*), and though he treats *mahācaitya* as the formal name of the monastery, it may also be a descriptive reference to a large *stūpa* or *caitya*, such as were regular features of Buddhist monasteries in India. Going by gZhon nu dpal's description, adjusted to account for hyperbole, it would seem that Mahācaitya Vihāra was a monastery capable of housing a modest monastic community, and which included a monastic college offering a broad curriculum taught by a learned clergy. All of this would have necessitated a campus of a size suitable for housing and feeding both a general monastic population and a group of specialists dedicated to higher studies.

Vanaratna was first ordained at Mahācaitya Vihāra by the preceptor (*mkhan po/upādhyāya*) Buddhaghoṣa, the ritual master (*slob dpon/ācārya*) Sujātaratna, and an attendant and timekeeper (*grogs dang grib tshod pa*) named Buddhajñāna.⁵² We are not told precisely which level of

⁵¹ Even in this case 400,000 would still be a significant exaggeration. Tāranātha's sources led him to estimate that there were altogether 20-30,00 monks in Koki in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (TĀR 132a.7). Burmese sources put the monastic population of eleventh-century Pagan at approximately 400,000 [Aung-Thwin 2012: 91-2]. The numbers in Ava during Vanaratna's lifetime were surely much lower, but still would have represented a sizable population. It is unlikely, however, that they would have reached the scale reported in the *ŽP*.

⁵² *ŽP* 3r.1-4: mkhan po ni gnas de na rab tu byung ba 'bum phrag bzhi lhag tsam 'du ba | de thams cad kyi gts'o bor

ordination he received at this time, but it would be logical that he received the ordination of a novice (*śrāmaṇera*). The *ŽP* also does not specify which *vinaya* tradition Vanaratna was ordained into, but we learn in the biography of Śākya mchog ldan that Vanaratna identified himself as a member of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Nikāya,⁵³ thus this was presumably the *nikāya* into which he received both novice and full ordination and would have been the affiliation of Mahācaitya Vihāra as well.

Of the three elders involved in Vanaratna’s first ordination, Buddhaghōṣa and Sujātaratna merit further discussion. Buddhaghōṣa was the abbot of Mahācaitya and Vanaratna’s principle teacher there. He had a formative influence on his young student, so much so that Vanaratna continued to teach from his lineages later in life. Buddhaghōṣa is referenced by name as the source of instructions Vanaratna offered to his Tibetan disciples, and his name appears in three lineage lists found in Tibetan sources.⁵⁴ Vanaratna also included Buddhaghōṣa in a painting of the masters in his lineage of the thirteen-deity Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala, which we know of from bSod nams rgya mtsho’s translation of the verses Vanaratna included in the painting.⁵⁵ Buddhaghōṣa’s influence on Vanaratna was so great that he aspired to build a statue of his teacher in Bodh Gayā using the gold that he had amassed in Tibet.⁵⁶

The second figure to preside over Vanaratna’s ordination, Sujātaratna, was not from Mahācaitya Vihāra, but was invited from an outside monastery to assist in the rite. gZhon nu dpal describes Sujātaratna’s home monastery as, “a monastic estate named Suvarṇa that was located nearby and was home to a *saṅgha* of 50,000.”⁵⁷ Setting the hyperbole aside, the fact that Mahācaitya Vihāra called in an elder monk to officiate at Vanaratna’s ordination suggests, first, that the full complement of monastic officials needed to confer ordination was not available at Mahācaitya Vihāra, and second, that there were other monastic institutions in the area with which Mahācaitya was at least loosely, if not institutionally affiliated, such that they could share resources and personnel, including senior monastic officials who served in formal capacities. Because we know that Sujātaratna also assumed the role of *karmācārya* for Vanaratna’s full ordination, it is reasonable to conclude that his home monastery of Suvarṇa was of the same *nikāya* as Mahācaitya Vihāra. Sujātaratna also appears ahead of Buddhaghōṣa in Vanaratna’s lineage of Anupamarakṣita’s *śaḍaṅgayoga*, possibly indicating that Suvarṇa Vihāra also taught

gyur pa cing | phyi nang gi rig pa’i gnas mtha’ dag la mkhas shing yi dam gyis rjes su bzung ba mngon par shes pa rgya chen po mnga’ ba sangs rgyas dbyangs shes bya ba dang | slob dpon ni de dang mi ring ba zhig na dge ’dun gnas gzhi chen po su warṇa zhes bya ba | dge ’dun khri phrag lnga tsam ’du ba zhig yod pa de’i ’dren par dbang bskur ba’i su jā ta ta ratna zhes bya ba dang | grogs dang grib tshod pa buddha jñā na zhes bgyis ba mams las rab tu byung ste.

⁵³ NTSC 40r.5-6: nga yang sde pa thams cad yod smra ka yin gsung. As mentioned previously, Vanaratna actually states he was ordained into the Sarvāstivāda Nikāya (*sde pa thams cad yod smra ka*), but considering the Sarvāstivāda Nikāya did not endure into the fifteenth century, this appears to a truncated reference to the Mūlasarvāstivāda Nikāya.

⁵⁴ Vanaratna is recorded as giving instructions on Ghaṅṭāpāda’s *Pañcakramopadeśa* based on Buddhaghōṣa’s teachings (Öta. 4624: 103r.4) and is said to have given the ’Brug pa dKa’ brgyud master Kun dga’ dpal ’byor (1428-76) teachings on yogic meditation according to Buddhaghōṣa’s lineage (Rin chen nam rgyal: 5). Buddhaghōṣa likewise appears in Vanaratna’s teaching lineages provided in the DN, including Anupamarakṣita’s tradition of the *śaḍaṅgayoga*, Abhayākaragupta’s *Vajrāvalī*, and an unspecified Kālacakra maṇḍala (DN 22r.7-22v.4; 23r.7-23v.2).

⁵⁵ See the *bLa ma’i bris thang rgyab yig bzhugs* (Öta. 4607). This painting is mentioned in at NTSG^b: 371.13.

⁵⁶ When Vanaratna returned to Nepal at the end of his second journey to Tibet he intended to continue on to Bodh Gayā and build a large statue of Buddhaghōṣa there. Vanaratna did not travel farther than the Kathmandu Valley, and so never fulfilled his wish (SG 37v.4-5; DN 22v.6-23r.1).

⁵⁷ ŽP 3r.3-4: slob dpon ni de dang mi ring ba zhig na dge ’dun gnas gzhi chen po su warṇa zhes bya ba | dge ’dun khri phrag lnga tsam ’du ba zhig yod pa de’i ’dren par dbang bskur ba’i su jā ta ta ratna zhes bya ba.

the practices of tantric Buddhism,⁵⁸ and that there were educational and lineage ties between them.

Following Vanaratna's formal entry into Mahācaitya Vihāra, his education began in earnest. From the account given by gZhon nu dpal, which is plausibly based on Vanaratna's personal communication, his curriculum covered all the essential works of exoteric and esoteric Buddhism and firmly grounded the lineages, texts, and practices prominent in Vanaratna's later career in the training he received at Mahācaitya. The scope of his studies is suggestive of a core curriculum of essential works, mirroring curricula reported elsewhere in the Buddhist world, such as the *navadharmā/navagrantha* of the Newar Buddhists Vanaratna would eventually serve.⁵⁹ Many of the topics and texts Vanaratna is said to have studied at Mahācaitya, and the teachers he studied them with, feature in his later narrative and form the core of his teaching repertoire. It is thus certainly possible that either he or gZhon nu dpal embellished or fabricated the curriculum at Mahācaitya Vihāra to establish the pedigree of the lineages he would later transmit to his Tibetan students. Before exploring this possibility, however, it is worth examining the details of Vanaratna's curriculum at Mahācaitya and how it is echoed in Vanaratna's later biography.

Vanaratna's education began with the study of Sanskrit grammar and prosody based on the *Kātantra/Kalāpasūtra*, the *Amarakoṣa*, the works of Kātyāyana, and of an Indian author perhaps named Kapila.⁶⁰ Vanaratna took great interest in these studies, to the point that he even set aside his engagement with his study of tantric scriptures and practices until he had mastered his study of grammar.⁶¹ He continued to emphasize the study of Sanskrit grammar throughout his career, and references to the *Kātantra/Kalāpasūtra* are frequent in his narrative. The work alternately known as the *Kātantra* and *Kalāpasūtra* is a non-Pāṇinian system of Sanskrit grammar attributed to Sarvavarman (d.u.) that was particularly popular among Buddhists.⁶² This text and its commentaries were so essential to Vanaratna that he carried copies of them during his travels, and both received and gave teachings on them at various points in his career. The *ŹP* records that he studied the *Kalāpasūtra* with a non-Buddhist grammarian named Harihara while living in Bodh Gayā,⁶³ which is corroborated by material evidence. Shin'ichiro Hori recently brought our attention to a manuscript collection containing five Sanskrit treatises from the *Kalāpasūtra* corpus that were scribed for Vanaratna's personal use. The manuscript, copied by a scribe named Vāgiśvara between 1421 and 1423, is explicitly identified as Vanaratna's personal collection,⁶⁴ and reports that he was living at the time in a village named Kapasiya on the Kānakaśrotra River near Bodh Gayā.⁶⁵ He kept the *Kalāpasūtra* in his possession until at least 1426/7, at which time

⁵⁸ As will be explored shortly, there is another perspective to take on Sujātaratna and the term *suvarṇa* that points to a Theravāsa presence at Mahācaitya Vihāra.

⁵⁹ Tuladhar-Douglas 2006: 86, 130-33; von Rospatt 2015: 819-21.

⁶⁰ *ŹP* 3r.4-5; 3v.2-3. The works of Kātyāyana (ca. 1st century BCE) comprise a series of *vārttikas* on Pāṇinian grammar extant now only Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*. About the challenges of identifying Kātyāyana and his works, see Brokhorst 2016: 46-52. Kapila is my conjectural translation of gZhon nu dpal's *dmar ser*; it is not possible to identify any works on poetics (*sdeb sbyor*) by an author of that name.

⁶¹ *ŹP* 3v.1-2.

⁶² Verhagen 1996: 50-52.

⁶³ gZhon nu dpal notes that the version of the *Kalāpasūtra* they studied together was seven volumes (*gzhung?*) longer than the version available in Tibetan translation. See also Hori 2018: 48. [*ŹP* 11v.3: ka lā pa'i dka' ba'i gnas rnam dang | ka lā pa'i che ba da lta bod na yod pa 'di las gzhung bdun 'gyur gyis che ba zhig yod pa.]

⁶⁴ Three of the five colophons refer to their respective texts as "Vanaratna's book" (*pustaka*), with one colophon also describing the purpose for which it was copied, Vanaratna's "private reading" (*nijapāṭha*) (Hori 2018: 47-8).

⁶⁵ Hori 2018: 47-53. This manuscript and its collection of texts will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

he is reported to have given his personal, hand-written copy to the Tibetan Sa skya pa master Rong ston Shes bya kun rig.⁶⁶ Vanaratna is also said to have given teachings on the *Kalāpasūtra* in Tibet at the Phag mo gru's sNe'u gdong palace in 1453/4.⁶⁷ Thus from the number and nature of the references to the *Kalāpasūtra* in Vanaratna's narrative we can be certain it was an essential text for him throughout his career.

Vanaratna next studied *vinaya* at Mahācaitya with Buddhaghōṣa, though as was the case with his ordination we are not told specifically which *vinaya*, nor which specific texts he studied.⁶⁸ Buddhaghōṣa is also said to have given Vanaratna his first tantric initiations, making him both his monastic and tantric preceptor. According to the *ŽP*, Buddhaghōṣa initiated Vanaratna into a number of maṇḍalas, including those of the *Kālacakra Tantra* and Abhayākaragupta's *Vajrāvalī*,⁶⁹ both of which feature prominently in Vanaratna's later narrative. It was also at this time that Buddhaghōṣa is said to have introduced Vanaratna to his personal deity, Vajrayoginī.⁷⁰ That Vajrayoginī alone is mentioned and not the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* is curious, as the practice of Cakrasaṃvara is among the most prominent in Vanaratna's narrative. Apart from this single reference to Vajrayoginī there is no mention of the tantric goddess or the Cakrasaṃvara corpus in Vanaratna's early narrative, and it is not until Vanaratna's transformative initiation into the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala in Nepal thirty years later that Vajrayoginī and the Cakrasaṃvara become prominent in his biography and oeuvre. Nonetheless, Buddhaghōṣa was included among portraits of Cakrasaṃvara lineage masters Vanaratna commissioned, suggesting that Vanaratna's Cakrasaṃvara lineage extends back to years at Mahācaitya Vihāra.⁷¹ The reference to the *Kālacakra Tantra* here is also one of the very few explicit mentions of the system in his early narrative, as it would only be much later, during his career in Tibet, that the Kālacakra is regularly mentioned in his biography and teaching repertoire. Thus, if either Vanaratna or gZhon nu dpal were to be guilty of retroactively ascribing teachings Vanaratna received later in life to this early period, this would be a likely case.

Vanaratna's Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna training at Mahācaitya also included classics such as the *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Sandhinirmocana Sūtra*, Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the works of Maitreya (*byams chos*), Abhidharma (*mngon pa*; which one specifically we are not told), and Asaṅga's *Yogācārabhūmi (sa sde)*.⁷² Of these only the *Prajñāpāramitā* figures in Vanaratna's later narrative; he would teach often on the *Aṣṭasāhasrakaprajñāpāramitā*, including at Bodh Gayā,⁷³ during his first residence in the Kathmandu Valley,⁷⁴ and at the Phag mo gru monastery of rTses thang⁷⁵. bSod nams rgya mtsho also tells us that, upon his return to the Kathmandu Valley in 1438, Vanaratna gave six months of teachings on the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus at Gopīcandra Vihāra, which included the *Prajñāpāramitā* in 8,000, 25,000, and 100,00 lines.⁷⁶

Vanaratna studied most of this curriculum with Ratnakīrti, who appears to have been a resident of Mahācaitya. In addition to the texts listed above, Ratnakīrti is also said to have

⁶⁶ *ŽP* 15r.6: ka lā pa'i mdo gcig | nyid kyis phyag bris su mdzad nas chos rje rong ston chen po la gnang.

⁶⁷ SG 43v.1.

⁶⁸ *ŽP* 3v.5.

⁶⁹ *ŽP* 3v.6-4r.1.

⁷⁰ *ŽP* 3r.7.

⁷¹ See the *bLa ma'i bris thang rgyab yig bzhugs* (Öta. 4607), 5r.8-5v.1.

⁷² *ŽP* 3v.3-4.

⁷³ *ŽP* 13r.4

⁷⁴ *ŽP* 13v.4.

⁷⁵ *ŽP* 17r.7.

⁷⁶ SG 35r.4-5.

instructed Vanaratna on his own work concerning epistemology (*pramāṇa*),⁷⁷ and to have given him extensive training in the various classes of tantric Buddhism. No specific systems are mentioned by name, but Ratnakīrti appears in four of Vanaratna's lineages: Nāgārjunapāda's *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga*,⁷⁸ Abhayākaragupta's *Samputatantrarājaṭīkāmnyamañjarī* and *Vajrāvalī*,⁷⁹ and Ghaṇṭāpāda's *Pañcakramopadeśa*.⁸⁰ In all of these lineages Ratnakīrti immediately precedes Vanaratna, except for the *Vajrāvalī*, where they are separated only by Buddhaghōṣa. All four of these works feature in Vanaratna's teaching repertoire and are mentioned again in his biographies. He regularly taught on the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* in Tibet, and gave teachings on Nāgārjuna's specific system at least once, at rTses thang monastery in 1432.⁸¹ He would also translate this text with 'Jam dpal ye shes (Öta. 4792). Abhayākaragupta's two works also figure into his oeuvre; he gave the reading transmission for the *Samputatantrarājaṭīkāmnyamañjarī* at sNe'u gdong in 1436,⁸² and offered initiations based on the *Vajrāvalī* multiple times in Tibet. He is reported to have given the complete set of initiations at sNe'u gdong in 1436,⁸³ and then again in 1454 with bSod nams rgya mtsho serving as his ritual assistant,⁸⁴ and as we have seen, Vanaratna appears as the subject of a Tibetan portrait in which he is surrounded by the lineage of the *Vajrāvalī* (image 2).⁸⁵ The *Vajrāvalī* also served as an important source text for Vanaratna, as witnessed in his *Trayodaśātmakaśrīcakrasaṃvaramaṇḍalavidhi*, where he incorporates lengthy passages verbatim from Abhayākaragupta's work. Finally, Ghaṇṭāpāda's *Pañcakramopadeśa* appears again late in Vanaratna's narrative, when he teaches on the text at sNe'u gdong in 1454.⁸⁶ At around the same time he translated the text with bSod nams rnam rgyal at Byams pa gling monastery (Öta. 4624) and included a Sanskrit apograph of Ghaṇṭāpā's work in the Vanaratna Codex.⁸⁷

Vanaratna completed his studies at Mahācaitya in 1404, at the age of twenty. It was then that he was awarded the degrees of *paṇḍita* and *karmācārya* (*las kyi slob dpon*) and took full monastic ordination (Tib. *bsnyen par rdzogs pa*; Skt. *upasampanna*). Both were conferred on him in front of the full monastic assembly by the same triad who officiated his previous ordination, Buddhaghōṣa, Sujātaratna, and Buddhajñāna.⁸⁸ As part of the ceremony for the awarding his degrees and full ordination, Vanaratna was asked to give a teaching to the full community, an event that was presided over by his uncle instead of his father, who had passed away years before.⁸⁹ As with his earlier ordination, the *ŽP* does not identify his ordination

⁷⁷ *ŽP* 3v.3. We have no record of such a work by this author, but perhaps gZhon nu dpal had conflated Vanaratna's teacher with the eleventh century master of the same name who was a renowned scholar of *pramāṇa* and Yogācāra thought. See Ruegg 1971.

⁷⁸ Öta. 4792: 52r.2-7. The translator's colophon offers a bilingual lineage history from Nāgārjuna to 'Jam dpal ye shes.

⁷⁹ DÑ 22v.3-6.

⁸⁰ DÑ 23v.5-7.

⁸¹ *ŽP* 17v.6. The Nāgārjuna connected to this text and practice is not the Madhyamaka philosopher, but rather the Nāgārjuna of the Ārya school of tantric exegesis or another tantric master who assumed the literary identity of Nāgārjuna.

⁸² *ŽP* 19v.3.

⁸³ *ŽP* 19r.6-19v.3

⁸⁴ NTSG^b 305.20-23.

⁸⁵ See Jackson 2011.

⁸⁶ SG 46v.2.

⁸⁷ About which see Chapter Seven.

⁸⁸ Buddhajñāna's role here is not clear, but it appears he may have acted as a formal witness (*dpang*). The text reads, cryptically (*ŽP* 4v.4): sngar gyi grib tshod pa des gpang ste ston pa mdzad nas...

⁸⁹ *ŽP* 4v.4-6.

lineage here, but because of the evidence that Vanaratna identified as a [Mūla]sarvāstivādin it would have been this *vinaya* he received. Also around this time Vanaratna is reported to have taken the vows of a bodhisattva, also conferred by Buddhaghōṣa, a ceremony the *ŽP* reports followed the ritual tradition of Nāgārjuna.⁹⁰ Vanaratna himself would use this system when giving the bodhisattva commitments on at least two occasions: once to the young Phag mo gru monarch Kun dga's legs pa and again during his teaching program at Byams pa gling monastery.⁹¹

Vanaratna adopted an additional level of discipline at this time, that of an *avadhūta* (*bya bral ba*).⁹² In general Indic spiritual parlance the term *avadhūta* indicates that one has “cast off” (*ava√dhū*) all familial, social, political, and institutional entanglements and adopted an itinerant ascetic lifestyle. Though the specifics of this commitment are vague, in Vanaratna's case it appears to have required a formal request to his preceptor. The *ŽP* states that Vanaratna first presented Buddhaghōṣa with his reasons for wanting the *avadhūta* commitment—the wish to dedicate his life fully to his spiritual training in such a way that irrevocably puts to rest the issue of Sadnagara's political succession. Buddhaghōṣa then deliberated on this for some time before giving his assent.⁹³ Beyond this it is not made clear what the commitments and practices of an *avadhūta* entailed for Vanaratna. In esoteric Śaiva traditions the term *avadhūta* can designate a style of asceticism that privileges an uncomplicated, carefree, and potentially antinomian mode of religious practice.⁹⁴ Though there is little indication the term is being used in that formal sense in Vanaratna's biography, this spiritual lifestyle does find some resonance. Throughout his biographies Vanaratna is shown to prefer the unelaborate practice of resting in *samādhi* over the complexities of ritual practice (in which he was certainly a specialist), and he would invoke his carefree *avadhūta* status when pressed into social and institutional obligations. This is particularly evident in a scene where he refuses to take personal responsibility for Gopicandra Vihāra in Nepal. When offered the monastery by the leaders of the local Buddhist community, he tells them, “I am an *avadhūta* and free of self-interest. I will only stay here as long as it makes sense to.”⁹⁵ Thus for Vanaratna, or at least in gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho's understanding of him, his commitment to the way of an *avadhūta* was prominent and guided him throughout his life.

Omissions and Absences: Finding Perspective in Vanaratna's Early Biography

From the *ŽP*'s description of Vanaratna's early education at Mahācaitya, and from evidence gathered throughout our sources, a picture emerges of an active monastery of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Nikāya steeped in the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna tradition. This tradition was upheld through instruction in Buddhist Sanskrit literature that covered the linguistic sciences, the core treatises of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and instruction and initiation into the major systems of esoteric Buddhism. This is precisely the type of institution and education one would expect in the

⁹⁰ *ŽP* 4v.3-4.

⁹¹ SG 43r.1; NTSN 39v.3.

⁹² We can be confident that the Sanskrit term *avadhūta* is intended by the Tibetan *bya bral* because of a later scene in the SG where bSod nams rgya mtso (incorrectly) phoneticizes the term (*a ba dhu tāh*) during one of Vanaratna's first-person recollections (SG 34v.2-3).

⁹³ *ŽP* 5r.3-4.

⁹⁴ Mallinson 2015: 15.

⁹⁵ SG 34v.2-3: li tsatsha vi'i rgyal rigs jakṣa se ṅaḥ sogs gsum gyis dpal go bi tsandra gtsug lag khang chen po phul ba'i dus [] a ba dhū tāh yin bdag gir mi byed | ji tsam rigs pa de srid du 'dug pa yin gsung.

biography of an Indian *paṇḍita* from northeast India in the later centuries of Indic Buddhism and would have firmly established Vanaratna's credentials for his Tibetan disciples who inherited and valorized that tradition. The seeming normativity of this presentation should give us pause; is it possible that either gZhon nu dpal or even Vanaratna himself embellished or fabricated this account in order to ground his authority as Buddhist *paṇḍita* and *vajrācārya* in the earliest details of his biography? Could we read this section of his biography as an idealized, retrospective description that establishes for Vanaratna and his lineages an undeniable Indian pedigree? If this is the case, what reasons motivated Vanaratna and/or gZhon nu dpal in their selective retelling or outright invention? We can approach this hypothetical question by looking not at what the *rnam thars* tell us, but from what they potentially leave out.

There are two significant lacunae in Vanaratna's Tibetan biographies—in both gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho's work—that bear upon our understanding of Vanaratna's early narrative. The first is what appears to be the obscuration of a perceptible Pāli and perhaps Theravaṃsa influence in Vanaratna's training at Mahācaitya Vihāra; the second concerns an obscuration of Vanaratna's further Vajrayāna training in the Kathmandu Valley, as well as the complete omission of his discipleship to at least one Tibetan master. The occlusion of Vanaratna's Vajrayāna training under Nepalese and Tibetan masters, in combination with what are only sporadic and superficial references to the Vajrayāna during his years in Sri Lanka and India, raise questions about precisely when and where he received the majority of his tantric training. As this is a subject for later chapters, it suffices to say here that it is quite possible if not probable that the bulk of Vanaratna's Vajrayāna training occurred much later in his life and came at the feet of Nepalese and Tibetan teachers.⁹⁶ Because these important details are absent, and possibly deliberately omitted from the *ŽP* and *SG*, we need to reassess the veracity of the description of Vanaratna's education at Mahācaitya Vihāra. If, as the evidence will suggest, Vanaratna only truly emerged as a Vajrayāna master after 1430, the account given here may be revisionist, and intended to meet the expectations of a Tibetan audience by rooting his instruction and practice lineages on Indian soil.

Also affecting our assessment of Vanaratna's early narrative is its seeming omission of Theravaṃsa Buddhism and the Pāli language, of which there remain faint but tangible traces. The evidence we have for these influences are limited and speculative, but are nonetheless compelling. We recall that Sadnagara has been tentatively located in the far east of the Bengal delta, and possibly in the hills above it. This would put Sadnagara in close proximity to and in cultural exchange with the Northern Burmese kingdom of Ava to its immediate east, and perhaps with Arakan to the south. These kingdoms supported a distinctly Sri Lankan form of Theravaṃsa Buddhism, a tradition whose religious and literary culture was communicated through Pāli. Thus, even if we elect to believe that Mahācaitya Vihāra was a predominantly Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna institution, the presence of a thriving Theravaṃsa-Pāli community nearby would likely have had some influence on Sadnagara and its Buddhist culture.

The traces of this culture in Vanaratna's narrative are not made explicit, but they are there. The first piece of evidence is no less than Vanaratna's name, which appears to be the Sanskritization of the Pāli *vanaratana*. Vanaratna is an exceedingly uncommon, if not singular name in the Sanskritic Buddhist tradition, but appears with relative frequency in the histories of Theravaṃsa Buddhism, especially from the fourteenth centuries onwards. We know of two illustrious Sri Lankan Vanaratanas in close historical proximity to our Vanaratna. The first of

⁹⁶ We will look at evidence that Vanaratna received Vajrayāna training with Nepalese masters in Chapters Four and Five, and with his Tibetan teacher in Chapters Six and Seven.

these was the abbot of Amaragirivāsa Vihāra who lead a reform of the Sri Lankan *saṅgha* in 1345 at the behest of the powerful minister Senā Laṅkādhikāra.⁹⁷ The second, and more intriguing reference, is to Vanaratana Mahāsāmi, whose qualities are extolled in the fifteen-century Sinhala poem, the *Haṃsasandeśaya*.⁹⁸ According to H.B.M Ilanghasinha, this same Vanaratana was abbot of Viḍāgama Vihāra, an important center of learning in the *vanavāsa*, or forest tradition of Sri Lankan Buddhism. This institution attracted students from across the Buddhist world and was our Vanaratna’s primary home during his six years on the island. It is almost certain that his stay overlapped with the Sri Lankan Vanaratana’s tenure there.⁹⁹ The fact that these two men shared the same name and resided at the same institution is not compelling in and of itself, but it suggests the possibility that “Vanaratana” was a relatively common Pāli ordination name, and that it may have been used in a specific sub-branch connected to a Sri Lankan monastery which became our Vanaratna’s main residence in Sri Lanka. Tangentially, Peter Skilling has noted that a Sri Lankan ordination lineage known as the *vanaratana* (Pā Kaew) lineage was prominent on the Malay Peninsula during the Ayutthaya period (14th-18th century).¹⁰⁰

The second, more oblique piece of evidence for a Burmese, Theravaṃsa influence is the reference in the *ŽP* to Sujātaratna’s monastery named Suvarṇa. On the surface of it there is nothing about the common Sanskrit term *suvarṇa*, “gold,” to suggest a link to Theravaṃsa Buddhism, and in gZhon nu dpal’s precise phrasing it serves as the name of a large monastic institution in the relative vicinity of Mahācaitya Vihāra.¹⁰¹ In his DN, gZhon nu dpal also identifies Sujātaratna as a member of Vanaratna’s lineage for the esoteric *śaḍaṅgayoga* practices, thus placing him and his monastery in a undeniably Vajrayāna milieu. If we adopt a more skeptical perspective, we might read this lineage attribution as suspect, and approach the figure of Sujātaratna and his monastery differently. Because the monastery named Survarṇa is reported to be “nearby” (*mi ring ba*), we can assume that it shares a general, but not precise geographic location with Mahācaitya Vihāra. As we have seen, Indic Buddhist culture was pushed eastwards from the delta following the Turkic conquest and the subsequent collapse of the kingdoms that supported Buddhism there. It would follow that Buddhism would become increasingly attenuated as one traveled west from Sadnagara. The thriving Theravaṃsa Buddhist kingdom of Ava, on the other hand, was located to the east, and Arakan to the south. Thus, if Sadnagara’s Mahācaitya Vihāra belonged to a broader network of loosely affiliated institutions, it seems more likely that this network extended eastwards towards Burma and/or southwards to Arakan, rather than westwards towards Bengal. Returning to the name of the monastery, “Suvarṇa” is almost certainly not its full title, and could be read more generically, perhaps as a toponym. The term *suvarṇabhūmi*, “land of gold,” has been used from pre-Aśokan times to refer a number of Southeast Asian Buddhist cultures stretching from Burma to Indonesia.¹⁰² One could imagine, therefore, that in telling gZhon nu dpal about Sujātaratna, Vanaratna stated that he was from the neighboring “Gold country,” referring to the Burmese kingdoms to the east.

⁹⁷ Ilanghasinha 1972: 166.

⁹⁸ *Haṃsa Sandeśa*, 2005, 61-65.

⁹⁹ Ilanghasina 1972: 98, 103, 227-30. This same Vanaratna would go on to become a famous abbot at Kāragala during the reign of Parākramabāhu VI (Ibid.: 94).

¹⁰⁰ Skilling 2007: 183-4.

¹⁰¹ *ŽP* 3r.3-4: ...de dang mi ring ba zhig na dge ’dun gnas gzhi chen po su warṇa zhes bya ba.

¹⁰² Ray and Mishra (n.d.): 1-15. While various Buddhist cultures have attempted to co-opt the name *suvarṇabhūmi* and its Buddhist significance, there is no evidence that clarifies which, or even if it ever referred to a specific location in Southeast Asia.

The final, and in some ways most compelling indication of Vanaratna's potential Theravaṃsa connections is what he chose to do when he left Sadnagara in 1405. With his studies at Mahācaitya Vihāra complete, Vanaratna next went to Sri Lanka and stayed there for six years, where he is known to have visited some of the leading monastic colleges (Pāli: *pariveṇa*) in the fifteenth-century Buddhist world. First and foremost among these was Viḍāgama Vihāra, which gZhon nu dpal states was his primary residence during his stay. Vanaratna also studied at Gaḍalādeṇiya, a monastic college run by the *saṅgharāja* Dhammakīrti III, Devarakṣita Jayabāhu. This is telling because, if it is indeed the case that Vanaratna's education at Mahācaitya was purely Sanskritic and covered only a Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna curriculum, his choice to spend the ensuing six years studying in the uniformly Theravaṃsa environment of fifteenth-century Sri Lanka is a curious one. Pāli would have been the *lingua franca*, and certainly the medium of his studies, requiring that Vanaratna had reasonable proficiency in the language before his arrival. What Vanaratna did not do when he finished his studies was travel westwards into the Mahāyāna-Buddhist heartland of north India. One has to wonder then if, in his eyes, there simply were no viable opportunities for higher study in mainland India, and that his choice to go to Sri Lanka reflected both the diminished state of Indian Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism and the ascendancy of Theravaṃsa Buddhism on the peripheries of the subcontinent. Given the traces of Theravaṃsa Buddhism in Vanaratna's biography—particularly his potentially Pāli name—and the fact the Sadnagara was relatively close to northern Burma and Arakan, both Sadnagara as a polity and Mahācaitya as an institution may have had ties to Sri Lanka via the Theravaṃsa Buddhist cultures of Ava and Arakan, ties that Vanaratna was able to parlay into contacts in Sri Lanka that facilitated his studies there.

This evidence, admittedly speculative, casts a shadow over the picture the *ŽP* gives us of Vanaratna's training at Mahācaitya Vihāra, and specifically its predominantly Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna character. If we are to take a skeptical perspective, we can question the veracity of gZhon nu spal's description of Vanaratna's training, reading it as an idealized depiction designed to obscure Theravaṃsa elements in Vanaratna's early training and promote a picture of his early education that valorizes its Indianness and confirms the pedigree and authenticity of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna lineages he promoted in his later career. Though such skepticism is certainly healthy, it need not wholly define our understanding of Vanaratna's education at Mahācaitya Vihāra, nor of the view it gives of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism in fifteenth century India. The counter-narrative suggested by the evidence just presented can help us balance our perspective, but there remains good reason to believe that Vanaratna's training in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism did begin in his early years in Sadnagara.

The first reason is simply the obvious fact that Vanaratna went on to become a venerated master of both the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions in India, Nepal, and Tibet. While it is clear that he underwent significant further Vajrayāna training in both those places, he was known to have taught on the Mahāyāna publicly in north India within a few years of his departure from Sri Lanka, and we have manuscript evidence of his continued study of Sanskrit at that time. When Vanaratna first reached Nepal in 1423, he worked in a Sanskritic, Mahāyānist milieu, and we know that he and his first Tibetan translator, 'Jam dpal ye shes, began working together in Sanskrit in 1426. Though it is certainly possible, it seems unrealistic that Vanaratna developed in such a short time from exclusively Theravaṃsa-Pāli origins to become a Buddhist *paṇḍita* of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna who taught and composed solely in Sanskrit. If we discount gZhon nu dpal's narrative of Vanaratna's early education, this transition would have spanned approximately ten to fifteen years, the amount of time from his departure from Sri Lanka in 1411 to his arrival

in Tibet in 1426 and would have taken place largely in India, where such opportunities would have been limited in the early fifteenth century. Thus, the fact that Vanaratna did possess the training his biographies describe, and that this training is corroborated in his writings, translations, and in the material and art-historical record, it seems unnecessarily skeptical to reject gZhon nu dpal's narrative entirely.

The story this seemingly divergent evidence presents us with aligns with the history of the region in the fifteenth century: Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, nearly if not completely displaced from the Bengal delta by the end of the fourteenth century, continued in an attenuated state in the far east of the subcontinent, where it was increasingly assimilated into the Theravaṃsa culture of Burma, Arakan, and Southeast Asia. The tradition of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna exegesis continued, as it appears that masters trained in the *sūtras*, *sāstras*, and *tantras* remained in the region, but the tradition was dying out, and would likely be gone within a few generations. Ordination into a Sanskrit *vinaya* lineage typical of a Mahāyāna community—the Mūlasarvāstivāda Nikāya in Vanaratna's case—remained, but no single monastery could muster the quorum of monks or the necessary monastic officials to perform the ordination rites on their own. The Theravaṃsa tradition and Pāli were ascendent, so much so that Vanaratna took a common Pāli ordination name and saw his best opportunities for further training in Theravaṃsa countries.

The most sober assessment of the totality of evidence is to hold the key elements of Vanaratna's early biography to be correct, while acknowledging that either he or his biographer was selective and revisionist, and that certain aspects of his training were downplayed or omitted while others that aligned with Tibetan expectations were fore-fronted. This reading points to Sadnagara and Mahācaitya Vihāra as a last bastion of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism in the region, one whose core identity was being consistently eroded by indifferent political regimes and the vicissitudes of shifting cultural and religious paradigms. Sadnagara's Buddhist identity appeared to be safe due its proximity to the thriving Theravaṃsa culture to its east, but its Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions were fading, and evidenced by the hints of Pāli and Theravaṃsa Buddhism in Vanaratna's biography. This transition is also revealed in Vanaratna's decision to leave Sadnagara and travel not to India but to Sri Lanka, a move he made within a year of completing his studies at Mahācaitya Vihāra.

Departure from Chittagong

At the age of twenty-one Vanaratna, now a *paṇḍita* and fully-ordained *bhikṣu*, assembled an entourage of attendants and companions, gathered all needed supplies, and left his home, family, and monastery behind in Sadnagara to begin a nearly year-long journey to Sri Lanka. Returning to gZhon nu dpal's words, already cited above:

At twenty-one years of age [Vanaratna] lead an entourage of about thirty attendants who, carrying abundant essential supplies, traveled by boat and other [means] along the southern route out of Sadnagara. They progressively made their way through realms that included Chakma (*tsag ma*), and when they reached the bay of the ocean that lay between Bengal (*bhañ ga la'i yul*) and their destination, they boarded a ship.¹⁰³

As we have seen, this passage yields important information about Sadnagara's location in eastern

¹⁰³ ŽP 5r.4-6.

India, and helped us frame Vanaratna's narrative within the history of the region. What this passage does not tell us, however, is precisely which port in Bengal Vanaratna departed from. It is clear that Vanaratna began his journey some distance to the north, that the journey was long and involved, and that he passed through multiple kingdoms along the way. This evidence, slim though it may be, suggests that Vanaratna departed from the port at Chittagong (Skt. Chāṭigrāma), one of the busiest ports in Bengal at the time.¹⁰⁴

The facts we have are these: when Vanaratna left Sadnagara he traveled in a southwardly direction. Using "ships" (*gzings*) and perhaps other means (*la sogs pa*), he passed through the kingdom of Chakma (*tsag ma*) among others (*la sogs pa*), and only then reached a port where a ship was available for the onward journey. Most of these details are exceedingly vague and do little to help us pinpoint Vanaratna's point of departure, but the reference to the kingdom of Chakma strongly indicates that the port in question was at Chittagong. Very little is known about the history of the Chakma people, and it is difficult to identify the precise boundaries of their realm, but the consensus is that the Chakma kingdom encompassed an area in the mountains surrounding Chittagong, roughly the same geographical range the Chakma people still inhabit today. The Portuguese historian João de Barros (1496-1570) produced a map of the Bengal delta that includes the Chakma kingdom (image 4). This map, made between 1525-35, reflects the topography of the region as understood by Portuguese mariners plying the Bay of Bengal during the fifteenth century, and while it is certainly not to scale, it is clear that to their best approximations, the kingdom of Chakma (Chacomas in Portuguese) was located to the east-northeast of Chittagong along the Karnaphuli River and its tributaries. It lay between Chittagong and the Tripura hills, and was accessible via riverine, and presumable overland routes that roughly followed the contours of mountain ranges running north-south. In other words, it aligns exceedingly well with Vanaratna's description of his travel between Sadnagara and the Bengal coast. Barros's contemporary Tomé Pires (1468-1550), who served as ambassador to China in the sixteenth century, has written that that Chakma was a tributary of the Bengal Sultanate, and a key player in regional and maritime trade.¹⁰⁵ To this Barros adds that Chakma maintained an alliance with the kingdom of Tripura, and with their large cavalry were a formidable force in the region.¹⁰⁶ Though Chittagong was not the only or even the main port in Bengal,¹⁰⁷ it is the only major port-city in Bengal reached by passing through the Chakma kingdom, and thus is the most likely candidate for Vanaratna's point of departure for Sri Lanka.

Chittagong at the time of Vanaratna's arrival would have been a bustling port city with an international contingent of seamen, merchants, military men, and explorers. In addition the reports of the Portuguese mentioned above, Arab sources of the period describe Chittagong as among the biggest ports in Bengal, and the Chinese Imperial fleet is known to have docked there in 1405, the same year Vanaratna set sail.¹⁰⁸ As a major entrepôt and access point to the inland delta, Chittagong was the primary port for the Samataṭa kingdoms,¹⁰⁹ and became a contested site for much of its subsequent history. It was a flashpoint in regional politics, often trading hands between the kings of Tripura and Chakma before coming under Sultanate control in 1338, when it was captured by Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah. From 1338 to 1459, long after Vanaratna's departure from the region, Chittagong remained in firm Sultanate control until it was taken from

¹⁰⁴ Van Galen 2002: 153.

¹⁰⁵ Pires 1944: 89.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 89, note 3.

¹⁰⁷ João de Barros claims this status belonged to Gaur/Lakhnauti in the early sixteenth century (Pires 1944: 90).

¹⁰⁸ Van Galen 2002: 153-6.

¹⁰⁹ Husain 1997: 90.

them by Arakanese forces.¹¹⁰ Thus Chittagong would have been peaceful and stable when Vanaratna arrived there, allowing for an easy flow of goods and people. This is certainly supported by the *ŽP*, which records no unexpected difficulties for Vanaratna and his large, provision-laden party. And once there, it seemed that Vanaratna had little trouble securing passage onwards to the next chapter of his life.

¹¹⁰ Rahim 1952: 21-22; Van Galen 2002: 156.

Chapter 2

Sri Lanka: 1405/6-1411

Vanaratna's decision to leave the Buddhist community of his birth to seek further training in Sri Lanka can be understood to reflect both the general condition of Buddhism in the region and of the decline of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism in India. His decision accords well with what we know of the broader realignments taking place among the Buddhist cultures of South and Southeast Asia in the fifteenth century wherein the Theravaṃsa, Pāli-based Buddhism of Sri Lanka had supplanted Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism to serve as the foundation and touchstone of Buddhist culture for much of the region. Through Vanaratna's biography we follow the footsteps of one of the numerous Buddhist seekers navigating these uncertain waters, giving us a rare, on-the-ground perspective of the shifting fortunes of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia. Vanaratna spent a total of six years in Sri Lanka, which also makes his biography an invaluable resource for the study of the island and its Buddhist community during the tumultuous Gampola period. As we tell Vanaratna's story, we will coordinate his narrative with other sources on fifteenth-century Sri Lanka to both establish the context for his experiences there and to shed light on this dynamic period of Sri Lankan history.

With his departure from Sadnagara and voyage from Chittagong, Vanaratna entered the maritime network of the Bay of Bengal, joining the circulation of goods and people that linked Bengal and the hills of the eastern delta with the broader South and Southeast Asia region, and further to the trans-oceanic Indian Ocean trade routes that stretched from Africa and the Middle East to the South China Sea. In addition to being the economic engine for the region, the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean maritime networks had for centuries fueled the spread of Theravaṃsa Buddhism and contributed to the formation of a Pāli-Theravaṃsa ecumene with its central node in Sri Lanka, and which further encompassed the Buddhist cultures of Burmese, Mon, Khmer, and Thai kingdoms. Because of the widespread adoption of the Theravaṃsa tradition across Southeast Asia, and due to the slow collapse of Buddhism in its traditional north Indian homeland, Sri Lanka had solidified its status as a touchstone of Buddhist culture in South and Southeast Asia by the fifteenth century, both as an ideal of a religious society to be emulated by polities throughout the region, and as a geographic space made sacred by its place in Buddhist history and the esteem of its living institutions. As we trace Vanaratna's travels across the Bay of Bengal and throughout Sri Lanka we catch glimpses of maritime South Asia, and enter fully, if briefly, into this Pāli-Theravaṃsa Buddhist ecumene.

Vanaratna entered the South Asian maritime environment at Chittagong. Located at the apex of the Bay of Bengal, Chittagong was among the most important ports in the region, and one of the primary entrepôts for the Bengal Sultanate. Its value as an economic hub made Chittagong prized territory, one constantly caught in a tug-of-war between the kingdoms of Bengal, Tripura, Chakma, and by Vanaratna's lifetime, the Bengal Sultanate and Arakan. Portuguese historians of the fifteenth century regarded Chittagong as a main port in the region, and the access point for many goods available only in the hinterlands of Bengal. Located as it was at the northern reaches of the Bay of Bengal, Chittagong would nonetheless have been a node of the broader Indian Ocean maritime environment that was generally oriented towards east-west routes from the Arabian Sea to the seas of east Asia.¹ With ports in Sri Lanka and

¹ Hall 2010: 113.

along the Coromandel, Kalinga, Bengal, Arakan, and Burmese coastlines, the Bay of Bengal was a “polycentric networked realm,”² a network of smaller ports supplying local and subregional commodities to larger outlets, which in turn supplied and fueled transoceanic trade across the Indian Ocean and beyond. These port cities were multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and religiously diverse, and were comprised largely of communities that, whatever their relationship to the larger polities that ruled them, shared a similar set of values built upon their shared maritime culture.³

Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, competition for control over these lucrative routes and their ports had resulted in political realignments and the emergence of new polities whose economies were more closely tied to maritime trade.⁴ This realignment dovetailed with the emergence of a distinctively Theravaṃsa- and Pāli-based cosmopolitan Buddhist culture that supplanted earlier Mahāyāna and Hindu cosmopolitan cultures throughout Southeast Asia, specifically in Burmese, Khmer and Thai kingdoms.⁵ This Theravaṃsa culture was rooted firmly in the Mahāvihāra tradition of Sri Lanka, which had overcome rival traditions in the twelfth century to become the singular, state-sanctioned mode of orthodox Buddhism promoted on the island and served as the source the *vinaya* ordination lineages, canons, and traditions of Buddhist exegesis throughout Southeast Asia.⁶ The Mahāvihāra tradition spread throughout the region through scriptures and commentaries composed in Pāli that were carried back and forth from Sri Lanka by traveling monks and pilgrims.⁷ Thus emerged what Tilman Frasch has dubbed the “Pāli Cosmopolis,” which, with the rapid deterioration of the north Indian Buddhist heartland, replaced Sanskritic Mahāyāna Buddhism as the dominant Buddhist paradigm in South and Southeast Asia. Sri Lanka was regarded as one of, if not *the* primary center of this emerging ecumene, a mantle it was specifically well-positioned to inherit. Sri Lanka had a long and celebrated pedigree as a Buddhist realm: it was believed to have been visited by the Buddha himself; was referred to with great frequency in Pāli in Sanskrit Buddhist literature; was home to a Buddhist tradition believed to have been founded through the missionary efforts of king Aśoka, the paradigmatic Buddhist king; was the birthplace of Pāli and the Pāli canon; and, was the residence of the most famous and authoritative commentator on Pāli texts, Buddhaghosa.⁸

The spread of a distinctive Sri Lankan Pāli-Theravaṃsa mode of Buddhism accelerated in eleventh century when, in the wake of the Cōḷa decimation of Sri Lankan political and religious institutions, king Vijayabāhu I (r.1058-1114) sent an embassy to Burma to import Buddhist monks that could reestablish higher-ordination lineages in Sri Lanka.⁹ Within a century of this event, north Indian Buddhism would face the threat of Turkic invasion and begin the centuries-long process of contraction and eventual collapse. At the same moment, Pagan was thriving, and so witnessed an increase in its stature as a Buddhist state as monastics, teachers, pilgrims, and artisans from north India fled eastwards. With the strong religious affiliations between Sri Lanka

² To use the term coined by Kenneth Hall (2010: 113).

³ Hall 2010: 113-19. 138-9. Hall has dubbed these networked port cities “heterarchies,” horizontally linked urban centers that shared common goals, recognized the political independence of its members, and acknowledged a general cultural homogeneity despite the difference of the larger societies of which they were a part.

⁴ Blackburn 2015: 243.

⁵ Hall 2010: 116.

⁶ Bretfeld 2012: 287-88. The term *theravaṃsa* is used here instead of the more common appellation “Theravāda” because of significant issues regarding the latter as a term of self-reference within aligned traditions. For more on the problems pertaining to the use of “Theravāda,” see Skilling, et al. 2012, and Bretfeld 2012

⁷ Frasch 2017: 67.

⁸ Blackburn 2015: 256; Frasch 2017: 66.

⁹ Blackburn 2015: 239; Frasch 2017: 71.

and Pagan already well-established, the Indian Buddhist diaspora became increasingly connected with this strand of Buddhism and its Pāli literary culture. The Mongol assault on northern Burma in the thirteenth century significantly impacted Pagan's fortunes, increasing the focus on Sri Lanka as the homeland of Theravaṃsa Buddhist culture in South and Southeast Asia. Pagan, and Ava after it, would continue as an active and influential node of Theravaṃsa Buddhist culture, but the position of Sri Lanka as the center of this ecumene was secure. With north Indian Buddhism in steep decline and Theravaṃsa Buddhism increasingly dominant across South and Southeast Asia, the "great translocation" of Buddhist ecumenes, as Frasch calls it, was largely complete by the time Vanaratna left Sadnagara in 1405.¹⁰

During Vanaratna's lifetime and in the ensuing centuries, Sri Lankan Buddhism continued to serve as a unifying cultural paradigm for a region extending from Sri Lanka in southeast, through the Burmese and Khmer kingdoms of mainland Southeast Asia, to the Buddhist lands of northern Thailand and the Malay Peninsula.¹¹ Connected with each other through maritime routes crossing the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, there was regular contact between the disparate Buddhist polities of Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka's Buddhist heartland. This included regular royal missions, the travel of individual monastics and laypeople for study and pilgrimage, the exchange of canonical texts and relics, and shared ordination and recitation ceremonies. This level of political and cultural exchange is exemplified by a joint expedition to Sri Lanka in the 1420s by thirty-nine monks from the Malay Peninsula, twenty-five from Chiang Mai, eight from Khmer territories, and six from Pegu. They made this journey to train in orthodox Theravaṃsa Buddhism, visit its holiest sites, collect its scriptures, and learn its rites so they could be brought back to their respective realms.¹²

The centripetal lure of Sri Lanka's cosmopolitan Buddhist culture is evident in Vanaratna's narrative. Like other foreign Buddhists who preceded and followed him in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,¹³ Vanaratna would have been drawn to Sri Lanka for its mythic and historical importance for South and Southeast Asian Buddhists, and because of its status as an influential center of learning in the Pāli-Theravaṃsa ecumene. Upon completing his education at Mahācaitya Vihāra, Vanaratna did not elect to make the journey to Bodh Gayā or any of the other renowned but declining Buddhist centers of North India, but rather boarded a ship for the southern Indian Ocean and the "new" heartland of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. During Vanaratna's six years on the island he visited its most important pilgrimage sites, viewed relics of the Buddha enshrined throughout the island, met with political and ecclesiastical leaders, and was associated with the island's most illustrious monastic institutions. When Vanaratna departed Sri Lanka in 1411, his next choice of destination, Amarāvātī in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley, may have been influenced by centuries-old ties between the Theravaṃsa institutions of Sri Lanka and those of Andhra. Thus many of Vanaratna's activities and experiences align with the patterns of circulation of Buddhist monastics in the Pāli-Theravaṃsa maritime ecumene, and with its centrality in the Buddhist world of fifteenth century South and Southeast Asia.

¹⁰ Frasch 2017: 70-75.

¹¹ Hall 2010: 133; Blackburn 2015: 254.

¹² Hall 2010: 136.

¹³ Other known foreign missions and personal journeys to Sri Lanka include: two monks from Ava, Śrī Saddhamma Lankara and Siha Mahāthera, who traveled to Sri Lanka for personal studies and returned in 1430 bearing relics (Aung-Thwin 2017: 87); a mid-fourteenth century journey by Si Satha, a monk from Sukhothai in northern Thailand (Blackburn 2015: 244-7); a mission sent by the Ava king Narapati in 1455 (Aung-Thwin 2017: 96); and a delegation sent to Sri Lanka by king Dhammazedi of Pegu in 1475 to make offerings at the major pilgrimage sites and to bring an ordination lineage back to Pegu (Blackburn 2015: 247-51).

gZhon nu dpal’s narrative of Vanaratna’s years in Sri Lanka is valuable witness to both the maritime environment of the Bay of Bengal and of the state of Sri Lankan Buddhist culture in the early fifteenth century. It specifically offers a number of important details about the Buddhist landscape of the island, including reports on its sacred sites, a record of monastic institutions and teachers, and descriptions of the general terrain and the character of the Sri Lankan people. We learn very little about the political situation during Vanaratna’s stay, but by coordinating the information we are given in the historical record, it is clear that he visited Sri Lanka during a particularly volatile period and may have witnessed some of the intrigues and open conflicts of the period first-hand. Because it is exceedingly unlikely that the level of detail about Sri Lanka recorded in the *ŽP* would have been available to gZhon nu dpal in Tibet, it is clear that much of the data it provides comes directly from the Vanaratna’s oral reports, making the *ŽP*’s narrative a rare first-person account of the Buddhist culture of Sri Lanka during the Gampola period.

Ocean Interlude: Kāveripaṭṭanam

Vanaratna’s voyage to Sri Lanka was not direct, but rather included a stop in Kāveripaṭṭanam, a once-important port city located where the Kāveri River reaches the Coromandel coast in modern Tamil Nadu. In the chronology gZhon nu dpal gives us for Vanaratna’s early travels he notes that Vanaratna spent roughly eight months traveling between Sadnagara and Sri Lanka,¹⁴ which would include both his time at sea and his stay in Kāveripaṭṭanam. It is unclear if this stop was part of Vanaratna’s intended itinerary or if his route was dictated by the ships available to him at Chittagong, but it appears he did remain in Kāveripaṭṭanam for some time and had some degree of engagement with at least one local Buddhist site:

[In Bengal they boarded a ship] and again proceeded south, stopping for a while at the monastery of Ācārya Śūra in Kāveripaṭṭanam. Following a vision of his personal deity, he and his entourage accompanied a merchant bound for the island of Siṃhala, and so boarded a ship that took them onwards.¹⁵

From this terse description we learn that Kāveripaṭṭanam was still an active port in the early fifteenth century, despite the rise and dominance of the port at Nāgāpaṭṭanam just a short distance to the south. We also learn of the persistence of a Buddhist site there, and possibly an active Buddhist community associated with it. Based on gZhon nu dpal’s report it would seem that Vanaratna did not simply change ships at Kāveripaṭṭanam, but lingered for some time and only continued his journey when he was ready to do so or when conditions allowed. This in turn suggests that it was both possible and desirable for Vanaratna to remain there, and that the “monastery of Ācārya Śūra” may have been active enough to support him during his stay. gZhon nu dpal’s account also raises, but does not address the possibility that Vanaratna may have sailed to Kāveripaṭṭanam specifically to visit this site.

Presently a sleepy fishing village on the Tamil Nadu coast, Kāveripaṭṭanam (also known as Kolapattana, Pūmpuhār, and Pūhār, among others names) was a major port city that served as a capital of Cōḷa Empire during the Saṅgam Period (third century BCE - second century CE) and

¹⁴ *ŽP* 14r.1.

¹⁵ *ZP* 5r.6-5v.1: de nas slar yang lho phyogs la theg nas slob dpon dpa’ bo dgon pa ka be ra pa ṭa na zhes pat thogs shig bzhugs | de nas yi dam gyi gnang ba la brten nas sigḥa gling du ’gro ba’i thong pa dang ’grogs nas gzings la bzhugs nas singa’i gling du phebs.

remained a major international entrepôt for the Cōlas, as well as one of their more important cultural and political centers in the opening centuries of first millennium CE. It has been described in Tamil and Pāli literature as a well-planned, architecturally striking, cosmopolitan city that was home to a thriving community of merchants, artisans, and religious figures.¹⁶ Pāli Buddhist sources from the first millennium CE similarly describe Kāveripaṭṭanam as one of the most important ports in the Indic world, a bustling center of trade and culture.¹⁷ Archeological evidence suggests that Kāveripaṭṭanam flooded sometime around the sixth century,¹⁸ which contributed to the rise of nearby Nāgāpaṭṭanam, whose emergence as a major South Indian port permanently eclipsed that of Kāveripaṭṭanam.¹⁹ Despite this catastrophe, the city, its port, and its Buddhist population continued, albeit in a diminished form.

Much of what we know of the Buddhist population of Kāveripaṭṭanam in the centuries preceding Vanaratna’s arrival comes from the archeological record. Excavations have revealed the remains of at least two Buddhist monasteries that show both Theravaṃsa and Mahāyāna influence. The survey in question did not find evidence of activity beyond the ninth century, but acknowledges that human settlement and the changing course of the river over the centuries may obscure much of the archeological record in Kāveripaṭṭanam.²⁰ Nothing in the available historical record—apart from the *ŽP*—mentions the persistence of a Buddhist community in Kāveripaṭṭanam into the fifteenth century, and certainly nothing as specific as a monastery or other site associated with a figure named Ācārya Śūra. The most famous Ācārya Śūra, better known as Āryaśūra, is the ca. fourth-century CE author of the *Jātakamālā*, who lived nearly a millennium prior to Vanaratna and has no known ties to Kāveripaṭṭanam. This Āryaśūra is known in some sources as a “great poet of South India” (*dāksīṇātyamahākavi*), and a prince from a southern kingdom (*dāksīṇātyabhūpatisuta*), but more specific references place him in Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, not the Coromandel coastline.²¹ Thus it seems unlikely that this reference to “Ācārya Śūra’s monastery” in Vanaratna’s biography has any association with this figure, unless perhaps as a historical pilgrimage site. Instead it may represent an active Buddhist center led by a later, unknown teacher also named Ācārya Śūra.²²

Whatever the status of Ācārya Śūra’s monastery, the *ŽP* provides no further details on Vanaratna’s relationship to the site or how active it may have been. This lack of specifics is itself telling, as it indicates that either Vanaratna or gZhon nu dpal did not consider the *paṇḍita*’s experiences there to be significant enough to record in detail. Lacking data on teachers, texts, or practices related to his time in Kāveripaṭṭanam, we can presume that Vanaratna’s stop there was a stage in his longer journey, and that any Buddhist community he found was only of a passing interest and not worthy of note. When the time came for Vanaratna to depart, which was signaled

¹⁶ This includes early Tamil *saṅgam* poem, the *Pattinappalai* (2nd century CE), *Śīlappadikāram* (2nd-3rd century), as well as the later *Maṇimekhalai* (9th/10th century). For surveys of this literature and citations from it regarding Kāveripaṭṭanam specifically, see Rajan 1994: 9, Thapar 2003: 346-7, and Seshadri 2009: 103.

¹⁷ As in the *Milindapañho* (see Treckner, trans. 1880: 359) 1880: 359 and Buddhadatta’s (ca. 5th century) *Abhidhammāvatāra*.

¹⁸ Seshadri 2009: 107-08; Rajan 1994: 35.

¹⁹ See Seshadri 2009: passim.

²⁰ Rajan 1994: 26-108. Rajan tentatively dates two monastic sites he studied to the sixth century and the eighth-ninth centuries CE. He identifies the site plan of the ruins of the later vihāra as following a *pañcaratha* layout common to Mahāyāna vihāra, and discovered busts among the ruins of both sites that included a *dvārapāla*, an image of the *buddhapāda*, and bronze statues of a *dhyāna* buddha and Maitreya.

²¹ Stein 2019: 70-71. According Tāranātha, this Āryaśūra originally hailed from or was most active in Kashmir.

²² For a brief summary of the little historical detail available on the Āryaśūra who authored the *Jātakamālā*, see Stein 2019.

in the narrative by a sign from his personal deity, he found a merchant traveling to Sri Lanka and booked passage onwards. Just as was the case with his arrival, we do not know precisely what prompted Vanaratna to depart; it is uncertain if he was simply waiting in Kāveripattanam for an onward vessel to be available, or lingered there with some other specific purpose. Whatever the case, the final leg of his journey to Sri Lanka appears to have been uneventful, and eight months after leaving Sadnagara, he arrived in Sri Lanka, his home for the next six years.

Arrival in Sri Lanka

The section of the *ŽP* describing Vanaratna’s years in Sri Lanka begins with a general introduction to the island that appears intended to orient gZhon nu dpal’s Tibetan audience to the contemporary realities of the island, a place that was likely better known to them through traditional references in Buddhist scripture:

Siṃhala is well-known in Buddhist scripture as the island of Laṅkā. The stone causeway between Jambudvīpa and the island of Laṅkā, known from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, can still be seen as masses of rock in the ocean. Sometimes boats become stuck among these rocks, flounder, and have to be abandoned. There are also stories that tell of a rock on the island that had turned red after being soaked with the blood of the slain ten-headed *rākṣasa* of Laṅkā, and that in the morning [the blood] oozes out onto the ground. The Teacher left his footprint on the island, and a mountain where he taught the Dharma is among the many amazing sites.²³

Though gZhon nu dpal does mention the island’s most important Buddhist site—Sumānakūṭa, the mountain whose summit enshrines the footprints of past Tathāgatas—he focuses much of his introduction on the island’s associations with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, not the wealth of references from Buddhist scriptural sources. Given that versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* circulated in Tibetan,²⁴ there was likely a general awareness of the tale among gZhon nu dpal’s audience, knowledge it would seem he took for granted. gZhon nu dpal found it most compelling to introduce Sri Lanka by identifying features of the physical landscape associated with the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s mythology, including the tales of a red rock believed by the local population to ooze with the blood of Rāvaṇa (here called the “ten-headed *rākṣasa* of Laṅkā”).²⁵ gZhon nu dpal introduces this reference as part of the general lore of the island, suggesting this site was not known to him from Vanaratna’s first-hand experiences, but rather through the popular mythology of the island that was perhaps learned by Vanaratna during his travels, or more widely known in the regional *imaginaire*. More tangible is gZhon nu dpal’s description of Adam’s Bridge, the chain of rocky shoals that extends from the tip southern India to northwestern Sri Lanka. This archipelago is of

²³ *ŽP* 5v.1-3: singha gling de ni gsung rab dag las langka’i gling du grags pa de yin gsung | rā ma ṇas jambu gling nas langka’i gling gi bar du rdo’i zam pa btsugs pa mams kyang mtsho’i nang na rdo’i phung po ’dug pa dngos su snang zhing skabs ’gar rdo’i phung po la gzings thogs ’ong bas byol nas ’gro dgos dang | gling de nyid na’ang srin po langka’i mgrin bcu bsad pa’i hrag gis sbags pa’i rdo dmar pos snga dro tsam gyi sa’i cha khyab par yod pa la sogs pa’i gdam rgyud kyang gsung | gling de ston pas kyang zhabs kyis bcags shing chos gsungs pa’i ri bo’i gnas ngo tshar ba du ma dang...

²⁴ On the place of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Tibetan literature see de Jong 1972 and 1989, and Kapstein 2003.

²⁵ During a recent trip to Sri Lanka I had the opportunity to ask a number of knowledgeable informants about the location of this red rock, but memory of it seems to have been lost.

great mythic fame as the remnant of the *rāmasetu* (image 5), the stone causeway built by the monkey-architect Nala and his army to assist Rāma in his bid to rescue Sītā from Rāvaṇa’s clutches. Beyond the mythic, gZhon nu dpal also offers a reasonably geologically precise description of Adam’s bridge, one that was surely based on Vanaratna’s own testimony. Though it is unlikely Vanaratna did not pass through the Palk Strait and Pamban Channel on his voyage to Sri Lanka, it does seem probable that he traversed on his return voyage to India. The description given in the *ŽP* has the ring of a first-person report, and it would be quite implausible for gZhon nu dpal to have access to such details on his own. Thus, here in this passage it seems we are seeing Adam’s Bridge directly through Vanaratna’s eyes.

Upon reaching the waters around the island, Vanaratna’s ship would most likely have followed a route down the eastern seaboard to the southwest coast of the island, which was at the time the political, economic, and cultural heart of Gampola-period Sri Lanka, and is where, according to the *ŽP*, all of Vanaratna’s activities took place. Thus Vanaratna most likely disembarked at the port at Kōṭṭe, which was the primary port of the Gampola kingdom and a regional hub for the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean maritime trade routes.²⁶ Though not the actual seat of the Gampola kings, Kōṭṭe was governed by the de facto power in Sri Lanka at the time, the Alakeśvara family, and so was for all practical purposes center of political and economic life in southwestern Sri Lanka.

Vanaratna arrived in Sri Lanka in the final years of the Gampola period, which stretched from 1341 to 1415.²⁷ For much of this period the Gampola monarchs were mere puppets, with real power on the island invested in the chief minister. The men who held this position belonged to the leading noble houses of Sri Lanka, and many among them also held significant power in the island’s provincial governments. The contest for power and influence among these families created a fractious political environment, one in which each house vied for ever-greater influence that would extend their power beyond the territories they directly governed.²⁸ During Vanaratna’s stay on the island, and in the decades preceding his arrival, the position of chief minister was held by members of the Alakeśvara family, who had first risen to power during the reign of Vikramabāhu III (r. 1357-74) and remained so until they were overthrown in 1411, the year of Vanaratna’s departure. Their primary seat was in Kōṭṭe, and it was from there that they wielded their influence across the island. The Alakeśvara’s were originally aligned with the Tamil Ārya Cakravartins of the Jaffna Peninsula, and had leveraged that alliance to gain control over much of southern part of the island. They eventually turned on the Ārya Cakravartins at the battle of Colombo in 1369, after which time they ruled primarily from their seat at Kōṭṭe.²⁹ The two leading figures of the Alakeśvara family at the time were Vīra Alakeśvara and his younger brother Vīrabāhu. There were internecine struggles within the family, so that power oscillated between these two brothers for much of the second half of the fourteenth century, but it was Vīra Alakeśvara who ruled Sri Lanka when Vanaratna arrived in 1405/6. He had been in continuous power since 1396, when he returned after being exiled by his brother and took control of the island with support of the Vijayanagara kingdom. Vīra Alakeśvara remained in control until 1411 when, in a series of events possibly witnessed by Vanaratna, he was abducted by the Chinese admiral Cheng Ho, an event that cleared the way for the restoration of the Gampola kings in the figure of Parākramabāhu VI. Formally enthroned in 1412, Parākramabāhu VI’s reign

²⁶ Hall 2010: 134.

²⁷ Holt 1991: 91.

²⁸ Ilangasinha 1972: 168.

²⁹ Holt 1991: 102. Ilangasinha 1972: 60-67; Ray 644-46.

initiated a period of stability, prosperity, and cultural renaissance for Sri Lanka, but it was one Vanaratna would not see; he had boarded a ship bound for the mainland and departed in 1411, the year before Parākramabāhu IV's ascension.³⁰

Fifteenth-century Buddhist Sri Lanka through Vanaratna's Eyes

According to bZhon nu dpal's narrative, Vanaratna spent his years in Sri Lanka alternating between periods of personal meditation retreat, extensive pilgrimage, and formal study. Descriptions of Vanaratna's pilgrimages dominate this section of the *ŽP*, while accounts of his studies and private practice are comparatively brief. It is thus through the narrative of Vanaratna's pilgrimages—filled with details rich and personal—that we learn the most about fifteenth-century Sri Lanka and Vanaratna's impressions of it. Before beginning his account of Vanaratna's activities on the island, however, gZhon nu dpal offers us this general introduction to the island and its people:

[The land] is filled with *stūpas* containing the relics of tathāgatas and the people, being prosperous and deeply reverent of the monastic community, offer excellent alms in abundance, and that is not even taking into consideration the host of beggars. There were also many who would come and receive alms so they could stay in solitude.³¹

A short time later in the narrative, gZhon nu dpal again tells us:

The people of that island consider themselves superior to those living on Jambudvīpa (the Indian mainland). It is said, for example, that all the forests are filled with elephants, the land is rich in grain and precious minerals, the water is filled with pearls, and every home with lotuses. This is true, at least in part. The people are innately good, venerate monastics, and give generously to those who live in solitude and come to town seeking alms. They never ask for anything in return, and everything they give is appropriate and of good quality. They don't lie, and are reflexively respectful. Many find wonder in sacred places, foremost among them being the *stūpas* enshrining relics of the tathāgatas.³²

gZhon nu dpal first invokes a more fantastical view of Sri Lanka, seemingly drawn from the general South Asian and/or Buddhist *imaginaire*,³³ before turning to a more realistic, if still

³⁰ Nichols and Paranavitana 1961: 302-4; Ilangasinha 1972: 68-71; Holt 1991: 110.

³¹ *ŽP* 5v.3-4: de bzhin gshegs pa'i gdung bzhugs pa'i mchod rten mang pos gang ba | skye bo rnam 'byor pa dang ldan pa zhing dge 'dun la lhag par gus pas bsod snyoms bsod pa shin tu mang po slong ba'i tshogs mi ltos par 'bul ba yod pas dben pa bsten par yang bsod snyoms 'bul ba mang du 'ong.

³² *ŽP* 7v.5-8r.2: gling de na yod pa'i mi rnam kyang jambu'i gling pa nams las nged ches lhag pa yin | khyad par du nags thams cad glang po ches gang ba yin | sa thams cad 'bru dang rin po ches gang ba yin | chu thams cad mu tig gis gang ba yin | khyim thams cad padma can gyis gang ba yin zer | don la yang cha 'dra bar 'dug cing | mi rnam rang bzhin bzang | rab tu byung ba la guṣ | dben pa'i gnas nas grong khyer du bsod snyoms len pa la btang ba che | len mi ji skad du smra ba dang mthus pa'i bsod snyoms bzang po [[] brdzun mi smra snyam nas brtag dpyad mi byed par bskur | de bzhin gshegs pa'i gdung bzhugs pa'i mchod rten gyis thogs drangs pa'i rten dang gnas ngo mtshar can yang mang du yod.

³³ Some of aspects of gZhon nu dpal's description conform with Ibn Battuta's observations during his journey to the foot of Adam's Peak. He writes: "In this part there are many elephants, but they do no harm to pilgrims and strangers...In the island of Ceylon rubies are found in all parts. The land is private property, and a man buys a parcel

idealistic description. The sacrality of the landscape is naturally emphasized, as is the piety of the people, and though they are described in rather simplistic terms we are nonetheless left with the distinct sense of Vanaratna’s personal impressions of Sri Lanka’s Buddhist culture. Through him we encounter a terrain dotted with *stūpas*, some of which he visits, that enshrine the sacred relics of Buddhas of the past. This vision aligns well with what we know of the centrality of relic worship across South and Southeast Asia, and the specific importance of relics and their cults to religious and political life in Sri Lanka.³⁴ The most famous relics in the Buddhist world—the tooth, cranium, and alms bowl of the Buddha—were and are housed in Sri Lanka, attracting pilgrims from across the Buddhist world and figuring prominently in the formal political and institutional exchanges between Sri Lanka and other Buddhist polities across the Indian Ocean.³⁵ Judging by the account in the *ŽP*, visiting relics and their sites was high on Vanaratna’s agenda as well, and pilgrimage to them may have been among his many reasons for traveling to Sri Lanka. The people of Sri Lanka are likewise depicted as appropriately pious, with much of their veneration directed through the giving of alms to monastics, and particularly to hermit-monks who would enter urban and village areas on their alms rounds. This is perhaps a reference to the forest-monk tradition (*vanavāsa*), one of the two primary orientations within the Theravāsa *saṅgha*. To the extent we know of Vanaratna’s formal affiliations in Sri Lanka, he was primarily if not exclusively associated with *vanavāsa* institutions and teachers, which may account for the fact that he twice mentions the generosity of Sri Lankans towards these forest-dwelling mendicants.

For Vanaratna, Sri Lanka provided a set of conditions he found particularly conducive, conditions that may have been novel to him after a youth spent in a Buddhist community witnessing its waning days. His new circumstances allowed him to take up a diverse array of activities, some of which—such as pilgrimage to major Buddhist holy sites and extended periods of meditation supported by the general population—were simply unavailable to him in the eastern Bengal Delta dominated by Hindu and Islamic religious communities. *gZhon nu dpal* gives us the following overview of Vanaratna’s activities:

Vanaratna spent most of the six years he lived on the island in a variety of isolated places, maintaining meditative absorption primarily in the practices of the creation stage. Between [his stays in solitude] he gave both general and advanced sermons to more than five hundred monks, among whom roughly ten were genuinely learned. Using the highest-quality items brought from Jambudvīpa, he would make lavish offerings to the *stūpas* of the tathāgatas.³⁶

As framed by *gZhon nu dpal*, Vanaratna’s stay in Sri Lanka was largely oriented towards his private practice, broken up by periods of pilgrimage, teaching, and study. In describing Vanaratna’s personal practice, *gZhon nu dpal* uses the same phrase “living in solitude/isolation” (*dben pa’i gnas*), that is used twice in this section to refer to mendicant monks. This, along with

of it and digs for rubies. Some of them are red, some yellow, and some blue” (Gibb 1929: 256-7).

³⁴ Ilangasinha 1972: 269, 304-5; Ray 1960: 758-62; Blackburn 2010: *passim*.

³⁵ Nichols and Paranavitana 1960: 330-31; Blackburn 2010: 320-21, 328-30; Aung-Thwin 2017: 87, 96, 247.

³⁶ *ŽP* 5v.4-6: *gling der lo drug bzhugs pa’i tshe’ang phal cher dben pa’i gnas dang gnas rnam su bskyed pa’i rim pa gtso bo’i ting nge ’dzin la bzhugs | bar skabs dag tu ni | gling de na dge ’dun lnga brgya lhag tsam dang | de rnam kyi nang nas mkhas pa tshad dang ldan pa bcu tsam (ŽP^a; bcu gsum ŽP^b) ’dug pa phal che ba dang ’bel ba’i bka’ mchid dag mdzad pa dang [] ’jambu’i gling nas bsnams pa’i yo byad kyi khyad par bzang po yod pa rnam kyi de bzhin gshegs pa’i mchod rten rnam la mchod pa’i bkod pa rgya chen po mdzad.*

Vanaratna's association with *vanavāsa* institutions, hints at the possibility that Vanaratna formally practiced in the remote monastic communities of this tradition. Of course, the *ŽP* does not clarify if this was the case, and instead reinforces Vanaratna's Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna identity by noting that his main focus of practice was the creation stage (Tib. *skyes pa'i rim pa*; Skt. *utpattikrama*) a core meditation technique of Vajrayāna *sādhana*. If this was the case, which would naturally align with the training gZhon nu dpal states Vanaratna received at Mahācaitya in Sadnagara, he would have found no formal support from the Sri Lankan *saṅgha*, which was uniformly Theravaṃsa by the fifteenth century.

Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism do have a long and storied history in Sri Lanka, particularly at Abhayagiri Vihāra in Anurādhapura between the third and tenth centuries,³⁷ but this was well in the past by the time Vanaratna arrived in 1405/6. The Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions in Sri Lanka came to a formal end when Vijayabāhu I (r. 1058-1114), in the wake of his defeat of the Cōḷas, invited Theravaṃsa monks from Pagan in Burma to reestablish monastic ordination lineages on the island. These monks followed the distinctly Theravaṃsa *vinaya* of the Mahāvihāra tradition, and within a generation this Theravaṃsa lineage would become the state-sanctioned Buddhism of Sri Lanka when king Parākramabāhu I (r. 1153-86) unified the diverse *nikāyas* in Sri Lanka under its system.³⁸ As John Holt has argued, many features of popular Sri Lankan religiosity bear the clear hallmarks of a Mahāyāna origin, indicating that much of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism's legacy in Sri Lanka had been slowly assimilated in to mainstream religious culture, but it is nonetheless unlikely that there were Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna communities still active in Sri Lanka during Vanaratna's stay.³⁹

From gZhon nu dpal we also learn that Vanaratna would teach periodically, both to general audiences and to small numbers of learned members of the *saṅgha*. Given that Vanaratna had undergone years of training at Mahācaitya and had received his *paṇḍita* degree, perhaps this is unsurprising; however, if his education did in fact follow the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna curriculum reported in the *ŽP*, it is unclear what he would have taught to the generally non-Mahāyāna audience. We should not take gZhon nu dpal's statement as evidence that Mahāyāna and/or Vajrayāna Buddhism persisted in Sri Lanka into the fifteenth century, as there is no other evidence to suggest that it did and ample evidence that it did not. Given that gZhon nu dpal's relatively cursory statement of Vanaratna's teaching activity is not supported with the logistical details of place, time, or text, we can interpret this statement in a few possible ways: it could perhaps serve as further evidence that Vanaratna received training in the Theravaṃsa tradition at Mahācaitya, and that he was recognized as an authority by the Sri Lankan *saṅgha*; we can take this to mean that Vanaratna, as a recognized Indian *paṇḍita*, gave general Buddhist discourses on common Buddhist themes that were appropriate for his local audience; or, we can perhaps read this as a fictionalized statement, one that, along with gZhon nu dpal's statement on Vanaratna's personal Vajrayāna practice, is intended to confirm for a Tibetan audience that Vanaratna continued to uphold his status as a Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna *paṇḍita* while in a land known as a bastion of the "inferior vehicle" (Tib. *theg dman*; Skt. *hīnayāna*).

Pilgrimage

The undeniable focus of the Sri Lanka section of the *ŽP* is Vanaratna's pilgrimages across

³⁷ Acri 2016: Bopearachchi (forthcoming): 1, note 2; Sundberg 2011: 103-110.

³⁸ Ilangasinha 1972: 91-2.

³⁹ Holt 1991 *passim*. See also Ilangasinha 1972: 99-103.

southwestern Sri Lanka. We are not given anything approximating a true chronology for his pilgrimages and taken together they would only amount to a fraction of the time he spent in Sri Lanka. Nonetheless they account for the largest portion of text in the Sri Lankan section and are among its most elaborately detailed and hagiographically vibrant descriptions. The emphasis on pilgrimage, which recurs throughout the *ŽP*, perhaps reflects the emphasis in Vanaratna’s own oral reports, but the subject of pilgrimage gives gZhon nu dpal a unique freedom to bring Vanaratna’s inner, spiritual experiences to the fore of the narrative. To accomplish this gZhon nu dpal employs a more hagiographic register than elsewhere in the *ŽP*, relying on a distinct imagery of radiating and enveloping light to articulate and illustrate Vanaratna’s inner experiences. By integrating these descriptions of the visionary with the Vanaratna’s more mundane observations, gZhon nu dpal offers his readers a comprehensive picture of the inner and outer realities of Vanaratna’s experience.

The centerpiece of Vanaratna’s Sri Lankan narrative is undoubtedly the description of his ascent of Sri Pada, which Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal refer to by its Sanskrit name, Sumanakūṭa (Images 9 and 10). In his detailed account, gZhon nu dpal combines a rugged realism with visionary imagery to give us access to the realities of climbing the holy mountain in the fifteenth century, and of Vanaratna’s ecstatic reveries atop its summit:

There is a large mountain on the island named Sumanakūṭa, or *yid bzang rtse mo* [in Tibetan]. This mountain was visited by the previous buddhas of the Excellent Eon, who dwelled there and taught the Dharma. At the summit is a large slab of rock whose surface bears the footprints of the [previous] conquerors up to and including the Lord of the Śākya. So that [Vanaratna] could view this sacred site of exceedingly great blessings and make offerings, he and his entourage traveled there along with many local people. They made it about two-thirds of the way up the mountain, but the heart of the mountain was like a solid massif of rock on all sides. Not being able to find the path, he said to the local people, “We searched an area of the steep terrain carefully for signs of a trail, and it looked like it was possible, but now it seems like this path won’t really get us through. What should we do?” [They replied,] “You can’t just go any way you please. Previously, some meritorious people were able to climb up using ladders made of rope, but [the ladders] aren’t there now. There’s no way through. If you do make it, there’s special holy water on the summit, and the footprints of the four tathāgatas.”

While [Vanaratna] was sleeping there that night, he supplicated his guru and personal deity and received favorable signs. When he awoke at daybreak he promptly thought “Now it’s possible to make it” [This time,] when he saw the rocky flank of the mountain he veered slightly off the course the local people had previously shown him. He found that cuts had been made into the rock so people could climb up using their hands and feet. He said to his entourage “Ah! This is the way up,” and in a short time he and his entourage reached the summit by following that path. They first made extensive offerings to the footprints of the tathāgatas. As they offered supplications the sun rose, and at that exact moment a vast lattice of five-colored light descended from the center of the sky, winding and twisting around His Eminence and his entourage as it fell. At that moment [Vanaratna] recalled the qualities of the Tathāgata and said “I have faith. I have faith.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *ŽP* 6r.3-6v.5: skabs shig tu gling de na su ma ṅa kū ṭa ste | yid bzang rtse mo zhes bya ba’i ri bo chen po yod cing | de’i steng du bskal pa bzang po’i sangs rgyas sngar byon pa mams kyis bzhugs nas chos gsungs | der rdo leb shin tu yangs pa cig gi ngos la rgyal ba śākya’i dbang po yan chad kyi zhabs rjes kyang yod pa’i gnas dang rten byin rlabs

Apart from demonstrating Vanaratna’s qualities as an intrepid traveler (qualities that are on display throughout his biography), this scene is remarkable in many ways. Vanaratna’s recollections articulated through gZhon nu dpal’s prose bring us onto the ground of Sumanakūṭa in the fifteenth century, going well beyond spiritual clichés to describe the details and difficulties of his ascent. Through it we glimpse the realities of an active pilgrimage site, many of which resonate with the contemporary experience of climbing Sri Pada. It is clear from the ŽP that Vanaratna and his party joined local pilgrims in the arduous ascent, of which the final section was particularly difficult because the trail was not well-maintained or they were climbing out of season. This aligns with Ibn Battuta’s experience a half-century earlier, when he noted that the already difficult climb becomes especially hard towards the top, after pilgrims pass the last of the permanent chains and railings installed for their security.⁴¹ Battuta also reports that it was the custom of pilgrims to spend one or more nights on the mountain,⁴² which seems reflected in Vanaratna’s account as well.⁴³

To this day pilgrims begin their ascent of Sri Pada well before dawn and wait atop the summit for the rising of the sun, a time considered especially auspicious to view the Buddha’s footprint and experience the sacredness of the mountain. Like those pilgrims before and after him, Vanaratna and his party completed their ascent before the sun rose so that they could time their offering rite to coincide with the sunrise. A visionary, almost ecstatic register is then woven into the narrative, using the motif of a pulsating and enveloping descent of a “lattice of five-colored light,” an image that invokes the play of colors that might appear in the pre-dawn sky. Moved by his intensity of his experience, Vanaratna developed a deep faith, one unlike any he had experienced before,⁴⁴ and one which he exclaimed to the rising sun, just as is still the tradition among pilgrims to Sri Lanka’s most sacred site.

Apart from his ascent of Sumanakūṭa, possibly the most spiritually and culturally charged of Vanaratna’s pilgrimage experiences would have been his visit to the Tooth Relic.

shin tu che ba zhig yod pa la mjal ba dang mchod pa’i slad du nyid kyi ’khor dang yul mi mang po dang bcas te byon nas ri de’i sum gnyis tsam du phebs pa na | ri bo de nyid kyi snying po lta bu | ngos kho ra khor yug tu brag ri brtsegs pa mthon po zhig ’dug cing | lam gang yin ma ’tshal nas | yul mi rnams la dris dus | brag gi ngos gzar po zhig la lam gyi rnam pa tsam legs par brtags na mngon du rung tsam zhig bstan | de’i tshe lam ’di la rang gar thar ba mi ’dra na ji ltar bya zhes gsungs pa na | ’di la ji ltar ’dod ’dod du ’gror med | sngon bsod nams can gyi skyes bu ’ga’ res spa thag la sogs pa’i lam gyi them skas yod pa la ’dzus te ’gro ba yin ’dug | da lta de rnams ni mi snang | da thar ba’i thabs med | gal te thar na lta ’di’i rtse mo na grub pa’i chu khyad par can dang | de bzhin gshegs pa bzhi’i zhabs rjes kyang yod ’dug pa la zer | de nas de nub der gzims nas bla ma dang yi dam la gsol ba btab pa na | dge ba’i mtshan ma khyad par can yang rnyed | nam la’ang ’phral la da ni thar ba srid dam snyam nas brag ri’i ngos de la gzigs pa na | sngon yul mi rnam kyis bstan pa’i lam gyi rnam pa de las cung zad ’jur ba’i thad cig na yar lag pas ’dzin cing | rkang pa ’jog tu rung ba’i brag gi khung bu ched du brkod pa kha cig snang nas ’khor rnams la’ang da ni ’di na yar lam ’dug gi ’dong zhes gsungs nas | ’khor dang bcas pa lam de nas ri’i rtse mor yud tsam gyis phebs | thog mar de bzhin gshegs pa’i zhabs rjes la mchod pa rgya chen po phul te gsol ba btab pa na | nyi ma char ba dang dus mtshungs par nam mkha’i dkyil nas kha dog sna lnga pa’ ’od zer gyi dra ba chen po gnam babs su babs nas | bdag nyid chen po ’khor dang bcas pa’i lus la dkris shing dkris shing ’bab pa byung | de’i tshe de bzhin gshegs pa’i yon tan rjes su dran nas dad po dad po byung gsung.

⁴¹ Gibb 1929: 258.

⁴² Gibb 1929: 259.

⁴³ Also similar to Vanaratna’s account is the eight-century description of Vajrabodhi’s (671-741) ascent recorded by his biographer Lü Xiang in the *Zhenyuan Xingding Shijiao Mulu*. See Sunberg 2001: 136-38.

⁴⁴ ŽP 6v.7r.3. In a challenging and possibly corrupt passage, Vanaratna exclaims that the faith born in him upon seeing the footprints of the Tathāgatas produced a corresponding compassion for beings that was stronger than any degree of *bodhicitta* he had ever cultivated previously.

Counterintuitively, this is the briefest among the descriptions of his pilgrimages, announced with only a single line of text:

The king in Yāpahuva⁴⁵ offered [Vanaratna] great service. The king had in his possession the Tooth Relic, which [Vanaratna] viewed and made lavish offerings to.⁴⁶

This scene, succinct though it may be, is a significant reference that provides a useful historical witness for the Tooth Relic and its royal cult. As the most potent religious object in Sri Lanka, possession of the Tooth Relic conferred both religious and political legitimacy upon its bearer. Symbolic of the king's sovereignty and his stewardship of the Buddhist tradition, it was treated as a national treasure and kept in the king's possession at all times, often housed in a shrine specially constructed for the purpose.⁴⁷ Despite the fact that true political power rested with the Alakeśvaras in Kōṭṭe, it would have been necessary for the Tooth Relic to remain in the possession of King Bhuvanaikabāhu V (r. 1372-1408). There is nothing in the historical record to indicate he had made Yāpahuva his primary residence rather than the palace at Gampola, but as a long-established royal enclave complete with a Tooth Relic shrine, it is logical that Vanaratna could have met him there. Yāpahuva was a heavily fortified royal encampment located near the modern-day city of Maho in Sri Lanka's Northwestern Province (images 11-12). It was founded in the late thirteenth century, and served as the royal capital during the invasion of the Malayan king Candrabhānu that threatened Sri Lankan sovereignty.⁴⁸ As the wartime residence of kings, it was necessary to construct a temple to house and protect the Tooth Relic, the remains of which are still visible at the top of an impressive and artistically significant stone staircase within the precincts of Yāpahuva.⁴⁹ Vanaratna would have likely viewed and made offerings to the relic within this same structure. There is no other available evidence for the precise location of the Tooth Relic in the Gampola period, and it is known to have been moved to Kōṭṭe during the reign Parākramabāhu VI.⁵⁰ Thus, this account of Vanaratna's meeting with the king and the Tooth Relic at Yāpahuva is a rare witness to the relic in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The Tooth Relic was not the only relic of significance in Sri Lanka, and visiting other relics and the *stūpas* that enshrined them was a clear priority for Vanaratna. Following his descent of Sumanakūṭa, Vanaratna visited what he reports as a magnificent *stūpa* at a site named Guṇa Vihāra (Guṇawera) at the base of the mountain's northern flank:

After they left the mountain they visited a large *stūpa* of amazing design and construction located near the foot of the mountain on its north side. Named Guṇawera, it was filled with many relics, including those of the Tathāgata's throat and hair, as well as relic pills. He made extensive offerings to it, and at midday under a perfectly clear and cloudless sky, he had an experience of endless chains of multicolored light rays streaming upwards from the great *stūpa* like shooting stars before gliding back down. A small mass of light

⁴⁵ From the phrasing of the *ŹP* it would appear that gZhon nu dpal confused the name of the place where Vanaratna met the king, Yāpahuva, with the name of the king himself.

⁴⁶ *ŹP* 6r.2-3: yul de'i rgyal po ya ba ha ba (*ŹP*^a; ya ba ha mi, *ŹP*^b) zhes bya bas zhabs tog kyang cher byed | rgyal po de'i phyag na de bzhin gshegs pa' tshems bzhugs 'dug pa la'ang mjal nas mchod chen po'ang mdzad.

⁴⁷ Ray 1960: 758; Ilanghsinha 1972: 304-5.

⁴⁸ Ray 1960: 623-27; Holt 1991: 95-96. Candrabhānu was specifically covetous of the Tooth Relic, making its security at Yāpahuva all that much more imperative.

⁴⁹ Nichols and Paranavitana 1960: 338.

⁵⁰ Nichols and Paranavitana 1960: 331.

then emerged from among them and circled His Eminence. He reached out and the orb descended into his palm. It was as if fine crystal filaments of multicolored light had been fashioned into a ball. [Vanaratna] said, “I wondered if it would withstand my touch, but the very instant I thought to touch the orb resting in the palm of my left hand with my right index finger, it promptly disappeared.”⁵¹

A site by this name or matching this description is not presently known, nor is there anything in the historical record to help us more precisely identify Guṇawera or this *stūpa*. The reference to a “throat relic” (*mgrin pa’i gdung*) may refer to the Collarbone Relic, one of the most significant relics in Sri Lanka,⁵² but it would be unexpected to find it located at the base of Sumanakūṭa, as it is traditionally and currently believed to be contained within the Thūpārāma *stūpa* in Anurādhapura. Anurādhapura had long since been abandoned by the fifteenth century, making it speculatively possible that in Vanaratna’s narrative we learn something of the fate of the Collarbone Relic and its cult. As on Sumanakūṭa, Vanaratna’s pilgrimage moved him spiritually, an experience once again articulated by gZhon nu dpal using the imagery of dynamic light. Vanaratna’s reaction to this expanding and enveloping light is a playful one; described in his own words, he reaches out inquisitively, wondering what its reaction will be to his touch. It is an intimate scene, made all the more so through gZhon nu dpal’s use of Vanaratna’s first person voice.

Vanaratna made several more pilgrimages around Sri Lanka, primarily but not exclusively to sites enshrining relics of the Buddha. Presumably around the same time he visited Guṇa Vihāra he also visited a large *bodhi* tree located to the west of Guṇa Vihāra and known by the name Buddhaśaraṇa in commemoration of the seven days the Buddha was believed to have meditated beneath it. Following in the Buddha’s example, Vanaratna is said to have remained at the site for three months, cultivating *samādhi* in a period of personal meditation.⁵³ This may be the same tree visited by Ibn Battuta in the mid-thirteenth century; he describes coming across an “ancient tree” at the foot of Adam’s Peak where yogis gathered to wait for leaves to fall.⁵⁴ Also in the same general area was a *stūpa* containing the Buddha’s cranium (*dpral ba’i gdung*), where Vanaratna was once again enveloped in radiating light.⁵⁵ The light motif is also repeated during Vanaratna’s visit to an unnamed *stūpa* containing a fragment of the Buddha’s skull.⁵⁶ Finally, the

⁵¹ *ŽP* 7r.3-7v.1: de nas ri bo de las babs nas | skabs shig tu ri bo de’i byang ngos kyi rtsa ba gang nye ba zhig na gu ṇa we ra zhes bya ba’i mchod rten chen po bkod pa dang dbyibs phun sum tshogs pa | de bzhin gshegs pa’i mgul gyi gdung dang | dbu skra dang | ring bsrel la sogs pa mang du bzhugs pa zhig yod pa la | mchod pa rgya chen po mdzad | de’i tshen nyi ma gung gi dus la nam mkha’ spring med cing shin tu dangs pa la mchod rten chen po de las kha dog sna tshogs pa’i ’od zer gyi phreng ba skar mda’ lta bu mtha yas pa mang po gyen du ’phros nas | slar ’og tu lding zhing byung ba’i dkyil nas ’od kyi gong bu zhig bdag nyid chen po la ched du ’khor ba snyam byed nas | phyag bzed pa na | [hyag mthil du babs pa’i tshen | kha dog sna tshogs pa’i shal gyi skud pa shin tu phra ba du ma gong bur byas pa lta bu zhing snang | reg pa bzod dam dgongs nas phyag g.yon pa’i mthil na gnas pa’i gong bu de la | g.yas pa’i sor mos cung zad reg par dgongs pa’i mod la yal bar gyur gsung.

⁵² Blackburn 2010: 321.

⁵³ *ŽP* 7v.1-3: khyad par mchod rten gu ṇa we ra’i nub phyogs na | bo de tsi’i shing sdong chen po bu ddha śa ra ṇa zhes bya ba | shing de’i rtsa bar de bzhin gshegs pas zhag bdun du ting nge ’dzin la mnyam par gzhag pa zhig yod pa der | shing drung pa’i sbyangs pa’i yon tan gyi don du zla ba gsum bzhugs nas phal cher mnyam par gzhag pa kho nas ’da’ bar mdzad.

⁵⁴ Gibb 1929: 259. In Gibb’s translation, Ibn Battuta seems to report that the tree is in an inaccessible location, but that makes little sense in combination with his statement that yogis are gathered around it in anticipation collecting its falling leaves.

⁵⁵ *ŽP* 7v.3-4.

⁵⁶ Tib. *dbu’i gdung*. This seems to be different from the cranium relic (*spral ba’i gdung*) mentioned previously.

ŽP makes a curious reference to Vanaratna’s visit to a *stūpa* said to contain the Buddha’s alms bowl (*lhung bzed*). Vanaratna is reported to have made extensive offerings to it, circumambulated it many times, and remained near it in private meditation retreat for some time.⁵⁷ This reference is curious because the alms bowl, perhaps the most important relic of the Buddha after the Tooth Relic, was supposed to remain in the possession of the king to serve, like the tooth, as symbol of his right to rule.⁵⁸ Popular tradition maintains that the alms bowl relic was in the custody of the Nātha *devālaya* in Kandy until the site was looted in 1889,⁵⁹ a location not otherwise mentioned in Vanaratna’s biography. According to H.B.M. Ilanghasinha on the other hand, the alms bowl disappeared from the historical record in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,⁶⁰ in which case the reference to it in the ŽP—whatever its veracity—may be the only available evidence for the location and accessibility of the alms bowl relic during this period. We are unfortunately not told where this *stūpa* was, apart from being in the general vicinity of Sumanakūṭa and Guṇa Vihāra, nor if the site had a name.

Study

Vanaratna’s pilgrimages to Sri Lanka’s holy sites make up the bulk of the Sri Lankan section of the ŽP, but they cannot possibly account for the majority of the years Vanaratna spent on the island. We can presume, therefore, that most of his time was spent engaged in study and meditation. Little information is provided in the ŽP about Vanaratna’s studies, but what we are told yields some valuable information on Gampola-period Buddhism and Vanaratna’s relationship to the Sri Lankan *saṅgha*. The totality of information we have on his studies is found in two short passages. First:

For most of the time [Vanaranta] lived on the island, he stayed at Viḍāgama Vihāra.⁶¹

And:

He spent some time at Gaḍalādeṇiya Vihāra, where he received teachings on the *Vinayaḥśudraka*, the *Prabhāvatī*, and other works from the *ācārya* Dhammakāṭṭi. He would also spend evenings teaching others whatever seemed appropriate.⁶²

Despite the political turmoil of the Gampola period, Sri Lanka maintained its status as a center of Buddhist education, and the institutions mentioned in the ŽP were among the island’s most illustrious. The two monastic colleges (*piriveṇa*)⁶³ at Viḍāgama and Gaḍalādeṇiya would have offered training to Vanaratna and other native and international students in the major topics of Buddhist study—*sūtra*, *vinaya*, *abhidharma*—as well as subjects of a more worldly

⁵⁷ ŽP 7v.4-5.

⁵⁸ Ilanghasinha 1972: 305; Holt 1991: 97, 183, note 4.

⁵⁹ Holt 1991: 183.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ ŽP 7v.1: spyir gling der bzhugs pa phal cher vi dā ga ma zhes by ba’i gdong par bzhugs.

⁶² ŽP 7v.5: skabs shig tu kā dā la de ni’i dgon par | slob dpon chos kyi grags pa zhes bya ba la ’dul ba lung dang ’od ldan la gsan la sogs pa gsan | gzhen dag la’ang ji ltar rigs par chos mtshan re gsungs.

⁶³ At its most basic the term means “monastic cell,” but came to be applied to centers of higher education during the fifteenth century. It is unclear if the term *piriveṇa* was widely used during Vanaratna’s time, but the types of institutions it came to be applied to certainly were (Ilangasinha 1972: 224-31).

application, including prosody (*chanda*), poetic ornamentation (*alankāra*), logic (*tarka*), astrology (*nakṣatra*), and medicine (*vaidyāsāstra*). Some of the instruction was likely offered in Sinhala, but because of the international student body, Pāli would have been the primary medium of education.⁶⁴ The depth of the educational opportunities would have appealed to Vanaratna, given what we know of his general and specific intellectual interests. Thus, it is surprising that we are told so little about his studies. We could certainly take this to indicate that he did not, in fact, spend much of his time in Sri Lanka engaged in formal study, and accept at face value gZhon nu dpal’s statement that Vanaratna remained primarily in private meditation retreat. But given that we also know that Viḍāgama was his primary residence, and that he traveled to and sought teachings at Gaḍalādeṇiya, it is easy to suspect that Vanaratna or gZhon nu dpal downplayed Vanaratna’s intellectual activities, perhaps because of their predominantly Theravaṃsa character.

Both Viḍāgama and Gaḍalādeṇiya were, following the *saṅgha* reforms of the twelfth century, broadly affiliated with the Theravaṃsa tradition of Mahāvihāra, and within it belonged to the *vanavāsa*, or “forest-dwelling” community which stood in distinction to the urban-based *gāmaṃvāsa* community.⁶⁵ The *vānavāsa* tradition in general, and the two institutions mentioned in the *ĀP*—Viḍāgama and Gaḍalādeṇiya—would have been quite conservative in their doctrines and practices, and the figures associated with them—Vanaratana Mahāsāmi and Dhammakīti Devarakṣita Jayabāhu respectively—were both staunchly conservative figures. The fact that an Indian *paṇḍita* with Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna training spent his time in Sri Lanka among such orthodox company is intriguing, and is perhaps indicative of connections Vanaratna formed prior to his arrival on the island.

Vanaratna told gZhon nu dpal that his base in Sri Lanka was at Viḍāgama Vihāra, located in the vicinity of Kōṭṭe in what is now the Bandaragama neighborhood (image 6). It was the home of Vanaratana Mahāsāmi, an influential and politically powerful figure in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries who served as *saṅgharāja* under Parākramabāhu VI. Vanaratana Mahāsāmi would go on to found one of the most important monastic colleges in fifteenth-century Sri Lanka, the Śrīghanānanda Piriveṇa at Viḍāgama, but even during Vanaratna’s stay Viḍāgama was recognized as a major center of learning on the island. The *ĀP* does not tell us precisely how Vanaratna came to reside at Viḍāgama, so we do not know if he was granted permission to live there because of prior affiliations or if he simply enrolled as an international student in the college. We also learn nothing of any personal encounters between Vanaratna and the Mahāsāmi, or even if he engaged in formal study there. Despite the little we know about Vanaratna’s time at Viḍāgama, the fact that it was his primary residence during his six years on the island nonetheless locates him at the center of the religious and political life of fifteenth-century Sri Lanka.⁶⁶

Vanaratna also reported visiting and formally studying at Gaḍalādeṇiya (images 7 and 8), a monastic center and temple located in the mountainous highlands of Sri Lanka’s Central Province, a relatively short distance from Kandy. Like Viḍāgama, Gaḍalādeṇiya was a *vanavāsa* institution that ranked among Sri Lanka’s leading centers of study. It was founded during the

⁶⁴ Ilangasinha 1972: 239-60. Instruction was also known to be offered in Sanskrit and Tamil as well.

⁶⁵ This is certainly not to say that the *vanavāsa* tradition did not have a presence in the major urban centers of Sri Lanka; their main headquarters would often be located in or near the political capitals of the time. During Vanaratna’s period of residency, the *vanavāsa* tradition was headquartered in Palābatgala, before shifting to Kāragala in the fifteenth century (Ilangasinha 1972: 93-94).

⁶⁶ As will be detailed below, the end of Alakeśvara rule and the ascension of Parākramabāhu VI was directed by Vanaratana Mahāsāmi during Vanaratna’s residence on the island.

reign of Bhuvanaikabāhu IV (1341-51) under the supervision of Śīlavam̐sa Dhammakātti,⁶⁷ the second in the succession of abbots with the title Dhammakātti associated with the *vanavāsa* monastery at Palābatgala.⁶⁸ According to an on-site inscription dated to April 28th 1344, Śīlavam̐sa Dhammakātti began the construction of Gaḍalādeṇiya shortly after his restoration of a Buddhist shrine at the Dhānyakaṭaka *stūpa* in Andhra, a connection that may have important implications for Vanaratna’s later travels.⁶⁹ During the time Vanaratna studied at Gaḍalādeṇiya the abbot would have been Dhammakātti III, Devarakṣita Jayabāhu, who served as *saṅgharāja* under Bhuvanaikabāhu V and presided over a reform of the Sri Lankan *saṅgha* in 1396.⁷⁰ Dhammakātti III is the only Sri Lankan teacher mentioned by name in the *ŽP*, which also records two *vinaya* works that Vanaratna studied with him: the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu*⁷¹ and the *Prabhāvati*.⁷² From their Tibetan titles, both of these works appear to be drawn from the Sanskrit Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, which would be an unexpected subject of study at an illustrious Theravaṃsa *vanavāsa* institution and with a teacher who was known for his orthodox reform of the Sri Lankan *saṅgha*. It does seem most likely that the specific details of his studies at Gaḍalādeṇiya were related to gZhon nu dpal directly by Vanaratna, thus this curious reference to the Mahāyāna *vinaya* could reveal the otherwise unexpected availability of Sanskrit Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya* study in fifteenth-century Sri Lanka. Or perhaps we again are witnessing an attempt by either Vanaratna or gZhon nu dpal to bolster the *paṇḍita*’s Mahāyāna identity despite his lengthy period spent in a decidedly *hīnayāna* environment. Most probable, given that much of the material from these Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* texts is also found in the Pāli *vinayas* of the Theravaṃsa school, is that Vanaratna studied the Theravaṃsa *vinaya* in Pāli with Dhammakātti III, and simply referenced the corresponding Sanskrit, Mūlasarvāstivāda texts when narrating his studies to gZhon nu dpal.

Departure

Based on gZhon nu dpal’s chronology, Vanaratna reached Sri Lanka in approximately 1405/6 and spent six years on the island, placing his departure sometime in either 1411 or 1412. It is perhaps no coincidence that this year was among the most tumultuous of the Gampola Period, the year when the island was besieged by Chinese naval forces, the Alakeśvara’s lost their grip on power, and one of Sri Lanka’s greatest monarchs, Parākarambāhu VI, ascended the throne. The *ŽP* is completely silent about all of this, but given that Vanaratna lived and was active in the southwest of the island and around Kōṭṭe specifically, he likely had some direct experience of the political turmoil.

For the duration of Vanaratna’s stay in Sri Lanka, political power was vested in the chief

⁶⁷ Paranavitana 1943: 106; Ilangasinha 1972: 169.

⁶⁸ Ilangasinha 1972: 139-40.

⁶⁹ *Epigraphica Zeylanica* IV: 90-110. This inscription and its implications for Vanaratna’s further travels will be explored in the next chapter.

⁷⁰ Ilangasinha 1972: 142.

⁷¹ Tib.a *’dul ba lung* (Tōh. 0006). The *Kṣudrakavastu*, extant only in a Chinese and Tibetan translation, is section of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* covering a large number of subsidiary rules for the monastic community. Despite its formal association with the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, its content is found throughout other *vinayas*, including the Pāli *vinayas* of the Theravaṃsa tradition (Clarke 2015: 63, 76).

⁷² Tib. *’od ldan* (Tōh. 4125). This is a likely reference to the *Āryamūlasarvāstivādiśrāmaṇerakārikāvṛtti-prabhāvati*, a work of the eighth-century Indian commentator Śākyaprabhā.

minister Vīra Alakeśvara, and by many accounts it appears his rule was convulsive for the island. After being exiled to Vijayanagara by his brother and rival Vīrabāhu, he returned to Sri Lanka upon Vīrabāhu's death in 1396 and ruled with the support of Vijayanagara until roughly 1411. According to Sri Lankan and Chinese sources, Vīra Alakeśvara was a tyrannical and impious ruler, one who may have initiated his own downfall through these unbecoming qualities. His end seems to have begun in 1406—roughly the time of Vanaratna's arrival—when he first received the Chinese ambassador, the admiral and explorer Cheng Ho, who had arrived with his 62-ship fleet.⁷³ Vīra Alakeśvara is believed to have treated Cheng Ho roughly, and though he withdrew without incident at that time, he was less favorably disposed to the Sri Lankan leader when he returned with his fleet in 1411, close to the time of Vanaratna's departure. When Vīra Alakeśvara again behaved undiplomatically, Cheng Ho ordered his men to storm the island and, seemingly with help from within the Alakeśvara court, captured Vīra Alakeśvara and returned with him to the ships blockading the port. Cheng Ho then took Vīra Alakeśvara to the Ming court, where terms of his abdication of power were negotiated. This included the restoration of the Gampola line, whose heir had been secretly protected by Vanaratana Mahāsāmi, the abbot of Viḍāgama monastery where Vanaratna resided. In 1412, likely after Vanaratna departed, this heir was formally enthroned as Parākramabāhu VI.⁷⁴

The timing of Vanaratna's departure from Sri Lanka in the same year as Cheng Ho's blockade and assault may have been entirely independent of these events, but it is nonetheless reasonable to conclude that the intrigue, upheaval, and eventual open conflict that defined Sri Lankan politics in 1410-11 played some role in his decision to leave Sri Lanka and return to India. If Vanaratna was primarily based at Viḍāgama as the *ẒP* states, the *vihāra*'s close proximity to Kōṭṭe would have put Vanaratna very much in the middle of the action. Additionally, Sri Lankan sources report that Vanaratana Mahāsāmi, the abbot of Viḍāgama, granted asylum to the future Parākramabāhu VI and his mother, protecting them from both the machinations of the Alakeśvaras and from the conflict they brought upon the island.⁷⁵ The heir was not housed at Viḍāgama, but was instead sent to Rayigama, but the political role of the Viḍāgama abbot would surely have placed his monastery in the spotlight, a reality that likely had some impact of Vanaratna's stay during these years. Though the primary sources depict the events as a series of short, intense encounters, it is likely that there was prolonged instability that preceded and catalyzed Vīra Alakeśvara's downfall, and Vanaratna may have sensed the crisis that was brewing and chose to leave while he could.

Thus with intrigue and conflict unfolding around him, Vanaratna departed Sri Lanka in 1411/12, but he immediately found himself in much greater personal peril. His first step in leaving the island was to secure passage on a vessel sailing to India, and so he found a captain willing to take him and his entourage on board:

Even though he had given up all concerns (*bya bral byas nas kyang*),⁷⁶ when [Vanaratna] considered his immediate sense of happiness, he found living on the island suitable. He

⁷³ This same fleet had been previously docked in Chittagong, around the time Vanaratna set sail (Van Galen 2002: 153-6).

⁷⁴ Ray 1961: 651-2; Ilangasinha 1972: 65-7.

⁷⁵ Nichols and Paranivitanā 1961: 305-6; Holt 1991: 110.

⁷⁶ The language used here appears to be a deliberate evocation of Vanaratna's status as an *avadhūta* (*bya bral ba*). The phrase is meant to convey the fact that Vanaratna's was unconcerned, as a matter of practice, with the specific conditions within which he found himself. Nonetheless, it seems he was particularly content with his life in Sri Lanka.

nonetheless decided to disregard that happiness so he could set off for Jambudvīpa and cultivate *samādhi* in the sacred places of the Tathāgata [located there]. He thus went in search of a ship and found one captained by a foreigner that was bound for Jambudvīpa. He told him, “We need a captain and crew to carry us,” to which [the captain] agreed. The group of about fifty people, master and disciples, then set out with the captain and about two hundred of his crew.⁷⁷

Cheng Ho’s blockade notwithstanding, Kōṭṭe was a busy port and key hub of the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal maritime networks, so ships making the journey between southwestern Sri Lanka and Indian ports would have been readily available to Vanaratna. That he booked passage with a “foreign” (*phyi rol pa*) ship captain is also of little surprise, as Kōṭṭe would have hosted a significant number of foreign vessels hailing from a diverse array of ports stretching from Africa and the Middle East, across Southeast Asia, to the eastern seaboard of China. For reasons that will become apparent shortly, gZhon nu dpal seems careful to emphasize the captain’s foreignness, which he does more than once. In this passage he uses the term “foreign” twice, and in a later reference to the same scene, calls the captain a “religious outsider” (*mu stegs pa*).⁷⁸ Using these two terms together makes it clear that the captain was not a Sri Lankan, but it also gives the distinct impression of an even greater degree of foreignness, someone from well beyond the cultural borders of South Asia. In the cosmopolitan waters of the Indian Ocean, the possible nationalities of such a captain and his ship are numerous.

Unfortunately for Vanaratna and his party, his choice of captain was a poor one. gZhon nu dpal describes what happened next:

After they had traveled about a quarter of the way across the sea, the foreign ship captain said, “The ship is floundering; you, master and disciples, must get off.” His Eminence gave him all the possessions they had with them and said, “Don’t say such things. This ship is certainly able to continue.” But no matter what he said [the captain] refused to listen. “We won’t be able to escape from the middle of the ocean, at least find a way to drop us on the shore.” The captain then turned the ship’s bow toward the west and continued on until they reached the northwestern coast of Siṃhala,⁷⁹ where the master and disciples disembarked, and the captain went his own way to Jambudvīpa.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *ŽP* 8r.2-4: des na bya bral byas nas kyang ’phral skyid pa la lta na | gling der ’dug rigs na’ang | skyid pa la ma bltas par jambu’i gling du byon nas | de bzhin gshegs pas bsten pa’i gnas rnam su ting nge ’dzin la mnyam par ’jog pa’i dgongs pa btad nas gzings btsal ba na | phyi rol pa cig gis bdag po byed pa’i gzings jambu’i gling du ’gro ba zhig ’dug pa la | ded dpon g.yog ’dzud dgos gsungs pas | des khas blangs nas | dpon g.yog lnga bcu tsam dang | gzings kyi bdag po dpon g.yog nyis brgya tsam dang bcas pa byon pa.

⁷⁸ *ŽP* 22r.6-22b.1.

⁷⁹ There is a slight logistical problem here. It seems unlikely that the ship carrying Vanaratna would have sailed up the east coast of the island, only to turn west, navigate the Palk Strait, and drop him and his entourage on the northwest coast. Given gZhon nu dpal’s specificity regarding the coastal area reached, I take the ship’s westward trajectory to be inaccurate, perhaps due to gZhon nu dpal’s lack of first-hand knowledge of the waters around Sri Lanka, or perhaps simply through later scribal error.

⁸⁰ *ŽP* 8r.4-8v.1: rgya mtsho’i lam gyi bzhi cha tsam du sleb pa’i tshes | phyi rol pa de na re | da ni gzings ’dis mi theg par (*ŽP*^a; mi thag par *ŽP*^b) ’dug pas khyed dpon g.yog ’don dgos shes zer ba na | bdag nyid chen po ’di’i (*ŽP*^a; ’di la *ŽP*^b) phyag na yo byad ji smyed yod pa rnam kho la ster | de skad ma zer gzings kyis kyang theg par ’dug gsungs shing | ji tsam smras kyang nyan du ma ’dod | ’o na rgya mtsho’i dbus nas ’don pa ga la phod | ’gram zhig ti ’don pa’i thabs gyis shes gsungs pa na | khos thog mar gzings de nub phyogs la gtad | de nas singha’i gling gi nub byang gi ’gram zhig tu dpon g.yog rnam gzings las phyung nas kho rang jambu’i gling la song.

Though the precise phrasing of this passage is ambiguous, it does seem as if Vanaratna and his entourage were victims of piracy.⁸¹ Vanaratna appears incredulous about the captain's claims that the ship was overburdened, and even attempts to bribe the captain with his possessions.⁸² His pleas are ineffective, but only partially so, as the captain does relent on his demand that they jump overboard and instead sails them to the nearby shore. Thus, from the security of the ship's deck Vanaratna suddenly found himself marooned and un-provisioned in the jungle wilds of the northwest Sri Lankan coast.

Lest we consider this scene a dramatic embellishment, or perhaps find it suspiciously resonant with other Buddhist accounts of perilous sea voyages, such as Vajrabodhi's (671-741) calamitous journey from South India to China,⁸³ the detail in gZhon nu dpal's account gives us reason to believe that he was faithfully reporting Vanaratna's experiences as he heard them. He writes:

In that area there was plenty of dried coastal fish available for those who ate meat, while for those who did not there was an abundance of delicious fruit. Thus, they were able to survive without being overwhelmed by emotion, but because [the beach] was enclosed by cliffs that came right up to sea, there was nowhere for them to go. Though it was possible to go through the jungle to the middle of the island, the forest was dense and filled with ferocious beasts, so there was no viable path. Because there was no sea traffic in that area, the party became worried and did not know what to do. His Eminence made numerous supplications to his personal deity, and on the third night a monk came to him in his dreams and said, "You should not worry, master and disciples. On the fifth day a ship will come and rescue you." He woke up gladdened, and told the entourage "Please, everyone be at ease. There have been favorable signs to indicate that all of us, master and disciples, will quickly return to Jambudvīpa." They all felt relieved after that. Early in the morning on their fifth day in that place, His Eminence thought "I think today is the day," and looked out across the ocean. Far out at sea he saw a black spot that looked like a crow and said, "Look, what is that out there?" As everyone watched the black spot took on the shape of a horse, and then as it got closer, a house. Once they were sure it was a ship they became ecstatic, and had trust in the guru. A short time later the boat reached the camp of the master and disciples. There were not many people on the ship. [Vanaratna] said, "We wished to go to Jambudvīpa, but a foreign captain kicked us off his ship to a place such as this. We, master and disciples, need rescue will give you much wealth." [The captain said]: "You, master and disciples, must be weary from such an ordeal. I see there are many monks among you, and you specifically seem like a good master, so I require no payment. This is an act of piety for me." They then boarded the

⁸¹ Piracy was a known problem in the region, with some pirates believed to have state support. Ibn Battuta (1304-68) was warned of piracy in the waters around northern Sri Lanka as he approached the island from India's Malabar coast (Gibb 1929: 254; Hall 2010: 112, 134).

⁸² Or, alternatively, offers to throw them overboard to reduce the ship's weight.

⁸³ On Vajrabodhi, his time in Sri Lanka, and for the details of his voyage to China, see Sundberg 2001 and Orzech 2011. Despite a number of superficial commonalities, the description of Vajrabodhi's experiences in Sri Lanka and the disaster that befell him at sea do not much resemble the Vanaratna's experience as narrated in the *ZP*, giving us little reason to believe Vajrabodhi's biography, written in and preserved in Chinese, served as a model for Vanaratna's narrative.

boat, and in a short time reached Jambudvīpa.⁸⁴

The nuance of gZhon nu dpal's description sustains the ring of truth, and effectively brings the reader onto the beach with Vanaratna and places them in his predicament. The sea and jungle are bountiful enough (both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options were available) so that there was no danger of starving to death, but they were stranded in an utterly remote and un-trafficked part of the island with no clear way to escape. Vanaratna remains the calming influence, reading his dream visions to affirm to his party that rescue was imminent. Sure enough, a ship appears on the horizon, and gZhon nu dpal, who had surely never seen an ocean-going vessel, skillfully evokes their anticipation as they watch the dot on the horizon get closer and closer. Unlike the "foreign" captain who stranded them there, Vanaratna's rescuer is portrayed as pious man whose natural faith and kindness motivates him to see Vanaratna and his party onwards to India. We can therefore understand this man to be a native Sri Lankan, a person embodying the faith, piety, and generosity of the Sri Lankan people extolled earlier in this section. Offering to transport them all to India for free, Vanaratna and his entourage board his boat, and so bring an end to the Sri Lankan chapter of Vanaratna's narrative.

⁸⁴ ŹP 8v.1-9r.3: gnas de na sha za ba rnams la mtsho 'gram gyi nya skam po mang du 'dug dang | mi za ba rnams la'ang shing tog bzang po mang po 'dug pas 'tsho bas nyon mongs pa mi 'ong bar 'dug na'ang | yan man du brag gi g.yang dang | rgya mtsho la thug pas thar pa med | nags de nas sigha'i gling gi dbus su 'gro ba la'ang nags ma thug ches | bcan zan gtum po mang pos lam mi dod [[]] phyogs der gzings 'ong ba'i srol ni ye med pas | de'i rgyu mtshan gyis 'khor rnams la ci bya gtol med nas yi shi bar gyur pa na | bdag nyid chen po 'dis 'dod pa'i lha la gsol ba mang du btab pas | nub gsum song ba'i gnal lam du dge slong zhig byung nas | khyed dpon g.yog yid mi bde bar ma byed | da ste zhag lnga (ŹP^b; zhag gnyis ŹP^a) na khyed rnams sgröl ba'i gzings 'ong ba yin gsung ba cig byung | mnal sad pa na dgyes te | 'khor rnams la'ang | da khyed rnams yid bde bar gyis shig | rang re dpon g.yog myur du jambu'i gling du phyin pa'i mtshan ma bzang po byung gsung ba mdzad nas dbugs phyung | gnas der zhag lnga song ba'i snga dro shin tu snga ba'i tshe | bdag nyid chen pos de ring dus yin dgongs nas rgya mtsho'i steng la gzigs pa na | rgya mtsho'i steng rgyang ring po na bya rog lta bu nag ling ba cig byung ba na | pha bi ci yin ltos shig gsung nas thams cad kyis bltas pa'i tshe | re shig na rta tsam gyi nag ling ba cig tu song | de nas ring por ma thogs par khang pa tsam zhig tu song | der thams cad kyis gzings yin par thag chod dga' ches te | bla ma la'ang yid ches | de ma thag dpon g.yog bzhugs pa de nyid du gzings des sleb byung ba na | gzings nang de na mi mang po yang mi 'dug | bdag po de la nged jambu'i gling du 'gro 'dod pa yin la phyi rol pa cig gis gzings kyi nang nas gnas 'di 'dra bar phyung | da khyed kyi gzings 'dis nged dpon g.yog sgröl dgos | khyed rang la'ang nor mang po ster ba yin gsungs pas | de na re | khyed dpon g.yog gnas skabs 'di lta bur gyur pa'o rgyal | da khyed rnams kyi nang na rab tu byung ba mang po 'dug pa dang | khyad par bla ma khyed bzang po cig yin 'dra bas da lan rngan pa mi 'dod par nged dad pa'i las byed do zer nas gzings su bcug ste | yud tsam gyis jambu'i gling du phyin.

Chapter 3

India: 1411-1422/3

With his return to India, Vanaratna embarked on the final phase of his career on the subcontinent. This phase unfolded in two disparate parts of India: the Kṛṣṇa River Valley of Andhra and the ancient heartland of Buddhism in north India's Gangetic plain. Both of these regions were important centers of Buddhist culture during the religion's long history on the Indian subcontinent, but were both nearly extinct by the time Vanaratna arrived in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. As in the preceding chapters, Vanaratna's narrative offers us a unique view into the condition of Buddhism in both these regions in the early fifteenth century, presenting us with first-hand evidence of the Buddhism's final days and the status of the communities that lingered on despite the historical forces that eroded their foundations. Vanaratna's unique perspective and evocative experiences afford us rare access to the on-the-ground realities of Buddhism in its waning days in India, realities that we will explore as we continue to tell the story of Vanaratna's return to the Indian subcontinent and his first attempts to settle in a Buddhist community and establish his career as a *paṇḍita*. We will also see how these conditions ultimately proved unsatisfactory, compelling him to leave India altogether, which is itself a strong testament to the deterioration of Buddhism in the land of its birth.

As before, gZhon nu dpal emphasizes pilgrimage, study, and personal meditation in his narrative, but we see the first glimmers of Vanaratna's career as a *paṇḍita* as well. Over the course of twelve years Vanaratna traveled from the southern reaches of the Deccan in Andhra, across central and northern India, and eventually arrived in the ancient heartland of Buddhism in the Gangetic plain. Whatever Theravāsa influences there may have been in his early biography now fade from view as the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna become more prominent in his personal and professional activities. There are indications that Vanaratna intended to settle in the Bodh Gayā region and build a career among what remained of its once-famed Buddhist culture. But all he found in Magadha was remains—the ruins of the crumbling edifices that had signaled Buddhism's might and prosperity, and the vestiges of a once-flourishing Buddhist community now dwindling out of existence. During the final years he spent on the subcontinent Vanaratna did discover pockets of Buddhism, have meaningful exchanges with Buddhist masters, and make a first foray into the scholarly life of a *paṇḍita*, but the conditions of Buddhism in India eventually proved unsatisfying for him, its status too diminished to provide him with the opportunities he sought. Thus, the years 1411-22 close the bracket on his time in India, a land to which he would not again return.

Andhra: 1411-1414

After Vanaratna's harrowing ordeal at sea and rescue from Sri Lanka's remote coastline, the rest of his voyage to India was comparatively uneventful. His trip, as well as his arrival at his next destination, are described succinctly in the *ZP*:

The ship continued north along the eastern shoreline until, following His Eminence's wishes, they turned northwest towards the South Indian kingdom of Kalinga. He made extensive offerings at the Dhānyakataka *stūpa* and reported that many favorable signs

appeared.¹

The voyage would have taken Vanaratna and his party through the Pamban Channel at the north end of Adam’s Bridge, across the Palk Strait between southern India and northern Sri Lanka, and then up the east coast of Tamil Nadu to the mouth of the Kṛṣṇa River. From there, gZhon nu dpal tells us, Vanaratna directed the vessel to turn to the northwest and then traveled—whether by river or overland is not clear—to Amarāvātī, the location of the Dhānyakāṭaka *stūpa*. gZhon nu dpal’s account is misleading in identifying their destination as Kaliṅga; despite the frequently shifting political boundaries of the region in the early fifteenth century, Kaliṅga, which is roughly equivalent to modern Odisha and northernmost Andhra Pradesh, was still some distance to the north of his stated destination. gZhon nu dpal can be forgiven this oversight, however, as Kaliṅga would have been a toponym well known to his Tibetan audience for its enduring status as Buddhist, or at least Buddhist-supporting kingdom. Using this toponym would have spared him (or perhaps Vanaratna) the need to get into the complex geopolitical realities of the Andhra region in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

As was the case for much of the Indian subcontinent following the rapid contraction of the Delhi Sultanate, the Andhra region and the rest of South India was undergoing a period of political fragmentation and realignment that resulted in a near-constant state of upheaval. There were numerous rival polities vying for dominance in the region, including the burgeoning dynasty at Vijayanagara in Karnataka; their primary rivals, the Bāhmani Sultanate, a vestige of the Delhi Sultanate that rapidly rose as an independent power in the region; and a number of smaller dynasties such as the Velamas of Rāchakoṇḍa, the Gajapati/Eastern Gaṅgas of Kaliṅga, and most importantly for this study, the Redḍis who governed the Kṛṣṇa-Godāvārī doab from their dual, and eventually rival seats of Koṇḍavīḍu and Rājamahendri. These states were in constant conflict with one another in the closing decades of the fourteenth century and the first quarter of the fifteenth, making the region intensely unstable.

When Vanaratna stepped off his ship and onto Indian soil in 1411/12, he did so within the domain of the Redḍis, (ca. 1326-1438), a dynasty that was witnessing its final days. The Redḍis, a predominantly Śaiva kingdom, had been a political, military, and cultural force in the region since they first emerged from their vassalage to the Kākatīyas of Warraṅgal in the early fourteenth century.² At the height of their rule under their second and third monarchs, Anavema (r. 1371-81) and Kumāragiri I (r. 1381-1403), the Redḍis governed a territory that stretched from Śrīśailam and the borders of Vijayanagara in the southwest to Siṃhāchalam at the edge of Kaliṅga to the northeast.³ They were renowned patrons of the arts, with famed Telugu and Sanskrit poets such as Śrīnātha and Vāmanabhaṭṭabāṇu gracing their courts and composing works in their honor.⁴ The Redḍi kings were also notable scholars and poets themselves, composing a number of refined commentaries on literature and the arts.⁵

¹ ŽP 9r.3-4: de yang gzing de byang du thad por btang na rgya gar shar phyogs kyi ’gram du ’ong na ’ang | bdag nyid chen po’i bzhed pa dang sbyar nas nub byang la btang bas | rgya gar lho phyogs ka lingka’i rgyal khams su phebs | dpal ’bras dpung gi mchos rten la mchod pa mang du mdzad | mtshan ma bzang po mang du byung gsung.

² M.R. Rao 1937: 734.

³ M.R. Rao 1939: 747.

⁴ Śrīnātha composed his *Paṇḍitārādhyacaritamū* and *Śrīṅgāranaiśadamū* under Peda Komaṭi Vema’s patronage. Vāmanabhaṭṭabāṇu’s *Vemabhūpālacartī* is a work that valorizes the life and deeds of the same monarch (V.V. Rao 1946: 257).

⁵ Kumāragiri I was known to have been a keen patron of dance, supported the celebrated dancer Lakumādevī at his court, and both revised *nāṭyaśāstra* treatises by authors such as Bharata and Bhoja and composed his own, the

This high culture that they cultivated masked the enduring instability of their rule, and Vanaratna arrived in Andhra at a particularly volatile moment. The land the Redḍis governed—the area between and immediately contiguous to the Kṛṣṇa and Godāvarī Rivers—was agriculturally fertile, rich in minerals, and had easy access to the maritime networks of the Bay of Bengal, making it a coveted prize for their rivals in the region. The Redḍis thus found themselves constantly at war with their neighbors: Vijayanagara prized the southern reaches of the Redḍi kingdom; the Gajapati-Gaṅgas constantly challenged their grip on the lands straddling the Godāvarī River, much of which the Redḍis had seized from them in the late fourteenth century; and the Bāhmani Sultanate and Velamas would often ally themselves with one or another of these aggressors to advance their own territorial and political ambitions.⁶ Regional strife during Vanaratna’s residency was all the more acute because of internal divisions among the Redḍis. Prior to his death in 1403, Kumāragiri I partitioned his kingdom, granting the eastern lands and the city of Rājamahendri to his favored general Kātaya Vema (r. 1403-14), leaving the rest, including the Redḍi capital at Koṇḍavīḍu to his heir Peda Komaṭi Vema (r. 1403-19). Peda Komaṭi was the ruling monarch during Vanaratna’s time in Andhra, but his power was substantially weaker than his predecessor, and he was in continuous conflict with Kātaya Vema and his allies, which included both the Gajapati-Gaṅgas of Kaliṅga and Vijayanagara.⁷ It is unclear to what extent Vanaratna witnessed or endured the conflicts between these regional powers, as the *ŽP* is completely silent about the geopolitical situation, but as was the case in Sri Lanka, Vanaratna’s activities in Andhra would have put him in close proximity to the tumult of the times. Even if he was not directly affected by them, it seems implausible that he was not aware of the situation and was required to take measures to steer clear of danger.

Upon reaching “Kaliṅga” Vanaratna proceeded directly to Amarāvātī, located approximately 80 kilometers up the Kṛṣṇa River from the Andhra coast. It is unclear from the *ŽP* if Vanaratna traveled to Amarāvātī via the same ship that carried him from Sri Lanka, or if he disembarked at a port on the coast and either traveled by river up the Kṛṣṇa or continued overland. If Vanaratna did change vessels on the coast, or if he disembarked there for overland travel, a likely port of call would have been Moṭupalli, located just south of the mouth of the Kṛṣṇa River. Moṭupalli emerged as a key regional port in the late thirteenth century under the Kākatīyas, and quickly became a significant hub of regional and international trade.⁸ When the Redḍis rose to dominance in the region they took over control of this port, as is attested by a series of pillar inscriptions found at Moṭupalli that describe the kingdom’s maritime policies.⁹ The Redḍis briefly lost Moṭupalli in the late fourteenth century, but it appears to have been firmly in Redḍi hands when Vanaratna arrived in Andhra in 1411/12.¹⁰ The language of the *ŽP* suggests, however, that Vanaratna did not land in coastal Andhra, but instead continued up the Kṛṣṇa River directly to Amarāvātī. The Kṛṣṇa River, which was navigable at least as far as Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, flows from the northwest to the southeast from roughly Amarāvātī to the coast, making gZhon nu dpal’s description of their turn northwest entirely accurate.

Vasantarājīya (M.R. Rao 1939: 758). His successor Peda Komaṭi Vema, also known as Vemabhūpāla, composed the *Śṛṅgāradīpaka*, a commentary on the *Amaruśataka*, the *Bhāvadīpaka*, a work associated with Hāla’s *Sattasaī*, and the *Sāhityacīntāmaṇi*, a work of *alankāraśāstra* (V.N. Rao 1946: 257).

⁶ M.R. Rao 1937: 738 and 1939: 748-55; V.N. Rao 1946: 256-7; Venkataramanayya 1950: 159-60.

⁷ V.N. Rao 1946: 256-8; Venkataramanayya 1950: 160-66.

⁸ Karashima 2004: 3-6.

⁹ See EI XII no. 22 and *South Indian Inscriptions* X no. 556, and XXVI no. 635.

¹⁰ M.R. Rao 1939: 752; Karashima 2004: 5. A stone inscription composed by Śrīnātha dedicating a tank in nearby Gunṭūr attests to Redḍi rule in the area, however tenuous, at least until 1416 (*South Indian Inscriptions* X no. 582).

Vanaratna's first significant stop after leaving Sri Lanka was the Dhānyakaṭaka *stūpa* at Amarāvātī (image 13). Though it is impossible to say what compelled him to make this his first stop upon returning to India, the Kṛṣṇa River Valley and the sites of Amarāvātī, Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, and Jaggayapeta were well known in Buddhist lore, its history and legend stretching back to the closing centuries BCE. Established during the Mauryan Empire and referenced in Aśokan inscriptions, the Buddhist community in the lower Kṛṣṇa River Valley flourished well into the third century CE during the reign of the Sātavāhanas and Ikṣvākus. During this period the region was a renowned center of sculpture and architecture—its style was imported and replicated throughout the Indic world—and was home to a number of Buddhism's main *vinaya* lineages and philosophical traditions. It was (arguably) a key early base of Mahāyāna Buddhism, with the Mahāsaṅghika Nikāya and the Madhyamaka philosophical school believed to have a particularly strong presence there.¹¹ Amarāvātī and the Dhānyakaṭaka *stūpa* hold a prominent place in the mythology of Vajrayāna Buddhism as well; the *stūpa* located at Amarāvātī is mentioned in the eighth-century *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* as potent site for esoteric practice,¹² and is considered the mythic site not only for the revelation of the *Kālacakra Tantra*, but of the entire *mantranaya* by Indian and Tibetan exponents of the Kālacakra system.¹³ We know little of the state and fate of the Buddhist community in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley after the twelfth century,¹⁴ but the renown of its earlier history surely would have echoed in Vanaratna's time and may have compelled him to make the journey there.

If Vanaratna was inspired to visit the Kṛṣṇa River Valley by its hoary past, there are some curious gaps in his itinerary: there is no mention of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, or the great *stūpas* at Jaggayapeta and Kanaganahalli. The fact that Vanaratna does not even reference them suggests that he was either unaware of these important Buddhist monuments or, perhaps more realistically, that they no longer existed in a condition that would make it possible to locate and visit them. If Dhānyakaṭaka was the only site from Buddhist antiquity remaining, it is doubtful that Vanaratna visited Andhra based on its contemporary reputation as a Buddhist pilgrimage destination. Instead, there is reason to believe that Vanaratna was acting on a more specific connection, one between the community at Gaḍalādeṇiya in Sri Lanka and the Buddhist center at Dhānyakaṭaka. As we know, Vanaratna resided at Gaḍalādeṇiya at some point during his six years in Sri Lanka, and while there studied with its current abbot, Dhammakītti Devarakṣita Jayabāhu. Devārakṣita Jayabāhu's predecessor, Dhammakītti Śīlavamṣa of Pālabatgala, had traveled to Amarāvātī to restore a Buddhist shrine at Dhānyakaṭaka, and was subsequently inspired by those efforts to found Gaḍalādeṇiya. An inscription at Gaḍalādeṇiya dated to 1344 records Śīlavamṣa's restoration efforts at Dhānyakaṭaka and their influence on his decision to build the image house (*devālaya*) at Gaḍalādeṇiya (image 7):

His Holiness Dhammakītti *sthavira*, born in the family of Gaṇavāsi which has come to the island of Sri Lanka bringing the holy Mahābodhi [tree], [restored] a two-storied

¹¹ Padma and Barber 2008: 1-3; Padma 2008: 11, 22-24; Holt and Padma 2008: 107-116; Walters 2008: 178-80. Boparachchi (forthcoming): 1-2.

¹² *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* 10.21cd: *śrīdhānyakaṭake caitye jinadhātudhare bhuvī*.

¹³ Newman 1987: 70-73.

¹⁴ Inscriptions from the Śaiva Koṭa dynasty of twelfth-century Amarāvātī record ongoing patronage of Buddhist communities at that time, but the historical record for Buddhism in the region largely falls silent after that (Walters 2008: 175-6; EI VI: no.15, p. 146-60). Until the record of Dhammakītti Śīlavamṣa's restorations described below, we have no definitive information on the Buddhist communities of Amarāvātī or elsewhere in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley.

image house at Śrī Dhānyakaṭaka in Dambadvīpa,¹⁵ too, [by spending] much gold and jewels. He, being desirous of causing an image house of stone to be founded in the island Lanka...caused to be built, on the expanse of flat rock called Dikgala¹⁶...a three storied image house.¹⁷

The fifteenth-century Sinhala *Saddharmaratnākaraya* of Dhammadinna Vimalakīrti, a monk from Pālabatgala, provides a more substantive account of Dhammakīrti Śīlavaṃsa's restoration efforts at Dhānyakaṭaka:

Abroad, [Dhammakīrti] also restored a stone-built *vihāra* named Śrī Dhānyakaṭaka, making it in workmanship as it originally was. The marble image of the Lord, in sitting posture, eighteen cubits in height, which was in that stone shrine, and which was daily being anointed with water, he besmeared with scented paste to a thickness of two inches and offered to it *sevuvandi* flowers, affixed thereon so that the stalk of one flower touched that of the other. In the morning of the second day, he anointed the stone image, which appeared like an image of flowers, (firstly) with scented water, secondly with pots of sesamum oil, thirdly with milk, and fourthly with pure water, after the image was rubbed with scented powder; and was thus made exceedingly clean. He next offered to the image five thousand balls of rice and curries. Moreover, in one day alone, he lighted nine thousand lamps with sesamum oil and offered twenty *koṭis* of *idda* flowers and seventy-five *lakhs* of jasmine flowers. Thus he made different kinds of offerings to the image of the lord.¹⁸

The evidence from these two accounts has encouraged scholars to argue for a continuity of Buddhism at Amarāvātī and more widely in Andhra that extended at least into the fourteenth century, and to specifically suggest the enduring presence of a branch of Sri Lankan monasticism there. At its height in the first centuries of the Common Era and in the centuries that followed, Amarāvātī-Nāgārjunakoṇḍa did indeed sustain a cosmopolitan Buddhist culture and was home to branch monasteries and hostels associated with Buddhist institutions from across South and Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka. That Dhammakīrti Śīlavaṃsa traveled there in the mid-fourteenth century to restore a Buddhist image hall is offered as evidence that the historical ties between Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions and the Buddhist community in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley were still active.¹⁹ Whatever its Buddhist affiliations, Dhānyakaṭaka was more popular as a site for Śaiva communities during the period due to the presence of a popular shrine to Amareśvara, an edifice built using materials salvaged from the ruins of the Buddhist *stūpa* (image 14). This Śaiva shrine, patronized by the Reddis in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,²⁰ is also the probable site of the Buddhist image house that was in need of Dhammakīrti Śīlavaṃsa's extensive and expensive restorations.²¹ It is worth noting that neither the Gaḍalādenīya inscription nor the more extensive account in the *Saddharmaratnākaraya* mention the famous *stūpa*, and instead refer to an image house.

¹⁵ As S. Paranavitana notes in his translation, this refers to Jambudvīpa, meaning India.

¹⁶ Gaḍalādenīya.

¹⁷ *Epigraphica Zeylanica* IV: 106.

¹⁸ *Epigraphica Zeylanica* IV: 97; Ilangasinha 1972: 24.

¹⁹ Padma 2008: 28; Bopearachichi (forthcoming): 4.

²⁰ Sewell 1882: 64.

²¹ Walters 2008: 180-81.

Given that Vanaratna spent considerable time at Gaḍalādeṇiya and studied under its abbot, Dhammakīrti III, and considering the close connection between Gaḍalādeṇiya, its Dhammakīrti line of abbots, and the Buddhist site at Amarāvātī, it is reasonable to speculate that the desire to visit Amarāvātī upon his return to India was planted in Vanaratna’s mind during his stay at Gaḍalādeṇiya. The renovations at Amarāvātī had been made by Dhammakīrti III’s immediate predecessor, and the inscription celebrating the renovations were on display to Vanaratna during his residency at the Sri Lankan monastery. Because of Gaḍalādeṇiya’s ties to Amarāvātī, it is also possible that Dhammakīrti III had reliable information on the condition of the Buddhist community in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley that informed Vanaratna’s decision to travel there. In the words of gZhon nu dpal, Vanaratna specifically directed his ship’s captain towards the Kṛṣṇa River and Amarāvātī (*bdag nyid chen po ’i bzhed pa dang sbyar nas nub byang la btang ba*), which conveys the sense that it was his premeditated destination.

Despite its enduring importance in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna lore, and specifically in the lore of the Kālacakra tradition of which gZhon nu dpal and Vanaratna are considered prominent exponents, gZhon nu dpal offers only a perfunctory description of Vanaratna’s visit to Amarāvātī and Dhānyakāṭaka, stating only that Vanaratna made offerings there and then quickly moved on after receiving signs marking the efficacy of his worship. Though this account does specifically mention the existence of a *stūpa* (*chos rten*), nothing is said of its specific qualities or features, no mention is made of the relics it may have housed, nor is there any indication of an active Buddhist community at the site. Vanaratna would find a small but active Buddhist community in Andhra, but it seems not to have been directly connected to Amarāvātī or Dhānyakāṭaka specifically.

What we do learn about the state of Buddhism in Andhra comes from the next, more substantial passage on Vanaratna’s travels in the region. After leaving Amarāvātī, Vanaratna met a Buddhist teacher who would have a lasting influence on him, the *paṇḍita* and master of the literary arts, Manuṣasūrya:²²

In this southern region there lived a great *paṇḍita* named Manuṣasūrya, who had mastered all the topics of knowledge from a young age. He was eminently talented in metrics, to the point that he could compose poems without relying on a *prastāra*²³ and possessed a knowledge of scripts that allowed him to write anything.²⁴

The ŽP goes on to state that Vanaratna periodically studied under Manuṣasūrya during his three-year stay in South India, received Vajrayāna teachings from him, and was otherwise treated with great respect by the south Indian master:

Vanaratna remained in the southern lands for three years, spending most of that time in meditation, but on occasion would receive teachings on the various maṇḍala systems of secret mantra. Asked whether Manuṣasūrya received teachings in his presence, [Vanaratna] remarked, “He was a scholar of Jambudvīpa, he did not [need to] receive

²² This is the master often misidentified as Narāditya in contemporary scholarship. See Introduction, p. vii.

²³ In Sanskrit prosody, a table for enumerating and arranging meters of varying lengths. This is a way of saying that Manuṣasūrya had an intuitive command of Sanskrit meter and thus did not need to rely on metrical tables when composing verse.

²⁴ ŽP 9r.5-6: lho phyogs kyi rgyud de na paṇḍi ta chen po ma ṅu ṣa sūrya zhes bya ba gzhon nu nas rig pa’i gnas thams cad kyi pha rol tu phyin pa | snyan ngag rtsom pa’i tshes’ang pra sta ra la mi ltos par sdeb sbyor khyad par du ’phags pa’i sbyor ba dang ldan pa yig mkhan gyi rtsal gyis ji tsam lcogs pa bris pas chog pa zhid ’dug.

teachings [from me], but he did show great reverence.”²⁵

gZhon nu dpal notes here that Vanaratna received Vajrayāna instruction from Manuṣasūrya, but the emphasis is clearly placed on the *paṇḍita*’s literary accomplishments. Not only are we told that he was a master poet with an innate command of metrics and skilled in penmanship, we also learn that he could hold his own in the high literary culture of the Redḍi kingdom:

There were seven non-Buddhist scholars who found fault with [Manuṣasūrya’s] poetic compositions and complained to the king of the realm, “A debate must be staged with the pretentious Buddhist monks who composed such faulty poetry. Summon them! Whichever one of us loses will be banished from the realm. The king replied: “There will be a debate, but whichever side is defeated will not be exiled. Instead the victor will be given great riches.” He sent a message to Manuṣasūrya, saying: “Come and debate these eminent teachers so we can see if you will outlast them in debate or not, or if your *ācāryas* and elders can outlast them. I have arranged the debate, and will grant riches to whomever among you is the victor.” The master [Manuṣasūrya] and his disciples confidently accepted. When the time finally came, they all arranged themselves on the debate stage, and the seven non-Buddhist teachers began: “We have read the treatises composed by Manuṣasūrya, and find them to violate grammatical convention. With this flaw and that they demean the poetic method. It doesn’t matter if you respond yourself or if someone else does, what do you have to say about this?”

At first, it was Manuṣasūrya’s *ācāryas* and senior students who offered a variety of responses. But when it became clear that their opponents were offering only specious responses and superficial refutations, Manuṣasūrya told the other masters and *sthaviras*: “Please take a break; this will not be very difficult and I can handle it myself.” The opponents agreed: “If you think so, then that’s fine.” The debate was set to last seven days, but on the third day Manuṣasūrya defeated them using various modes of reasoning, saying:

“Do you recall that you said such-and-such?”

“We remember.”

“You made this and that assertion, do you remember?”

“We remember.”

Well in that case...”

Using various reasonings such as these, he defeated them. Seeing that they had all lost their confidence, the king, who previously did not support Manuṣasūrya, was astonished that he had stripped those great teachers of their confidence. Even though the king had

²⁵ ḌP 10r.5-6: lho phyogs kyi rgyud du lo gsum bzhugs | de’i bar du’ang phal cher thugs dam la bzhugs shing skabs
'gar gsang sngags kyi dkyil 'khor ci rigs pa'ang gsan | mi'i nyi mas spyen sngar chos gsan tam zhus pas | khong
'jambu'i gling na mkhas | chos ni ma gsan | mos pa chen po mdzad gsung.

faith in a non-Buddhist tradition, he still, with great faith, offered a large parcel of land to Manuṣasūrya.²⁶

If we accept the accuracy of this depiction, the story is of historical significance both for our understanding of the status of Buddhism in fifteenth century Andhra and for the culture of the Redḍi kingdom. From this account we learn that Manuṣasūrya was the leader of a community of renunciants (Tib. *dge sbyor*; Skt. *śramaṇa*), and that among his followers were both those who could be counted as “senior” (*rgan pa*) members of his community and those who held the degree *ācārya* (*slob dpon*). In one instance, gZhon nu dpal uses the term *sthavira* (*gnas brtan*) in place of *rgan pa*, suggesting that the community may have been of a Theravaṃsa persuasion.²⁷ The community thus seems to be of reasonable size, and was well-versed in poetics, grammar, composition, and debate. This is, unfortunately, all we learn about Manuṣasūrya’s community, and otherwise we know nothing of its general doctrinal orientation nor its relationship to other extant Buddhist groups in the area, but this information does seem to point to the presence of an active Buddhist presence in Andhra at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

The fact the dispute between the seven non-Buddhists and Manuṣasūrya was centered on literary matters aligns well with what we know of the culture of the Redḍi court. The king who presided over the debate would in all probability have been one of the Redḍi monarchs—either Kumāragiri I or more plausibly Peda Komati Vema—or someone from their court.²⁸ We learn that the king was, unsurprisingly, not a Buddhist, and had within his realm a number of learned littérateurs. Knowing that such prominent intellectuals as Śrīnātha and Vāmanabhaṭṭabāṇu were active in the Redḍ kingdom, it is tempting to wonder if they or *paṇḍitas* of their status were

²⁶ ZP 9r.5-10r.4: des brtsam pa’i snyan ngag la | phyi rol pa’i mkhas pa bdun gyis skyon gzung nas | yul de’i rgyal po la phyi rol pa bdun po des ’di ltar skyon chags pa’i tshigs su bcad pa sbyor nas mkhas par rlom pa’i sangs rgyas pa’i (sangs rgyas pa’i om. ZPa) dge sbyong dag dang nged cag rtsod pa’i grwa shoms la de dag khug cig | ci ste rtsod par mi bzad na ni yul nas byung zhig ces zhus pa na | rgyal pos de dag la rtsod pa’i grwa bshom par yang bgyi la | khyed cag las su pham pa de kho bos yul nas ’byin par mi byed kyang | su rgyal ba de la bya dga’ chen po (ZPa; chen po om. ZPb) sbyin no zhes smras nas | mi’i nyi ma la khyod kyis rtsod par bzod dam | gal te khyod kyis mi bzod na’ang khyod kyis slob dpon dang rgan pa gzhan dag gis bzod na yang | ’dir ston pa chen po ’di dag dang rtsod pa’i slad du shog cig | kho bos rtsod pa’i grwa bshams pa nas khyed cag las su rgyal ba de la bya dga’ sbyin no zhes springs pa na | dpon slob thams cad kyis nus par khas blang ’dug | de nas dus la bab pa na de thams cad rtsod pa’i grwar ’khod nas | thog mar phyi rol pa’i ston pa bdun po de rnams kyis ma nu ṣa sūryas brtsams pa’i tshigs su bcad pa dag bkags nas ’di ni sgra’i sbyor ba dang ’gal ba yin no ’di dang ’di ni nyams dang ldan pa la sogs pa snyan ngag gi tshul las nyams pa yin no zhes te | de ltar na ’di dag la sbyor ba po nyid dam | gzhan gyis kyang rung ste | ji ltar rigs par lan thob cig ces smras pa na | thog mar ma nu ṣa sūrya’i slob dpon dang rgan pa dag gis lan gyi rnam pa de dang de ’debs shing phyi rol pa de rnams kyis de dag la lan ltar snang ba dang | sun ’byin pa ltar snang ba du ma byed pa mthong nas | mi’i nyi mas | slob dpon dang gnas gtan dag la | khyed cag re shig gzhes shig | las ’di ni bya dka’ ba ma yin pas kho bos rngo thog par bgyi’o | zhes zhus te | phyi rol pa de rnams kyis de lta na de bzhin du bgyi’o zhes smras nas | nyin zhag bdun du rtsod pa’i dus byas nas | nyi ma gsum la bab pa na | mi’i nyi mas | khyed kyis ’di skad du smras te dran nam | dran no | ’o na ’di dang ’di skad du smras pa de dran nam | dran no | ’o na da ni zhes byas nas rigs pa du ma tshar bcad pa na | thams cad spobs pa med par gyur pa mthong nas | rgyal po des sngan chad mi’i nyi ma la de tsam du de tsam du mi ’dzin pa tin na’ang | de’i tshe ston pa chen po de rnams spobs pa dang bral bar byas pa las ya mtshan skyes te | rgyal po de nyid phyi rol pa’i lugs la dad pa zhig yin mod kyis | dad ches pas mi’i nyi ma la yul ’khor chen po zhig phul.

²⁷ This possibility is, of course, undermined by the reference to Vanaratna’s study of esoteric maṇḍalas under Mānūśasūrya.

²⁸ It was not just the Redḍi monarchs who excelled in the literary arts; they were known to have encouraged those in their court and administration to support and actively participate in the high literary culture they promoted in their kingdom (M.R. Rao 1939: 758).

among those critiquing Maṇuṣāsūrya’s work. The king himself was sufficiently learned to adjudicate matters of literary propriety and was magnanimous to those who pleased him with their craft, regardless of their religious identity. This is underscored by the fact that he removed the threat of exile from the terms of the debate and made a land grant to Maṇuṣāsūrya and his community as a result of their victory. Though gZhon nu dpal’s account is brief, light on details, and surely partisan, it does fit neatly with what we know of the Redḍi kingdom and its refined literary culture.

Maṇuṣāsūrya is not referenced in Vanaratna’s narrative beyond this passage, but there are clear indications that he had a meaningful influence on him. In the NTŹP, Chos grags ye shes cites Vanaratna declaring Maṇuṣāsūrya to be the most learned master he met in his travels across South Asia and the Himalaya,²⁹ and it would appear that Maṇuṣāsūrya held Vanaratna in equally high esteem. Maṇuṣāsūrya composed a verse praising Vanaratna, a verse preserved in Tibetan translation in the DÑ and in a bilingual citation from bSod nams rgya mtsho’s collection of Vanaratna’s favored quotations, the *Zhal lung rin po che’i snying po’i phreng ba*:³⁰

People! To pacify existence
 Serve *mahāsthavira* Vanaratna devotedly!
 He is free from desire here and now,
 And is cleansed of the stains of affliction from [former] births.³¹

Based on gZhon nu dpal’s account, it would appear that the three years Vanaratna spent in South India pertain specifically to his time in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley. As was the case with Vanaratna’s six years in Sri Lanka, the brief scenes gZhon nu dpal narrates account for only a fraction of Vanaratna’s total experiences in the region. We are told that he primarily remained in meditation but are not given any specifics about the location or content of those personal retreats. Thus, we can assume that Vanaratna’s activities in the region were much more extensive but must be content with the few details we are given. These details tell us that Andhra was still a viable destination for a Buddhist pilgrim, affording opportunities to meet with Buddhist teachers and participate in scholarly and meditative activities. Potential ties with Sri Lanka and its institutions suggest that Buddhist networks in the regions were still active, and that there was some flow of religious, political, and cultural capital along them. Though we are given indications that traces of Buddhism remained in Andhra, they were just that: traces. Vanaratna remained in the region for three years, which would have only been a realistic proposition if there was some semblance of a Buddhist community there to support him intellectually and institutionally, if not financially. The community was not however, intellectually or

²⁹ NTŹP 27v.4. The context for this statement has been discussed in the Introduction, p. xxix.

³⁰ Though this verse appears in the DÑ, gZhon nu dpal does not cite it in the ŹP. The reason for this seems clear: bSod nams rgya mtsho compiled the *Zhal lung rin po che’i snying po’i phreng ba* in 1455, long after the ŹP had gone into circulation but before gZhon nu dpal had composed the DÑ. Thus, it would appear that Vanaratna did not share this verse with gZhon nu dpal himself, but rather gZhon nu dpal compiled it from bSod nams rgya mtsho’s collection.

³¹ Ōta. 5096: 122v.8-123r.1: srid par skye ba’i nyon mongs rnyog pa nams | rab tu bkruś las mngon sum chags bral ba | gnas brtan chen po nags kyi rin chen la (em.; °nags kyi rin chen nags kyi rin chen la) srid pa zhi byed skye bos gus bsten kye.

The Sanskrit text bSod nams rgya mtsho transliterated in his bilingual compilation, which shows clear evidence of perhaps generations of scribal error, reads: *Pratyakṣavītarāgam prakṣālitabhavajaṃ kleśakalāṅkam / Bhajata janā bhavaśāntyai bhaktyā vanaratnamahāsthaviram* (Ōta. 5096: 122v.8).

economically viable enough to support him in the long term. It therefore seems apparent that Vanaratna discovered a pocket of Buddhism surviving in Andhra, but it was not one that inspired him to settle there. Thus, after three years spent in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley, Vanaratna decided it was time to continue his journey, and so lead his party northwards.

Overland Travels: 1414-16/17

When Vanaratna left the Kṛṣṇa River Valley in approximately 1414, he proceeded towards the Godāvārī River on his way to his next stop, Śrī Parvata. gZhon nu dpal writes:

One month to the north, across the great Godāvārī River, was the region where Śrī Parvata was located, so that is where [Vanaratna] went next. He stayed at the monastery of the great *ācārya* Nāgabodhi, which at the time consisted of about fifty small huts, and remained in meditation there.³²

Though the precise location of Śrī Parvata is difficult to pinpoint, it is often thought to be identical to Śrīśailam, a famous center of ascetic and esoteric practice with a long pedigree in Indic literature. First mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*, this sacred mountain appears sporadically in the secular literature in India,³³ but features most prominently in the esoteric literature of Śaiva and Buddhist traditions. The site is especially well known in Śaiva sources, where it has long been one of the most important sacred sites (*pīṭha*) of Śaiva esoteric schools, continuing into modern times.³⁴ The Buddhist *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* references Śrī Parvata in the same verse that extolls Dhānyakaṭaka, and locates it generically in the south of India.³⁵ But as David Gordon White aptly puts it, it is likely that a number of different sites may have historically gone by the name Śrī Parvata, sites that were later conflated with Śrīśailam in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley: “[Śrī]parvata... is a highly generic term for a mountain or hilltop... Therefore, while the greatest wealth of Siddha lore, both Hindu and Buddhist, is attached to this toponym, we cannot be certain that it is always the Śrīśailam or Śrīparvata of the east central Deccan that is being evoked.”³⁶

Some scholars have argued that the Buddhist Śrī Parvata is in fact located in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, established as a rival center to the more dominantly Śaiva site upriver at Śrīśailam, and indeed there is epigraphic evidence that this may have been the case at one time.³⁷ For Vanaratna, the Śrī Parvata of Buddhist legend was neither identical to Śrīśailam nor to Nāgārjunakoṇḍa in the Kṛṣṇa River Valley, but instead required one month of travel north, across the Godāvārī River. His travels to reach it from the Kṛṣṇa River Valley may have been perilous, as the territory between the Kṛṣṇa and Godāvārī rivers was the site of open revolt and war in the Reḍḍi kingdom at the time. The Rājamahendrī branch of the Reḍḍis, based on the

³² *ẒP* 10r.5-6: de nas go dā va ri’i chu klung chen po brgal nas byang phyogs su zla ba gcig gi sa na dpal gyi ri bo yod pas der byon | slob dpon chen po klu’i byang chub kyi dgon pa | da lta’ang spyil po lnga bcu tsam ’dug pa der thog shig thugs dam la bzhugs.

³³ This includes Bāṇabhaṭṭa’s *Kādambarī*, Bhavabhūti’s *Mālatīmādhava*, Somadeva’s *Kathāsaritsāgara*, and Kalhaṇa’s *Rājatarāṅginī* (Yamano 2007: 1247).

³⁴ White 1996: 60-61, 110-12; Yamano 2009: 1246-7.

³⁵ *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* 10.21ab: śrīparvate mahāśaile dakṣiṇāpathasaṃjñike.

³⁶ White 1996: 60.

³⁷ EI XX: 9, 22-23; White 1996: 375, note 47; Shaw 1997: 161; Yamano 2009: 1246; Acri 2016: 9.

banks of the Godāvārī and led by Kātaya Vema and his allies, the Gajapati-Gaṅgas of Kalinga, were in open conflict with the Redḍis of Koṇḍvīḍu who were allied with the Velamas and Bāhmanis. Around the time that Vanaratna would have been making his way north, the allied forces lead by Peda Komati Vema of Koṇḍavīḍu defeated Kātaya Vema’s forces, captured his family, and killed him. The region briefly fell under Koṇḍavīḍu control but was lost shortly thereafter when Kātaya Vema’s son Allāḍa recaptured Rājamahendri.³⁸ It is impossible to know precisely when Vanaratna traversed this dangerous terrain, but it would appear that travel there would have presented significant hazards no matter the specific moment. He nonetheless appears to have made the transit without any trouble worth noting in his biography, and so arrived safely in Śrī Parvata.

Though the Śrī Parvata visited by Vanaratna is located in an otherwise unattested location, the information we are given about Śrī Parvata in the ŽP conforms with general Buddhist expectations. Śrī Parvata maintains an important place in the mythology of esoteric Buddhism as a site for the teaching and transmission of tantric Buddhism, and as the haunt of its greatest exemplars, the *siddhas*. Śrī Parvata’s renown as a center of esoteric practice goes back at least as far as the eighth century, as we know from its mention in the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*. The sacred mountain also appears in the hagiographies of the Buddhist *mahāsiddhas*, two of whom appear in Vanaratna’s narrative as well. The first of these is Nāgabodhi,³⁹ whom Vanaratna does not explicitly claim to meet but whose hermitage on the mountain he visits. Nāgabodhi’s mythic relationship with Śrī Parvata goes back to the time of Nāgārjuna (whether this means the Madhyamaka philosopher, the Guhyasamāja exegete, or the alchemical master is a matter of debate), when Nāgabodhi first moved to the mountain following his guru Nāgārjuna’s death. Nāgabodhi is reported in Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan sources to have an incredible lifespan, and is believed to spend his immortality on the flanks of Śrī Parvata.⁴⁰ His traditional biography is summarized by Tāranātha, who wrote on Nāgabodhi in the sixteenth century:

In Bengal in the east, an elderly brahmin couple had an only son. They lacked many comforts, so the *ācārya* Nāgārjuna gave them a lot of gold, inspiring faith in them. All three of them became his students, and the son served as [Nāgārjuna’s attendant] and attained accomplishment in *rāsayāna*. He then ordained and became learned in the *tripitaka*. This was the *ācārya* Nāgabodhi. He continued to serve the *ācārya* Nāgārjuna for as long as he lived, and then when he passed away, went to live deep in a cave on the flanks of Śrī Parvata, meditating one-pointedly for twelve years until he gained the supreme attainment of *mahāmudrā*. With a lifespan equal to the sun and the moon, he lives there still.⁴¹

³⁸ M.R. Rao 1939: 757; Venkataramanayya 1950: 160.

³⁹ The potential confusion and conflation of Buddhist tantric masters named Nāgabodhi and Nāgabuddhi has been much discussed, particularly in van der Kuijp 2007 and Sinclair 2016. Because gZhon nu dpal uses Nāgabodhi (*klu’i byang chub*) in the ŽP, this name will be used in the discussion here without further consideration of the intriguing issues surrounding these two figures.

⁴⁰ Aciri 2008: 14-15; Sinclair 2016: 389-90.

⁴¹ TĀR 44v.5-7: shar phyogs bhañ ga la’i yul gyi bram ze rgan rgon gnyis la bu zhig kyang yod cing | longs spyod kyis dbul ba la slob dpon klu sgrub kyis gser mang po gnang bas lhag par dad de | de gsum char gyis slob ma byas | bu des slob dpon gyi nye gnas byas shing bcud len gyi dngos grub kyang thob pa na | rab tu byung ste sde snod gsum la mkhas par byas pa ni slob dpon klu’i byang chub bo | des kyang slob dpon klu sgrub bzhugs kyis bar du slob dpon gyi g.yog byed cing | sku ’das na dpal gyi ri’i phyogs cig phug zab mo zhig tu ’dug nas rtse geig tu bsgoms pas lo bcu gnyis na phyag rgya chen po mchog gi dngos grub thob | sku thse nyi zla dang mnyam pas gnas de nyid du bzhugs so.

Thus, in referencing Nāgabodhi, or at least an institution associated with him, Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal invoke the mythology and mystique of Śrī Parvata already familiar to Indo-Tibetan audiences. Nothing in his biography indicates that Vanaratna met the immortal Nāgabodhi in person, but the possibility is not explicitly denied. More tangibly, it does appear that Vanaratna stayed in a Buddhist compound ostensibly associated with Nāgabodhi, which is said to be a *vihāra* on the slopes of Śrī Parvata that at the time was comprised of roughly fifty freestanding huts. It is thus entirely possible that in Vanaratna’s time there was a monastic compound on Śrī Parvata with historical ties to the immortal *siddha*, or that there was another teacher with that name living on the mountain. Unfortunately, there are no other known sources to corroborate his account.

The second legendary *siddha* frequently associated with Śrī Parvata to feature in Vanaratna’s narrative is Śabaripā, perhaps Vanaratna’s most important tantric guru who makes frequent, if consistently visionary appearances in his biography. In Vanaratna’s narrative Śabaripā prophesied his success in Nepal and Tibet, initiated him into his core practice of Cakrasaṃvara, and appeared to him other key moments. Given the core role he plays in Vanaratna’s spiritual life, it is surprising that so little is said about their first meeting on Śrī Parvata. It seems, however, that it was Vanaratna himself who remained reticent about their initial encounter:

His Eminence’s many meetings with the illustrious lord Śabaripā are well known, so I asked him if he [first] met Śrī Śabaripā while he was staying at Śrī Parvata. He said, “When I was staying there, there was a deep cave on the flank of the mountain where Śrī Śabaripā lived with his two wives.⁴² One of his wives asked Śabaripā, ‘There is a foreigner who has come here to see us, shouldn’t we show him some hospitality?’ ‘Yes!’ he said. So one of his wives came out, led me into the cave, and showed me hospitality.” I asked him, “what kind of hospitality did they show you?” He smiled and said, “Well, they certainly gave me a lot to eat and drink,” but wouldn’t really elaborate.⁴³

For an introduction to Vanaratna’s most celebrated tantric master, this description is remarkably laconic, which appears to be a deliberate choice by Vanaratna. Vanaratna’s reticence in describing his only in-person meeting with Śabaripā may indicate that the story was contrived to support the narrative of his visionary encounters with his tantric guru. Apart from the description of the teachings and initiations he received at Mahācaitya Vihāra, many of Vanaratna’s tantric lineages lack a clear origin in his biography. This is the case with his main practice of the *Trayodaśātamakacakrasaṃvara* maṇḍala, which he is reported to have received in a vision of Śabaripā at the Śāntipur Temple in Kathmandu. As will be discussed below, this visionary scene may conceal the reality that Vanaratna received tantric initiation at the feet of Nepalese gurus, a potentially inconvenient fact for a *paṇḍita* of Vanaratna’s pedigree. By framing his initiation and

⁴² Traditionally known by the names Jñānavartī and Padmavartī

⁴³ ŹP 10v.1-4: bdag nyid chen po dpal śa ba ra dbang phyug dang lan mang du mjal bar grags ’dug pas | bdag gis dpal gyi ri la bzhus pa’i tshe dpal śa ba ra dang mjal lam zhus pas | zhal lnga nas | der ’dug pa’i tshe na | re zhig ri bo de’i ngos kyī phug pa zab mo zhig na | dpal śa ba ra dbang phyug btsun mo gnyis dang bcas pa (ŹP^b; gnyis om ŹP^a) ’dug | btsun mo cig na re phyi rol gyi mi ’di nged rang gi thad du ’ongs pa la mgron du bya ba zhig mi bya’am zhes dpal śa ba ra la zhus pa na | gyis shig gsung ba’i bka’ byung nas btsun mo geig phyr byung | nged rang phug gi nang du khrid nas mgron byas so gsung | mgron ji ltar mdzad lags zhus pas | zhal ’dzum mdzad nas | bza’ btung mang po byin pa yin mod gsung nas khyad par rgyas pat ni gsung du ma gngang.

instruction into this cycle as a visionary revelation by an illustrious Indian *mahāsiddha*, Vanaratna may have disguised the true source of his lineage while further cementing both his own Indian pedigree and that of the lineages he taught widely in Nepal and Tibet.

Vanaratna’s description of his visit to Śrī Parvata—the veracity of which seems reasonable based on his description of its location and of the details of Nāgabodhi’s monastery—might naturally have prompted gZhon nu dpal to ask if that was where his first meeting with Śabaripā took place, which would in turn have given Vanaratna an ideal opportunity to establish the origins of his relationship with his visionary guru. That gZhon nu dpal was compelled to ask Vanaratna about his relationship with Śabaripā at this point is no surprise; as a prominent lineage holder of the bKa’ brgyud tradition, he would have been familiar with Śabaripā’s hagiography. In bKa’ brgyud lore, Advayavajra/Maitripā (ca. eleventh century), who along with Nāropā serves as the Indian font of many bKa’ brgyud lineages, was initiated and trained in the foundational practices of the Tibetan bKa’ brgyud system by Śabaripā on the slopes of Śrī Parvata.⁴⁴ After successfully completing his training there, Advayavajra embarked on his illustrious career as a tantric master, and eventually transmitted Śabaripā’s teachings (among others) to Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros (1012-97), the Tibetan forefather of the bKa’ brgyud lineage. Thus, gZhon nu dpal’s questions gave Vanaratna an ideal opening to establish his relationship with Śabaripā in the tangible reality of his travels in India, and to do so in a manner that conformed with well-known Buddhist mythological tropes and the expectations of his Tibetan audience.

Before continuing in the narrative of Vanaratna’s journey from South India to Magadha, an important discrepancy in our sources requires attention. Though the ŹP provides the longer, more detailed account of Vanaratna’s time in the south, gZhon nu dpal also briefly describes these travels in the DÑ. Confusingly, however, the details of the two accounts diverge significantly. In the DÑ gZhon nu dpal writes:

[Vanaratna next] went to the kingdom of Kaliᅅga in the south of India. While there the great *paᅅᅅita* Maᅅᅅasūrya, famed in Jambudvīpa, composed a verse of praise and showed him much respect. After that he went to the Dhānyakaᅅaka *stūpa*, where he stayed in the monastery of Nāgabodhi located there and first met Śrī Śabaripā.⁴⁵

The differences are immediately apparent: in this version Vanaratna travels to Dhānyakaᅅaka after meeting with Maᅅᅅasūrya, and it is there that Vanaratna stays in Nāgabodhi’s *vihāra* and first meets Śabaripā, with no mention of a trip to Śrī Parvata. Though this version gives us a very different picture of Vanaratna’s travels, and thus distorts his narrative for those who only consult the DÑ and ignore the ŹP, it is relatively straightforward to discount the DÑ version. There is evidence that the ŹP went into circulation shortly after the end of Vanaratna’s second trip to Tibet in approximately 1438.⁴⁶ It was during this second trip that he began working closely with

⁴⁴ Hadano 1959: 170-73; Tatz 1987: 700-708. For an extensive Tibetan presentation of Advayavajra’s hagiography, including his journey to Śrī Parvata and training with Śabaripā, see ff. 7v.1-12v.9 of the so-called *bLa ma brgyud pa’i rim pa* by Par phu pa bLo gros seng ge, edited in Passavanti 2008. For a summary of the narrative in English, see Tatz 1987.

⁴⁵ DÑ 10.21r.7-21v.2: ...rgya gar lho phyogs su ga lingha’i rgyal khams su phebs | der paᅅᅅi ta chen po mi’i nyi ma zhes bya ba dzambu’i gling na mkhas par grags pa des...[verse cited above]...bstod pa mdzad cing zhabs tog kyang mang du mdzad nas slar dpal ’bras spungs gi mchod rten por byon | de na klu’i byang chub kyi dgon pa zhig yod par thogs shig bzhugs | dpal śa ba ri dbang phyug dang thog mar mjal.

⁴⁶ As noted in the Introduction (p. xxvi) the ŹP was likely in circulation no later than 1453, when the newly-enthroned Phagmo gru monarch Kun dga’ legs pa reports being inspired to invite Vanaratna back to Tibet based on

Vanaratna, and to compile the *ŽP* based on Vanaratna’s oral reports. Thus, the memory of Vanaratna’s accounts were likely fresh in his mind, a conjecture supported by the level of detail given in the *ŽP*. The *DN*, on the other hand, was largely completed in 1478, near the end of gZhon nu dpal’s life, with the possibility that parts of volume ten, which contains Vanaratna’s biography, may have been completed posthumously.⁴⁷ Though it would be surprising that gZhon nu dpal did not consult his previous work when composing the *DN*, it does seem that Vanaratna’s biography in the *DN* was more hastily or causally compiled, and that many of the key details included in the *DN* were confused. Discrepancies such as these serve as reminders that the *DN*, an undeniably essential resource, must be studied with care.

The remainder of Vanaratna’s overland journey from southern to northern India is treated succinctly in the *ŽP*, the vast distance he covered acknowledged with only a few lines of text:

[Vanaratna and entourage] then proceeded slowly to western India, spending time in the special places where the Tathāgata lived and taught the Dharma. Specifically, they visited [the Tathāgata’s] birthplace, Kapilavastu, and Vārāṇasī.⁴⁸

From this we see that Vanaratna’s journey continued to be oriented around pilgrimage to the famous Buddhist sites that still dotted the Indian landscape. What precisely gZhon nu dpal means by “western India” is puzzling, as Vanaratna was probably in a more central or eastern location when he departed Śrī Parvata. None of the few sites he states Vanaratna visited would have required him to swing far to the west in his travels, so either we need to read “western” loosely, as in “west of the central land of Magadha,” or that unknown forces required Vanaratna to take a more westerly tack to reach Magadha. Whatever the case, he did approach Magadha from the west, as is evident in his visits to Kapilavastu and Vārāṇasī.

After first crossing the Godāvarī River and then leaving Śrī Parvata, Vanaratna would have left the Deccan and proceeded across the central highlands. Without knowing his precise route it is impossible to know whose territories he crossed, what geopolitical conditions he faced, and what stops he may have made along the way. Like much of India at the time, the broader region was convulsed with conflict between the former vassals of the Delhi Sultanate, who vied for authority and autonomy with each other while dealing with resurgent brahmanical houses.⁴⁹ His most likely course would have taken him across Ghūrid territory, centered at Mālwa, and thus brought him close to their recurring conflicts with the Ahmed Shāhīs of Gujarat. The Ghūrids also skirmished regularly with the Sharqīs of Jaunpur, who controlled much of the region Vanaratna would travel through when visiting Kapilavastu and Vārāṇasī. Sharqī territory as a whole was restive, necessitating that the Sultan’s forces roam the countryside quashing rebellions from upstart houses.⁵⁰ But as before, neither Vanaratna nor gZhon nu dpal felt it necessary to dwell on political and military matters. Thus, from our distant perspective Vanaratna’s two years of overland travel were entirely uneventful.

Vanaratna’s only recorded stops along the way are sites in the north Indian plains associated with Śākyamuni’s life and teaching career, with only Kapilavastu and Vārāṇasī

reading his *rnam thar*.

⁴⁷ van der Kuijp 2006: 3-4, 16-17.

⁴⁸ *ŽP* 10v.4-5: de nas rgya gar nub phyogs la dam bus byon zhing | de bzhin gshegs pas gang du bzhigs pa dang | chos gsungs pa’i gnas kyi khyad par nams su thogs re thogs re bzhugs | khyad par grong khyer ser skya, byung ba’i yul dang | va ra nā si rnam su bzhugs.

⁴⁹ Jackson 1999: 321-23.

⁵⁰ Diwakar 1959: 393-4; Schwartzberg 1978: 39, 194-95; Habib 2006/7: 373.

mentioned explicitly. Little is known about the condition of ancient Buddhist sites in the fifteenth century, and it is likely that many of them were in a state of disrepair due to neglect or the ravages of war. Kapilavastu specifically seems an unexpected stop for Vanaratna, as evidence suggests that it had been abandoned and forgotten centuries before his arrival in the area.⁵¹ It is possible that Vanaratna's reference to Kapilavastu is intended to refer to Lumbinī, site of the Buddha's birth, but this site seems to be generally absent from pilgrimage records from the seventh century onwards.⁵² Despite its absence from pilgrimage itineraries, there is slim evidence for Buddhist activity in or around Kapilavastu, as it is believed to be the birthplace of the fourteenth-century master Sahajaśrī (d.1381).⁵³

Vanaratna's visit to Vārāṇasī almost certainly refers to Sārnāth, the site of the Rṣipatana deer park where Śākyamuni preached his first discourse. Equally little is known about the status of this site during Vanaratna's time, but Tibetan pilgrims were known to visit Sārnāth into the eighteenth century, suggesting that Sārnāth remained a regular pilgrimage center continuously from the zenith of Buddhist activity through Vanaratna's time and beyond.⁵⁴ Much more research is needed to properly understand the condition of these sites and other Buddhist pilgrimage places in the area, but at the very least Vanaratna's biography offers a historical witness, however limited, to the continued awareness of these sites among Buddhist pilgrims in the fifteenth century.

Magadha: 1416/17-23

Vanaratna arrived in Magadha in approximately 1416 at the age of thirty-two. He had spent more than a decade traveling across South Asia, navigating networks of Buddhist centers undergoing paradigm shifts in the face of Buddhism's decline in its Indian homeland. Only now, after his long and circuitous journey, did Vanaratna arrive at this historic center of the Buddhist world. In all his many years seeking the most favorable conditions to train in Buddhist discipline, philosophy, and meditation he had never considered a visit to Magadha. It is only at this point, well after he earned the title of *paṇḍita* and pursued further training in Sri Lanka and Andhra, did he make the decision to travel to what had been in previous centuries the beating heart of Indic Buddhism. His motivations to finally visit the central land of Magadha seem twofold: his more explicit motivation as stated in the *ŽP* was pilgrimage—his desire to visit the holy sites of the historical Buddha, make offerings there, and cultivate his meditation practice in their sacred aura. Less detectible in the language of the *ŽP*, but nonetheless apparent, was his desire to settle and establish himself as the *paṇḍita* he was trained to be. We see both of these motivations at play in the narrative that follows, and both were dramatically affected by the state of the community he discovered in Buddhism's holy land. Of his arrival in Magadha gZhon nu dpal writes:

[Vanaratna] then progressively made his way to the central land of Magadha. At that point those who had been following him since they left their homeland returned home, as they were unable to remain carefree. [Vanaratna] said that only Dīpaṅkara, a native [of Magadha] remained. During this time, he visited the Mahābodhi Temple and other

⁵¹ Srivastava 1980: 103; Huber 2008: 53; Falk 2013: 57.

⁵² Huber 2008: 73.

⁵³ McKeown 2019: 23.

⁵⁴ Huber 2008: 203.

magnificent sites in Vajrāsana, as well as all the magnificent sites at Nālandā, and made numerous offerings and supplications.⁵⁵

After roughly fifteen years of travel, much of it undoubtedly challenging, Vanaratna and his party were now closer to home than they had been since their departure. As gZhon nu dpal informed us at the beginning of the *ŽP*, Sadnagara was three-months travel eastward from Bodh Gayā, and it would appear that this relative nearness encouraged the members of his entourage to go home to their families, their land, and the lives they left behind in eastern India. The duties of attending to the *paṇḍita* now rested solely in the hands of a previously unknown figure named Dīpaṅkara, a native of Magadha. It is not clear from the *ŽP* if Dīpaṅkara had already been a member of Vanaratna’s entourage and was able to remain simply because he was originally from Magadha, or if he was brought into Vanaratna’s service when the rest of Vanaratna’s group departed, but the latter seems more likely. Dīpaṅkara is only mentioned twice in Vanaratna’s biography, both times in the context of his service to Vanaratna. With Dīpaṅkara now serving Vanaratna, the rest of his party, which was originally said to number more than thirty, left the company of their *paṇḍita* with whom they had covered uncountable miles of overland, riverine, and ocean travel through diverse lands, cultures, and Buddhist communities. As Vanaratna would never return to Sadnagara, this was last he would see of his compatriots, but as gZhon nu dpal notes, they were not “carefree,” they were not *avadhūtas* as he was, and so had obligations and responsibilities to return to.⁵⁶

Some of the strongest evidence we have for the state of Buddhism in Bodh Gayā and the greater Magadha region in the time period comes from the biography of Vanaratna’s near-contemporary Śāriputra (1335-1426), who traveled there from his home in eastern India in the mid-fourteenth century, helped to renovate the Mahābodhi temple, and served briefly as its abbot.⁵⁷ During Śāriputra’s time the Bodh Gayā area was under the nominal control of the Ilyas Shāhī house of the Bengal Sultanate,⁵⁸ but it is clear from his biography that area around Bodh Gayā was directly governed by a number of minor brahmanical houses with an unclear relationship to the Islamicate polities vying for control of the broader region. The Mahābodhi temple complex had been sacked during the Turkic invasions of the thirteenth century and was in state of disrepair when Śāriputra arrived, but he was able to undertake substantial renovations with the political and financial support of these vassal “kings” (and one “queen”) whose lands were stable enough and treasuries rich enough to support such reconstruction efforts.⁵⁹ Though these rulers generally appear to have been Vaiṣṇavas, they cultivated an ecumenical religious

⁵⁵ *ŽP* 10v.5-6: de nas rim gyis yul dbus ma ga dhar phebs | de’i dus na sngar rang gi yul nas phyag phyir ’brangs pa rnam ni bya bral ma nus par phyir log | gnyug mar gnas pa ni dī paṃ ka ra gcig su yin gsung | de’i tsho rje gdan du ma hā bo dhi la sogs pa’i rten ngo mtshar can rnam dang | nā landa la sogs pa’i rten ngo mtshar ba rnam mjal nas mchod pa phul zhing gsola ba ’debs pa mang du mdzad.

⁵⁶ Here again gZhon nu dpal uses the phrase *bya bral*, echoing Vanaratna’s decision to take on the lifestyle of an *avadhūta* (*bya bral ba*). His entourage is considered “unable” (*ma nus pa*) to uphold the same attitude, and so are lured home by the pull of their previous obligations.

⁵⁷ The summary that follows is based primarily on the Tibetan “exoteric biography” of Śāriputra edited, translated, and studied in Arthur P. McKeown’s *Guardian of a Dying Flame* (2019).

⁵⁸ Diwakar 1959: 57.

⁵⁹ The names of this minor nobles, given in awkward Tibetan phonetics are the “kings” Caṅgalarāja, *sKyer Simhadeva, *Vīrasimhadeva, and the “queen” Uchhadevī. Caṅgalarāja appears to have belonged to the ruling house of Uruvāsa, as discussed below. Judging by their names, two among these kings may have been associated with the Devas of Bengal, who were among the ruling families of Samatāta prior to the Turkic conquest. As will be discussed below, the Devas made a brief resurgence to challenge the rule of the Bengal Sultanate in the early fifteenth century.

environment, demonstrated by their financial contributions to the restoration of the Mahābodhi temple, and the debates they arranged between Buddhists (represented by Śāriputra), Vaiṣṇavas, and Islamic clerics. The Buddhist community of Bodh Gayā was small in Śāriputra’s time but still active, as is clear when the community names him abbot and preceptor following the death of the previous office holder. In McKeown’s understanding of the source material, Śāriputra acted as a magnetizing force during his tenure, helping to moderately expand the Buddhist community while returning the Mahābodhi temple to a semblance of its former glory.⁶⁰ There is nothing in this account to suggest that the Buddhist community at Bodh Gayā was particularly large or influential in the second half of the fourteenth century, but under Śāriputra’s leadership it appears to have reached a level of stability and prosperity that allowed it to endure, and likely influenced the character of the community present there when Vanaratna arrived.

Though the ŽP does not record any interactions between Vanaratna and the local monarchs governing Bodh Gayā and the immediate area, the situation on the ground seems to closely resemble that of Śāriputra’s time. Broader political authority at this time was likely in the hands of the Sharqīs, who had taken control of the region around the turn of the fifteenth century,⁶¹ but it appears they were not exercising local control in Bodh Gayā. Because Vanaratna interacted with an unnamed “king” in nearby Rājagṛha, it would seem that local authority had been delegated to these smaller houses of landed nobles. The southern reaches of the region were restive around the time of Vanaratna’s arrival in 1416, requiring the Sharqīs to send a military force to protect their territory there,⁶² while to the east the Ilyas Shāhi dynasty was weakened internally by the revolt of one of its powerful zamindars, Rāja Gaṇeśa, and the concurrent but separate rebellion of the brahmanical Deva house.⁶³ As we have seen, a number of the “kings” that supported Śāriputra used the appellation “Deva,” but what relationship they had, if any, with the resurgent Devas of Bengal is unknown. Despite unrest in the south and east, it appears that Bodh Gayā and the area of Magadha that surrounded the important Buddhist monuments were secure at the time, and that Vanaratna was left in relative peace.

From the description in the ŽP, Vanaratna’s six years in Magadha were spent in a now-familiar combination of formal study and teaching, pilgrimage, and private meditation retreat. Though he traveled widely throughout the region, most of his activities were centered in two specific locations around Bodh Gayā. The first, and perhaps his primary base of activity, was a village named Kapasiā, for which we have evidence in an extant manuscript from Vanaratna’s personal collection, a compilation of works associated with the *Kalāpa Sūtra*. Two colophons found in the manuscript, both of which identify Vanaratna as its owner, state that he lived in the *kapasiāgrāma*,⁶⁴ which through the careful detective work of Shin’ichiro Hori can be plausibly located sixteen kilometers west of the Mahābodhi temple.⁶⁵ Those same two colophons provide the dates the texts were scribed, putting Vanaratna in Kapasiā from at least 1421-22. The date given for the copying of another text in the collection, but which does not mention Kapasiā, potentially extends that range to 1423.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ McKeown 2019: 101-11, 324-29.

⁶¹ Diwakar 1958: 57.

⁶² Diwakar 1959: 393.

⁶³ Dani 1952: 145-53; Eaton 1993: 50-60; Hussain 2002: 273-77.

⁶⁴ Hori 2018: 50, 58-9.

⁶⁵ Hori 2018: 50-51.

⁶⁶ Hori 2018: 49-50. The date in this third colophon could be read as either 1423 or 1426, but given that the other two dates can be confirmed as 1421 and 1422, and because we know that Vanaratna reached Tibet in 1426 after a few years in the Kathmandu Valley, the earlier date is more plausible.

The other site explicitly mentioned in our sources is Vanaratna’s hermitage on the Kanakaśrota River, which according to gZhon nu dpal was located in the vicinity of the Mahābodhi Temple. About this hermitage gZhon nu dpal writes:

On the outskirts of Vajrāsana, on the far side of the Kanakaśrota River, the guru built a beautiful hermitage where he stayed for three years, absorbed in meditation on the six-branch yoga.⁶⁷

Once again, Hori’s sleuthing skills allow us to confidently identify the Kanakaśrota river as a branch of the Phalgu River that flows immediately to the east of the Mahābodhi complex, and which in Buddhist sources is more commonly known as the Nairāñjanā.⁶⁸ Vanaratna spent three years in this hermitage, which accounts for about half his time in Magadha. When we add this to the dates of Vanaratna’s residency recorded in the *Kalāpasūtra*, we cover the full six years gZhon nu dpal states Vanaratna spent in Magadha. Since Vanaratna would have needed a significant amount of time to complete the pilgrimages described below, it seems that Kapasiā was his primary base during his more active years and the staging point for his pilgrimages, while his hermitage was reserved for his long meditation retreat. Thus, Vanaratna would have engaged in his more public activities while living in Kapasiā, including giving teachings to the local Buddhist community and studying with other learned *ācāryas* in the area.

Scholarly Life

When not in long-term meditation retreat, Vanaratna continued his personal studies and offered teachings to the local Buddhist community. From gZhon nu dpal’s descriptions the community appears to be diverse, with Buddhists substantially in the minority:

At that time in Magadha there weren’t more than ten native monastics, and the majority of people studying philosophy were non-Buddhist. When they saw His Eminence’s excellent character, however, the non-Buddhists were filled with faith, and their *ācāryas* gave him abundant alms.⁶⁹

This description echoes what we know of the religious environment around Bodh Gayā in Śāriputra’s time less than a century earlier. Vanaratna’s biography describes an ecumenical scene in which non-Buddhist students and *ācāryas*—possibly of the same Vaiṣṇava persuasion reported by Śāriputra—dominate, but engage cooperatively with the Buddhists in their midst. The phrase “native monastics” (*gnyug mar gnas pa’i rab tu byung ba*) is interesting and challenging to parse. On the one hand it could refer to the total size of the resident Buddhist community, which would indeed be quite small and reflect the impoverished state of Buddhism evident in other aspects of Vanaratna’s experience of Magadha. On the other hand, if read more

⁶⁷ ŹP 11v.5-6: dpal rdo rje’i gdan gyi pha zad (ŹP^a; pha thad ŹP^b) na ka na ka śro ta zer ba’i chu bo zhig yod pa’i phar ngos su spod khang legs po zhig mdzad | der bla ma bzhugs nas yan lag drug gi rnal ’byor la rtse gcig tu mnyam par gzhang pa lo gsum du mdzad.

In the DÑ, gZhon nu dpal adds that Vanaratna’s hermitage was located in a forest (DÑ 21v.3).

⁶⁸ Hori 2018: 52-3.

⁶⁹ ŹP 11v.4-5: de’i tshe ma ga dha na | gnyug mar gnas pa’i rab tu byung ba ni bcu lhag tsam las mi ’dug | grub pa’i mtha’ la blo sbyong ba pal cher phyi rol par ’dug na’ang | dam pa ’di’i ngang tshul bzang po la phyi rol pa nams blo lhag par dad pas phyi rol pa’i slob dpon nams kyī bsod snyoms mang du bzhes.

literally, it could refer to a dearth of north Indian Buddhist monastics at Bodh Gayā, and a correspondingly larger, transient population of foreign monks visiting the Mahābodhi temple on pilgrimage, a group that would have been comprised substantially of monks from Southeast Asia and the Himalaya.⁷⁰

The small number of Buddhist monastics in the area does not mean that Buddhism was not being actively propagated in Magadha; manuscript evidence suggests that the region remained an active center for both the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions. Shin'ichiro Hori has written about a diverse set of manuscripts that can be tied to the larger Magadha region in the fifteenth century. Though all but one post-date Vanaratna by more than a decade, they can be reasonably taken as representative of Buddhist activity during his time in Magadha. The three that post-date Vanaratna are a copy of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (1436), the *Kālacakra Tantra* (1447), and the *Karaṇḍavyūha* (1456).⁷¹ The fourth manuscript discovered by Hori is the previously mentioned collection of *Kalāpasūtra* commentaries, which were owned by Vanaratna.

The origins of Vanaratna's personal collection of commentaries on the *Kalāpasūtra* may be recorded in the events of the *ŽP*. While in Bodh Gayā, Vanaratna did not limit his scholarly activities to the Buddhist community, which was perhaps due to the dearth of Buddhist scholars in Magadha or because of his own ecumenical spirit. Whatever the case, the only teacher Vanaratna studied with while in Magadha to be mentioned by name was a non-Buddhist lay *ācārya* named Harihara, a master of the linguistic sciences (*sgra rig*):

In Magadha at that time there was a great *ācārya* who was deeply learned in the linguistic sciences named Harihara. This layman, who was praised by all scholars of the inner and outer sciences, previously had faith in the Buddhism, but after two of his non-Buddhist colleagues repeatedly extolled the excellence of [their] non-Buddhist tradition, developed faith in it and converted.⁷²

That Vanaratna had a teacher who was both a non-Buddhist and a layman seems to have been surprising to gZhon nu dpal, who asked Vanaratna:

“Did you display reverence for that *ācārya*?”

[Vanaratna] replied, “Because he was a householder it was he who venerated me, but I would show him the respect of standing when he arrived.”⁷³

gZhon nu dpal reports that Vanaratna primarily studied the literary arts with Harihara, and specifically mentions that they studied the *Kalāpasūtra* together.⁷⁴ This makes it likely that the Vanaratna commissioned and compiled the extant collection of manuscripts on the *Kalāpasūtra* in connection with his studies under Harihara. The collection consists of five commentarial

⁷⁰ McKeown 2019: 215.

⁷¹ Hori 2015: 228-234.

⁷² *ŽP* 11r.1-3: ma ga dha na sgra rig pa la shin tu mkhas pa'i phul du phyin pa phyi nang gnyis ka'i mkhas pa nmams kyis bsnags pa'i slob dpon chen po ha ri ha ra zhes bya ba khyim par gyur pa | dang po sangs rgyas pa la dad pa yin na'ang | grogs po phyi rol pa gnyis kyis phyi rol pa'i lugs bzang ba'i gtams mang po byas blo gyur nas | phyi rol pa la dad par gyur.

⁷³ *ŽP* 11v. 3-4: slob dpon de la phyag mdzad dam zhus pas | khyim pa yin pas phyag khong gis tshur la mdzad | nged rang gis khong byon pa'i dus na ldang ba tsam gyi nkur stie byed pa yin gsung.

⁷⁴ *ŽP* 11v.2-3.

works: Durgasiṃha's *Paribhāṣāvṛtti*, *Uṇādivṛtti*, and *Liṅgakāravṛtti* as well as Sarvadhāra's *Parādivyākhyāvṛtti* and Trilocanadāsa's *Kṛtpañjikā*, the last treatise being a commentary on the fourth chapter of the *Kalāpasūtra*.⁷⁵ The manuscript, which was copied by an otherwise unknown scribe named Vāgiśvara,⁷⁶ appears to have been used specifically for Vanaratna's personal study. Colophons to three of the five works, identify the manuscripts as Vanaratna's private copies, with one stating that it was "copied for the purpose of the personal reading of the blessed and glorious *sthavira*, the high-minded Śrī Vanaratna."⁷⁷ The fact that these texts were scribed for Vanaratna's personal use while he was in residence in Kapasiā and the Bodh Gayā area suggests that it was here, perhaps more so than during his youth in Sadnagara, that Vanaratna truly took up his in-depth study of Sanskrit grammar. And, because gZhon nu dpal specifically notes that Vanaratna studied the *Kalāpasūtra* with Harihara, we could reasonably speculate that the surviving manuscript collection was created in the context of those studies. As gZhon nu dpal will report later, Vanaratna carried a copy of the *Kalāpasūtra* with him to Tibet, where he offered it to the Tibetan master Rong ston Shes bya kun rig. gZhon nu dpal states that this manuscript was scribed in Vanaratna's own hand but given the fact that we have this collection of related manuscripts Vanaratna commissioned in Kapasiā, it is perhaps more likely that the copy he offered to Rong ston was part of this same collection copied by Vāgiśvara or another scribe under Vanaratna's patronage. The composite manuscript of *Kalāpasūtra* materials described here was discovered in Nepal in the late nineteenth century,⁷⁸ thus one can imagine that Vanaratna had carried them with him to Nepal, where they remained for centuries until being discovered and removed to the British Museum.

In addition to these and presumably other studies, Vanaratna also began to take on the mantle of teacher while in Magadha. As we have seen, the *ŽP* has previously referred to two occasions on which he gave public teachings: once during his final examinations for his *paṇḍita* degree at Mahācaitya Vihāra, and again during his stay in Sri Lanka. In these previous instances, his discourses are described in the vaguest terms, with the expected detail of the text or even a general topic omitted. From this point in his narrative, however, the descriptions of Vanaratna's discourses become more substantive and consistent in noting the specific texts or topics on which he taught. This allows us to start developing a picture of his preferred topics, and to begin tracking the evolution of his career.

There is only a single reference to Vanaratna's teachings in Magadha, but there is a hint of a broader engagement with the community:

While [in Bodh Gayā] he once taught the *8000-line Prajñāpāramitā* to a group of many people headed by about three *paṇḍitas*. In these ways he did whatever he could to be of benefit to others.⁷⁹

This brief note provides us with two useful pieces of information: first, we learn that Vanaratna taught from the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus in Bodh Gayā, which marks the first record of teachings

⁷⁵ Hori 2018: 47.

⁷⁶ Hori 2018: 48-49.

⁷⁷ *Uṇādivṛtti* 42v.7: bhagavānaśrīmatasthaviraśrīvanaratna(em. vanarantha)mahāśayānām pustakam idaṃ nijapāṭhahetau likhāpitam. Vanaratna's name also appears in the colophons to the *Liṅgakāravṛtti* (where it is misspelled as *vanarantha*) and the *Kṛtpañjikā* (Hori 2018: 47-8, 58-60):

⁷⁸ Hori 2018: 46.

⁷⁹ *ŽP* 13r.3: paṇḍi ta gsum tsam gyis thog drangs pa'i skye bo mang po la 'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa bryad stong pa tshar geig gsung | de la sogs pa'i gzhan gyi don yang ci rigs pa mdzad.

on a specifically Mahāyāna topic; second, while there was a sizable audience for his teachings, there were few advanced scholars in the community. This first mention of the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus is significant because of the emphasis Vanaratna will place on *Prajñāpāramitā* literature throughout his career. He is reported to have taught on the 8000-line *Prajñāpāramitā* during his first stay in Nepal a few years later, and he would teach on it frequently in Tibet as well. gZhon nu dpal reported that Vanaratna first studied *Prajñāpāramitā* material during his student days at Mahācaitya Vihāra, which would be the only plausible context in which he could have been trained in it prior to this time, as it is highly unlikely that he studied the core Mahāyāna scripture in Theravaṃsa-dominant Sri Lanka and there is no additional mention of the corpus during his years in South India. Thus, we can speculatively chart a period of upwards of two decades between the time he is reported to have studied Mahāyāna doctrines and when he is said begin teaching on them. One also wonders if this was the occasion when Vanaratna commissioned a copy of Prajñākaramati's *Bodhicaryāvatāraṭīkā*, of which a single manuscript exists in the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.⁸⁰ The colophon states that the manuscript was commissioned (*likhāpita*) by Vanaratna and copied by a scribe (*karaṇika*) named Śrī Vidyādhara, who is identified only as a *kāyastha*. Nothing more is known about the date or provenance of this manuscript, or how Vanaratna used it, but considering we know that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* was still being copied (if not actively studied) in the area in 1436, that Vanaratna was teaching on the Mahāyāna in general and the *Prajñāpāramitā* specifically, and that he was paying for the copying of manuscripts at this time, at the very least the conditions were in place for his acquisition of Prajñākaramati's work.

This scene, in combination with the more general description of the local community above, helps us gain a clearer picture of the Buddhist community in Bodh Gayā in Vanaratna's time. As we have already seen, the number local Buddhist monastics was exceedingly small, their numbers few in comparison to non-Buddhist students and *ācāryas*. In this passage we are told that Vanaratna taught to a sizable audience, but the specifics of that audience are vague. All we are told about them is that they are "people" (*skye bo*), not necessarily monastics, and that among them were roughly three *paṇḍitas*, whom we are left to assume were Buddhist though there is no reason to believe this was definitely the case. We have already seen that Vanaratna counted no more than ten local Buddhist monastics in Bodh Gayā, to which we can now add three *paṇḍitas* of uncertain affiliation. Given that he is said to have taught the *Prajñāpāramitā* to "a group," it would appear that he gave his teachings to a mixed audience and that the bulk of his audience may not have identified themselves as Buddhist. Among them, there may have been a very small number with the scholastic training to truly benefit from his discourses. The qualities (or perhaps lack thereof) of his audience in Bodh Gayā may have been among the reasons Vanaratna was eventually motivated to leave Magadha, and India altogether, for the more promising opportunities in the Buddhist Himalaya.

A Hermit's Life

What Vanaratna lacked in a supportive, learned Buddhist community seems more than made up for in the conditions the Bodh Gayā region offered him for personal meditation retreat. Here, unlike in the context of Sri Lanka, the Kṛṣṇa River Valley, and Śrī Parvata, we are given some specifics about the context and content of his meditation practice:

⁸⁰ Shastri 1917: 51.

On the outskirts of Vajrāsana, on the far side of the Kanakaśrōta River, the guru set up a beautiful hermitage where he stayed for three years, remaining absorbed in meditation on the six-branch yoga. During that time Dīpaṅkara would prepare wholesome food and carry it across the river for him every day. As his practice deepened his diligence grew, and he was struck by the feeling that he would awaken in this lifetime.⁸¹

As discussed above, Kanakaśrota was the name given to the river immediately to the east of the Mahābodhi temple complex and Bodh Gayā, the river now known as the Phalgu. Vanaratna thus chose a site for a long-term retreat in close proximity to the sacred environs of the Mahābodhi temple, but distant enough that he could remain in complete isolation for the duration of his retreat. In this scene we meet Vanaratna’s local attendant Dīpaṅkara for the second time, and it gives us a clear sense of how closely he served the *paṇḍita*. This is also the last we hear of Dīpaṅkara, however, and it would seem he only served Vanaratna through the end of his stay in Magadha, and did not travel onwards to Nepal and Tibet. With Dīpaṅkara seeing to his basic needs, Vanaratna was free to remain in retreat for three years, engaged primarily in the practice of the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, the six branches of yogic practices common to a number of major tantric cycles of Vajrayāna Buddhism. Two traditions of *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* are prevalent in Vanaratna’s narrative and oeuvre—one from the Guhyasamāja system and the other from the Kālacakra—but it is difficult to know if he practiced one of these during his retreat or another system altogether. Given Vanaratna’s later fame as Kālacakra master in Tibet, we might be inclined to read this as a reference to the Kālacakra system of practice. There is evidence that the Kālacakra was circulating in the area within the same general period, as demonstrated by the manuscript of the *Kālacakra Tantra* studied by Hori. This manuscript was copied in 1447 by a scribe named Jayarāmadatta on behalf of the Buddhist monk (*śākyabhikṣu*) Jñānaśrī, both of whom are recorded as living in villages that can be tentatively located in the general Bodh Gayā area.⁸² The discovery of this manuscript does nothing to link Vanaratna directly to the practice of Kālacakra, but it does at least put him in close proximity—geographically and temporally—to a known site of Kālacakra transmission. The only potential evidence we have that Vanaratna may have been practicing the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* of the Guhyasamāja system comes from a colophon to a *ṣaḍaṅgayoga sādhana* that was composed by the Ārya school exegete Nāgārjuna and translated by Vanaratna and ’Jam dpal ye shes in Tibet.⁸³ This colophon provides a lineage history for the text, which features Vanaratna preceded by his teacher from Mahācaitya Vihāra, Ratnakīrti. Thus, a practice of Guhyasamāja *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* had ostensibly already been transmitted to Vanaratna, and it was a version of the practice important enough to him that he would later teach it in Tibet and translate with his Tibetan colleagues.⁸⁴

Pilgrimage Through a Ruined Land

Like much of the South Asian content of the *ŽP*, the section on Vanaratna’s time in Magadha

⁸¹ *ŽP* 11v.5-12r.3: dpal rdo rje’i gdan gyi pha zad (*ŽP*^a; pha thad *ŽP*^b) na ka na ka śro ta zer ba’i chi bo zhig yod pa’i phar ngos su spod khang legs po zhig mdzad | der bla ma bzhugs nas yan lag drug gi rnal ’byor la rtse gcig tu mnyam par gzhag pa lo gsum du mdzad | de’i bar du dī paṅ ka ras chu de’i tshur ngos nas g.yos legs par byas pa’i zhal zas nyin re la tongs re bskyal | thugs dam shin tu ’pheel zhing de’i stobs kyis | da ni badga nyid kyis brtson ’grus brtsam nas tshe ’di la sang rgyas thob bam snyam pa’i thugs kyi shugs chen po skyes.

⁸² Hori 2015: 228-31.

⁸³ *Ōta*. 4792 52v.2-6.

⁸⁴ Vanaratna taught *Ōta*. 4792 at rTse thang in 1432/3 (*ŽP* 17v.6.).

places a significant emphasis on pilgrimage. As the ancient heart of the Buddhist world, the landscape of Magadha is dotted with sites of great historical and spiritual significance, many of which Vanaratna visited during his six-year stay. In gZhon nu dpal's account, Vanaratna visited the Mahābodhi temple, Nālandā, Gṛdhakūṭa, Rājagṛha, Kukkuṭapādagiri, and Uruvāsa. Vanaratna did not share his experiences of all these sites with gZhon nu dpal in equal detail, but all the sites he did describe at length share one remarkable quality: their derelict condition. Most of the sites Vanaratna visited had collapsed or been destroyed, were swallowed by the forest, had become inaccessible through neglect, and were dens of wild animals. There are no references to an active Buddhist community at any of the sites, nor mention of other pilgrims, leaving Vanaratna entirely alone to reminisce about the glorious days of Buddhism's past.

Though gZhon nu dpal mentions the Mahābodhi temple by name (*ma hā bo dhi*) as one of the places Vanaratna visited,⁸⁵ he offers no further descriptions of the site despite the fact that it was the probable venue for a number of Vanaratna's activities. We know that Śāriputra had undertaken significant renovations at the site in the mid-fourteenth century, including the restoration of the central temple, surrounding wall, and several smaller shrines. Given that no major catastrophes, natural or political, had affected the site in the interim, we can safely conclude that the Mahābodhi temple was in the same general condition as it was at the end of Śāriputra's tenure. We are in the same uninformed position with Vanaratna's visit to Nālandā Vihāra, the crown jewel of India's Buddhist monastic universities. The *ŽP* reports nothing about the site in general, nor does it offer insights into any potential Buddhist community that may have been active there. The only detail we are given concerns a small shrine to Śāntideva that Vanaratna visits, and where he had a moving spiritual experience.⁸⁶ We are told nothing further about the shrine that could help us locate it at the site or contextualize Vanaratna's experiences at Nālandā. The Indian monk Dhyānabhadra is reported to have studied at Nālandā in the early fourteenth century, but by the time Śāriputra visited it several decades later he, like Vanaratna, says nothing about an active Buddhist community there.⁸⁷ We could presume that Vanaratna might have had more to say about an institution as illustrious as Nālandā if he had found *paṇḍitas* and *ācāryas* still teaching there, or if he had encountered a sizable Buddhist community of any kind. Thus, given the absence of a detailed description of this important site, it is reasonable to conclude that Nālandā was no longer in use, and may already have been in a state of disrepair.

Vanaratna's most substantively reported pilgrimage in Magadha is his tour of the Rājagṛha region, which included the sites Gṛdhakūṭa, Kukkuṭapādagiri, and Uruvāsa. His first stop was Gṛdhakūṭa, "Vulture Peak" (image 15), the site of many scenes from Buddhist scripture and a renowned destination for Buddhist pilgrims. The scene in the *ŽP* is brief, recounting only Vanaratna's meditation experiences at the summit, where he stayed for three months reciting the mantra of Mañjuśrī. Apart from receiving a disembodied admonition about the pace of his mantra recitation,⁸⁸ we learn nothing more about the conditions at Gṛdhakūṭa specifically. As he descended Gṛdhakūṭa, Vanaratna is said to have stopped at a shrine to Khasarapaṇa Avalokiteśvara at Uruvāsa.⁸⁹ This identification is somewhat problematic, as the only known Uruvāsa in Buddhist history is an annex to Vikramaśīla monastery, but this was located far to the

⁸⁵ *ŽP* 10v.6.

⁸⁶ *ŽP* 10v.6-11r.1.

⁸⁷ McKeown 2019: 21, 101, 322-23.

⁸⁸ *ŽP* 12r.2-4. While reciting the mantra, Vanaratna said that a voice, speaking in Sanskrit, told him "[don't recite] too slowly or too quickly" (Skt. *nātikṣaṇair nā atīśīghram*; Tib. *nā ti śa nairvā ti śī ghrām*).

⁸⁹ *ŽP* 27v.3-28r.3.

east of Gṛḍhakūṭa.⁹⁰ Given that Uruvāsa is referenced multiple times in the *ŽP*, *DN*, and *SG* and that Vanaratna reported having key experiences there, we can assume that the toponym is correct, and that *gZhon nu dpal* is describing a potentially unknown site. Uruvāsa is referenced in three distinct contexts in the biographical literature: it is one of the two potential places he received the prophecy to leave India and go to Tibet (discussed below); it is the site where he reported receiving the transmission of Virūpākṣa’s lineage that he taught in Tibet in the 1450s;⁹¹ and, it is where Vanaratna prophesies that the Tibetan Phag mo gru monarch Grags pa ’byung gnas (d. 1445), one of his major patrons, had been reborn. In this prophesy, which Vanaratna sent in a letter to Grags pa ’byung gnas’s subjects, he announces that the king had been reborn in the royal family of Uruvāsa, a branch of the solar line descended from Caṅgalarāja, presumably the same Indian noble who sponsored many of Śāriputra’s renovations at Bodh Gayā in the previous century. Vanaratna tells Grags pa ’byung gnas’s Tibetan subjects that the king was born in the town of Akṣapura within the realm of Uruvāsa, but unfortunately there is no record of a town with this name in the area where the *ŽP* says Uruvāsa is located.⁹²

Following Vanaratna’s descriptions of his travels and experiences in and around Rājagṛha, *gZhon nu dpal* asks him a question that reveals the condition of the once-great monuments of Buddhist Magadha:

[Vanaratna] visited the many places in Rājagṛha where the Teacher taught the Dharma, and on those occasions had many visions of the Teacher instructing a large retinue of śrāvakas and bodhisattvas. [I] had heard that Rājagṛha had once been filled with settlements, but by that time they had all been abandoned and the area had been consumed by forest that abounded with ferocious animals. I asked [Vanaratna] if, being so few in number, the master and disciples were scared of the animals. He said: “There were indeed many animals, but they always seemed well-disposed towards me.”⁹³

Through *gZhon nu dpal*’s question to Vanaratna we learn that it was well known in fifteenth-century Tibet that the once hallowed sites of the historical Buddha and centuries of his followers had been completely abandoned. Vanaratna confirmed that the region’s former monasteries, palaces, cities, groves, gardens, and homes had been swallowed by the jungle and were now teeming with wildlife. He was still able to travel to these sites, and even remain in prolonged meditation there, but there can be little doubt from this description that one of the most historically and mythically famous Buddhist landscapes was, by his visit, lost to time and nature.

In the passage above *gZhon nu dpal* alludes to the many visions Vanaratna had during his pilgrimage through Magadha, visions of the Buddha teaching to large assemblies of śrāvakas and bodhisattvas. Though they are described using the language of miraculous visions, they perhaps

⁹⁰ TĀR 116r.3. The hagiographies of Advayavajra state that he visited a shrine to Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara after departing Vikramaśīla. This shrine is located to the east of Vikramaśīla, and is tentatively identified with a location near Pundravardhana in modern West Bengal (Tatz 1984: 700-701, note 31).

⁹¹ See also Chapter Seven, p. 249.

⁹² *SG* 39v.3-5.

⁹³ *ŽP* 12r.4-6: rgyal po khab na ston pas chos gsungs pa la sogs pa’i gnas shin tu mang po yod pa nams su’ang thogs re bzhugs | de’i tshes ston pa ’khor nyan thos dang byang chub sems dpa’ mang po la chos gsung gin ’dug pa’i snang ba mang du byung ’dug | rgyal po khab de na sngar mi grong gis gang yod pa na’ang | da lta stong pa nas mi’i grong med par nags stug pos khengs | gcan zan gtum po mang po yod par ’dug ces pa’i gtam thos pas | der dpon slob mang po ni med | gcan zan gyi ’jiga pa ma byung lags sam zhus pas | gcan zan mang po ni yod | nged rang la byams po byas gsung.

also speak to the nostalgia Vanaratna may have felt for the glories Buddhism’s past as he sat amidst its ruins. This nostalgia rings clearly in gZhon nu dpal’s description of Vanaratna’s pilgrimage to Kukkuṭapādagiri, a mountain to the south of Rājagrha located in what is now Gurpa, Bihar (image 16). Kukkuṭapādagiri, “Chicken Foot Mountain,” is famed in Buddhist lore as the site where Mahākāśyapa passed into nirvāṇa, and where his body waits, dressed in Śākyamuni’s robes and bearing his alms bowl, for the coming of the future buddha Maitreya who will enter the mountain to retrieve them. King Ajātaśatru plays in prominent role in the story, traveling with great haste to glimpse his teacher one last time, only to reach the mountain after Mahākāśyapa had passed away.⁹⁴ A *stūpa* atop the mountain is said to have been built by Ajātaśatru to commemorate the passing of his teacher. gZhon nu dpal’s describes Vanaratna’s experiences there:

To the south of Rājagrha was Chicken Foot Mountain, the place where the arhat Kāśyapa passed into nirvāṇa, and which is blessed by his relics, relics that are preserved there until the coming of Maitreya. At the mountain’s summit is a *stūpa* built by the king Ajātaśatru. Not far from there lived an exceedingly minor king of the lunar line who had assembled his friends into a band of about thirty people to assist [Vanaratna up the mountain,] carrying musical instruments to drive away wild animals. They made it as far as the shoulder of the mountain, but couldn’t find the way to the summit. [Vanaratna] questioned his escorts, who said, “We have lead you this far and protected you from wild animals as the king commanded. But before today, we haven’t even heard of anyone making it up this far.” The group then left to go search the other side of the mountain. His Eminence said, “Once I was alone, a path just appeared, and I reached the summit where there was an old but undamaged *stūpa*. Encircling its base was a raised path for circumambulation. As I approached the *stūpa*, but before I reached it,⁹⁵ a large number of monks [appeared] and began circling the *stūpa*. When I looked in the sky, there were many monks there as well. I prostrated to and circled the *stūpa* many times, and reflected on the life stories of the Teacher and his companions. I gained an undivided faith, and realized a deep conviction in the higher modes of discipline.”⁹⁶

This scene is remarkable first for serving as marker in the historical record. Kukkuṭapādagiri is little known and rarely referenced among the major Buddhist sites of north

⁹⁴ Ray 1994: 108-9.

⁹⁵ *conj.*; mchod rten de’i drung du ma sleb pa’i pha zad du sleb pa’i tshe.

⁹⁶ ŽP 12r.6-12v.6: rgyal po’i khab kyī lho phyogs na ri bya rkang can zhes bya ba gra bcom pa ’od srung chen po mya ngan las ’das nas sku gdung bcom ldan ’das byams pa byon pa’i bar la mi ’jig par byin gyis brlabs shing |ri de’i rtse (ŽP^b; rtsa ŽP^a) na rgyal po ma skyes dgras bzhengs pa’i mchod rten dang bcas pa yod pas | de’i nye logs na zla ba’i rigs kyī rgyal po stobs ha cang mi che ba zhiḡ ’dug pa la grogs bcol nas | des dmag sum cu lhag tsam zhiḡ gis zhabs tog byas nas rol cha mang po khyer gcan zan rnam sbskrad [|] de ri’i mgul du phebs pa na ri’i rtse mor ’gro ba’i lam ma rnyed | dmags de rnam la dris pas | ’di tshun du khyed kyī lam ston pa dang | gcan zan gyi ’jigs pa bsrung ba la rgyal pos nged rnam mngags pa yin | ’di yan chad du ding sang du ni mi gzhan gyis phyin pa’i gdam yang ma thos zer | de nas mi de rnam ri’i ngos gzhan la lta du song (ŽP^a; ri’i ngos gzhan du song ŽP^b) | bdag nyid chen po gcig su de na bzhugs pa yod pa na | nged rang la lam cig byung |ri’i rtse der phyin pa na | mcho rten snying pa zhiḡ ral med pa la | mthil de’i ’khor yug na skor ba’i lam dod pa cig ’dug | mcho rten de’i drung du ma sleb pa’i pha zad du sleb pa’i tshe | rab tu byung ba mang po mchod rten de la skor ba byed kyin ’dug | nam mkha’ la bltas pas kyang rab tu byung ba mang po ’dug | der mcho rten de la phyag dang skor ba mang du mdzad | ston pa ’khor bcas kyī rnam par thar pa dran nas mi phyed pa’i dad pa thob | lhag pa’i tshul khriḡs la nges pa yang dag pa byung gsung |

India, and according to Toni Huber, the specific location of Kukkuṭapādagiri has been completely unknown since the Gupta Era. Huber believes that any claims to the contrary, such as were made by Tibetan pilgrims like Buddhaguptanātha (1514-1610),⁹⁷ “beggars the imagination.”⁹⁸ Thankfully Vanaratna can salvage Buddhaguptanātha’s reputation by confirming the account with his own vivid description from the previous century. The modern pilgrimage site of Kukkuṭapādagiri is located, as it was in Vanaratna’s time, directly to the south of Rajgir in the town now known as Gurpur. The mountain itself fits Vanaratna’s description: its rises steeply from its remote location in the plains to a shoulder, from which point the final summit would be an especially steep, rocky scramble in absence of any pilgrimage infrastructure. Vanaratna discovered an old *stūpa* at the top of the mountain, a version of which is still present today. It is clear from Vanaratna’s account that pilgrim traffic had long ceased and the site was abandoned to the forest and wild animals, but the general location of the site was still a matter of local knowledge. The area around Kukkuṭapādagiri was governed by a minor king, affirming the political picture we are given by Śāriputra, in which much of the local administration of the Gayā region was in the hands of vassal brahmanical houses, likely in service to the Sultanate that governed the broader region.

With the assistance of this king’s hunting party, who kept Vanaratna safe by scaring away any threatening wildlife, Vanaratna made it most of the way up the mountain before the trail disappears into the overgrown, rough terrain. Vanaratna, ever the intrepid pilgrim, scrambles his way to the top where he finds himself alone with a relic of Buddhism’s past. As happened at similar sites in Sri Lanka, Vanaratna is moved to visionary reverie, but unlike in Sri Lanka, his experiences seem pervaded by a sense of nostalgia. His vision before the old *stūpa* is populated by monks, both on the ground surrounding him and throughout the sky above him. They are specifically described as *śrāvakas*, and beyond that *arhats*, invoking the earliest of the Buddha’s disciples, the first *saṅgha* to grace the Buddhist landscape of Magadha. Thus, Vanaratna’s experience atop Kukkuṭapādagiri can be read less an ecstatic vision and more a somber reflection on Buddhism’s long decline in the land of its birth. In it we can perhaps see something of Vanaratna’s longing for a situation different than the one in which he found himself: a Buddhist *paṇḍita* with no community to teach, wandering alone among the once great and sacred monuments of Buddhism, now derelict, forgotten, and swallowed by the jungle. Vanaratna’s reverie inspired him with faith in the Buddhist community, and specifically in the efficacy of its discipline, but that faith could not change the fate of Buddhism in India, nor the realities with which he had to contend. Thus, following his vision atop Kukkuṭapādagiri, Vanaratna descended the mountain and within a short time turned his gaze northwards, looking to the Himalaya to fulfill his long-held aspirations.

Leaving India

After Vanaratna completed his circuit of the major Buddhist landmarks of Magadha he returned to Bodh Gayā, but it was not long before he made the decision to leave Magadha and India to seek his fortunes in Nepal and Tibet. His decision to continue his search for a viable Buddhist community that could support his work is narratively articulated by a prophetic vision, but given his recent experiences of Buddhism in Magadha it is easy to imagine that his decision was based

⁹⁷ See Tāranātha’s *Grub chen bu ddha gu pta’i rnam thar rje brtsun nyid kyo zhal lung las gzhan du rang tog gi dri ma’i ma sbag pa’i yi ge yang dag pa’o*: 14v.1-2

⁹⁸ Huber 2008: 296, n. 42.

on his own personal assessment of the conditions he faced in India in combination with the general knowledge—drawn from merchants, pilgrims, and other travelers on the India-Himalaya trade routes that passed through the Gangetic plain—of the thriving Buddhist cultures to the north in Nepal and Tibet. There are multiple accounts of the prophecy scene in our sources, and surprisingly they do not agree on some of the key details the event. The shortest of the descriptions comes from the section of the *ŽP* on Magadha under discussion here:

At the end of his six-year stay [Vanaratna] received many dreams and prophesies. In one, the glorious Lord Śabaripā gave him the prophecy, “You should go north and then north again. In the north your great aspirations will be fulfilled. If you go to the land of Tibet you will serve a king and act in service of the Buddha’s teachings.”⁹⁹

In the epilogue of the *ŽP*, *gZhon nu dpal* provides a much lengthier and significantly more detailed version of events:

[After his pilgrimage to Rājagṛha, Vanaratna] traveled to Vajrāsana, where he stayed for some time. One night in a dream, he and five monks went to worship at the Mahābodhi temple. [Vanaratna] had already gone inside and had spread sitting mats in front of the Mahābodhi [shrine]. Water began to well up from beneath the mats, and he wondered “what’s happening?” He lifted up the mats to look, and saw a deep well filled with water, out of which images of two tathāgatas made from black stone suddenly emerged and moved here and there quickly. When [Vanaratna] told his companions, “This is an amazing sight! Come inside!” [the images] reentered the well and disappeared. On that very spot appeared two monks, deep black in color, sitting on small seats. They possessed all the accoutrements of a monk and held staffs made of ivory. [Vanaratna] said, “These two monks are those two tathāgata images that just previously appeared.” The two monks then stood up and said, “We offer these two ivory staffs, Your Eminence.” He replied, “You will need them when you make your alms rounds. I don’t want them.” [The two monks] said, “You must take what is given to you, you have a great need. Furthermore, you should go north and then north again. Your great aspirations will be fulfilled. If you go to the land of Tibet, you will serve a king and act in service of the Buddha’ teachings. You must get there by any means.” “I won’t go,” Vanaratna replied, “This is an excellent place, so I’ll stay here.” They insistently told him that he must get there by any means, so he picked up the ivory staffs and proceeded north with a few attendants. They traveled extensively in Nepal and Tibet, following those two monks, and had many experiences with them. When he awoke from the dream, [Vanaratna] gave it careful consideration, and then traveled extensively in Nepal and Tibet as has been described [here in this text].¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *ŽP* 13r.5-13v.1: der lo drug bzhugs pa’i tha mar mnal lam dang lung bstan gyi rnam pa mang po byung ba dang | khyad par dpal śa ba ra dbang phyug gis byang phyogs nas byang phyogs su song zhig | byang phyogs su khyod kyi ’dod pa’i don chen po’ang ’grub | bod kyi yul phyin na rgyal po cig la brten nas sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la yang bya ba byas par ’gyur ba yin gsung.

¹⁰⁰ *ŽP* 28r.6-29r.1: de nas rdo rje’i gdan du byon nas re shig bzhugs pa’i skabs shed du mnal lam du | grogs dge slong lnga dang bcas pa te | byang chub chen po’i drung du phyag mdzad pa la byon te | nyid kyi sngon la nang du byon nas byang chub chen po’i phyag sngar gding ba bting ba na | gding ba’i ’og nas chu rdol ba byung ste | ’di ci zhig snyam du gding ba blangs nas gzigs pa na | de na khron pa chus gang ba shin tu gting ring ba zhig ’dug pa’i nang na | rdo nag po las bsgrubs pa’i de bzhin gshegs pa’i sku gnyis snag nas | myur bar phyir gshegs nas grogs dag

It is only when gZhon nu dpal states later in the epilogue that one of those two monk was Śabaripā in disguise that the two accounts in the ŽP align. More puzzling, however, is the brief reference to this event in gZhon nu dpal’s DÑ, which is markedly different on the key points of the prophecy:

In a temple named Uruvāsa he met the met the lord of yoga, Virūpākṣa and his disciple, “the Mad Siddha.” While there, a stone image of Avalokiteśvara miraculously told him, “Go to Tibet! You will serve a king and bring much benefit.”¹⁰¹

There are a few elements of this version that remain consistent with the narrative cited above: Vanaratna has a vision (not a dream, however) in which a stone image directed him to go to Tibet where he will serve a king and be of much benefit. In the version from the DÑ, however, it is the statue of Avalokiteśvara—presumably Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara—that Vanaratna visited at Uruvāsa that gives him the prophecy, and for the first time in any of gZhon nu dpal’s works, the famous India adept Virūpākṣa and his disciple “the Mad Siddha” (*grub thob pā ga la*) are in the scene. The version in the DÑ appears to be a confused recollection that conflates two entirely different events in Vanaratna’s biography, his visit to Uruvāsa and his dream-prophecy at the Mahābodhi temple. To make sense of this conflation, and of the sudden presence of Virūpākṣa and the Mad Siddha, we need to look to a story Vanaratna told to bSod nams rgya mtsho in 1455. Vanaratna was in residence at sNa dkar rtse in Yar ’brog, where he was teaching on a series of texts related to Virūpākṣa’s *Amṛtasiddhi* corpus.¹⁰² When bSod nams rgya mtsho asked Vanaratna about his lineage for these he works, he responded by saying:

“I met the Lord of Yogis together with the *mahāsiddha* Pāgala in the courtyard of the Lokeśvara temple in Uruvāsa. I received the teachings from both of them at this time.”¹⁰³

gZhon nu dpal thus appears to have confused the details of Vanaratna’s prophetic vision in Bodhi Gayā, which Vanaratna surely described to him personally, with the account of his vision of Virūpākṣa at Uruvāsa, which gZhon nu dpal may have only learned of after bSod nams rgya

la ngo mtshar ba’i ltad mo yod kyis nang du (ŽP^b; om. nang du ŽP^a) ’deng zhes gsungs nas slar nang du byon pa ba | khron pa mi snang bar de’i sa na | khri’u zhig la dge slong shin tu mdog gnag pa | dge slong gi yo byad tsang zhing khyad par ba so las byas pa’i ’khar gsil thogs pa gnyis bzhugs pa mthong ste | da ci nas kyi de bzhin gshegs pa’i sku de gnyis ni dge slong ’di gnyis po zhes gsungs pa na | dge slong de gnyis blangs nas ba so’i mkhar gsil de bdag nyid chen po la ’bul ba yin zer | khyed rang bsod snyoms byed pa la dgos na kho bo mi ’dod gsungs pas | cis kyang (ŽP^a; ci nas ŽP^b) khyed la ster bas ’di zung | dgos pa chen po yod pa yin | gzhan yang khyed byang phyogs nas byang phyogs la song dang | khyed kyi ’dod pa’i don chen po yang ’grub cing | bod du yang rgyal po cig la brten nas sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la bya ba byas par ’gyur bas der yang cis kyang ’byon dgos gsungs bas | kho bos mi ’gro | gnas ’di nyid bzang bas ’dug pa yin gsungs pa na | nan gyis cis kyang ’byon gos gsung bas b so’i ’khar gsil de yan blangs | ’khor kha cig dang bcas te byang phyogs la byon pa na | bal po dang bod kyi yul mang por byon pa dang | dge slong de gnyis kyagn phyi bzhin byon pa la sogs pa mang po byung nas mnal sad pa na | lung bsten khyad par can du dgongs nas gong du bshad pa ltar bal po dang bod du byon.

¹⁰¹ DÑ 21v.4-5: u ru vā sa zhes bya ba’i gtsug lag khang du rnal ’byor dbang phyug vi rū pakṣa dang | de’i slob ma grub thob pā gha la dang mjal | de na ’phags pa sbyan re gzigs kyi rdo’i sku cho ’phrul can zhig yod pa des bod yul du song zhig | rgyal po zhig la brten nas mang po la phan par ’gyur ba’i lung bstan byung ba.

¹⁰² More will be said about this important scene in Chapter Seven.

¹⁰³ SG 47r.6-47v.1: de’i skabs shed du vi rū pa’i tshe sgrub kyi brgyud pa gang yin zhu ba la | u ru vā sa lo ke śva ra’i lha khang gi khyams su | rnal ’byor dbang phyug grub chen pā gha la dang bcas pa mjal | de dus thob pa yin te | khong dpon slob gnyi ga la thos pa chog gsung.

mtsho heard it in 1455. Recalling that the DÑ was written very close to the end of gZhon nu dpal's life, at a time when he was nearly blind and may not have been able to go back and review his previous writings,¹⁰⁴ this seems to be nothing more than a confused recollection on his part.

Returning to the relatively consistent version of the prophetic encounter described in the ŽP, it is possible to see some of Vanaratna's internal struggles reflected in this visionary account. Both accounts make it clear that Vanaratna had strong ambitions unsurprising for a *paṇḍita* who had studied in multiple, diverse Buddhist contexts. During his six years in Magadha, he had taken up stable residence in Bodh Gayā, began teaching to the local Buddhist community, formed relationships with the non-Buddhist teachers and students in the area, and built his own hermitage. He grew as a teacher and practitioner during this time, expanding his repertoire to include more advanced topics, such as the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and meditation practices like the *śaḍaṅgayoga*. Though never explicitly stated, the biographies leave the impression that Vanaratna intended to remain there indefinitely, which may be reflected in his reluctance to follow the words of prophecy and remain in Bodh Gayā, an "excellent place" as he calls it. But as the description of Vanaratna's vision also seems to suggest, the "great purpose" he hoped to accomplish (*'dod pa'i don chen po*) was not adequately fulfilled, and a change of venue would be required if he hoped to succeed in his aspirations.

The encouragement of Vanaratna's visionary interlocutors echo the historical realities of his situation: Buddhism's slow decline in India was reaching its finale, and even at the historic and mythic heart of Buddhist India, the status of the community had degraded to the point that only the palest of shadows of its former glory remained. The Buddhist community had been reduced to an untenable size, genuine scholars were few, the institutions and monuments that supported them had fallen into ruin, and Buddhists were dwarfed in number by non-Buddhist students and teachers in the area. Meanwhile, overland merchants, pilgrims, and other travelers following well-worn trade routes between northern India and the Himalaya were surely bringing word of an entirely different situation in Nepal and Tibet. The Kathmandu Valley was flourishing under the Malla kings, and though the kingdom was officially Hindu, the Buddhist population there was still active and robust. It was Tibet, however, that seemed to offer Vanaratna the best opportunities to fulfill his long-standing ambitions. Buddhism in Tibet was witnessing an efflorescence along with its literary, artistic, and political culture. Given the historical dynamic in the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet, Vanaratna perhaps saw the potential advantages he would have as an Indian Buddhist *paṇḍita* following in the footsteps of the many Indian masters who made the journey before him.

That this prophetic scene unfolds within the precincts of the Mahābodhi temple is surely no coincidence, spiritually or narratively. After decades of travel Vanaratna had arrived and made a home at the center of the Buddhist world. Despite the fact that the conditions there were far from optimal, Vanaratna had found a degree of contentment in his studies, teaching opportunities, and personal meditation practice. But the stone statues which had emerged from the subterranean depths at the very center of the Mahābodhi temple, the axial point for the Buddhist cosmos, are emphatic that he must leave, and press their symbolic ivory staffs into his hands, insisting that his fortunes lie elsewhere. Their voices speak of Vanaratna's recognition that center of gravity of the Buddhist world had shifted northwards to the Himalaya. He thus understood the reality of his situation, and of Buddhism's situation in India, and made his decision to head northward. Vanaratna would maintain a wish to return to India and Bodh Gayā specifically, and even returned briefly after first reaching Nepal, but India would never again be his home. The voice

¹⁰⁴ van der Kuijp 2006: 3-4.

that compelled him to leave India—whether the visionary voice speaking to him from the center of the Buddhist universe or his internal voice reminding him of his personal aspirations—was profoundly correct: he would indeed find all that he sought in the Himalaya, and there would be no need for him to return to the land of Buddhism’s birth where it had all but died out.

Part II

The Kathmandu Valley

1423 – 1432 • 1438 – 1467

Introduction

Part II of this study focuses exclusively on Vanaratna's years in the Kathmandu Valley, a total of thirty-six years bracketing his three trips to Tibet that are the subject of Part III. With their respective emphases on Vanaratna's activities in Nepal and Tibet, Parts II and III depart from the linear narrative format of Part I and instead approach the remainder of Vanaratna's biography geographically, allowing us to better utilize his *rnam thars* and supporting materials as witnesses to the specific local histories of the Kathmandu Valley and Central Tibet. Vanaratna's biographies are a rich and relatively untapped source of historical data for both these regions in the fifteenth century, and their value as such is diminished when approached from a purely narrative perspective. Vanaratna's personal narrative remains the central thread around which these chapters are woven, but a more site-specific perspective on the religious, political, and cultural environment in which Vanaratna worked is privileged in the following chapters.

Vanaratna's years in Nepal¹ can be separated into two distinct periods: his early years in the Kathmandu Valley that encompass the years 1423 to ca. 1432, which bracket his first trip to Tibet in 1426, and his later years from ca. 1438-68 that bracket his third and final trip to Tibet in 1453-55. Intervening between these two periods is Vanaratna's second and longest trip to Tibet, which took place between approximately 1432 and 1438. This division is not based solely on the chronology of Vanaratna's personal narrative, but is also tied to divisions in the biographical literature itself. Vanaratna's early years in Nepal are described in the *ŽP*, while the later years are taken up by bSod nams rgya mtsho in the SG. gZhon nu dpal is much more laconic in his descriptions of Vanaratna's years in Nepal, and with the important exception of Vanaratna's initiatory visions at the Śāntipur temple, covers Vanaratna's first seven years in Nepal in less than a single folio. bSod nams rgya mtsho, by contrast, provides a wealth of detailed information to contextualize and describe Vanaratna's diverse activities in Nepal, making his SG an immensely valuable historical resource for the study of fifteenth-century Nepal.

There are two potential reasons for this variance in the biographical detail. One is the difference in the two authors' personal orientations towards the Kathmandu Valley. gZhon nu dpal, unlike bSod nams rgya mtsho, never traveled to Nepal and had little personal knowledge of the land or its people. The same could of course be said of gZhon nu dpal's relationship to South Asia in general, but because India looms much larger than Nepal in the Tibetan cultural imagination, it is little wonder that there is a corresponding difference in the way gZhon nu dpal approached the two regions when writing the *ŽP*. bSod nam rgya mtsho, on the other hand, visited Vanaratna in Nepal towards the end of the *paṇḍita's* life, and wrote the SG after his return to Tibet. During the year bSod nams rgya mtsho spent in Nepal he traveled extensively around the Valley, visited many of the sites essential to Vanaratna's narrative, and met a number of the key religious and political figures with whom the Vanaratna worked. This gave bSod nams rgya mtsho a degree of familiarity and perhaps even affinity for the Kathmandu Valley that gZhon nu dpal did not possess.

Second, Vanaratna had a significantly different orientation to the Kathmandu Valley and its people during the periods covered by gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho, which surely

¹ The term "Nepal" is used here to refer to the historical boundaries of the kingdom of Nepal rather than the borders of the modern nation of Nepal. The boundaries of the medieval kingdom of Nepal are roughly contiguous with the Kathmandu Valley, and included the principal cities of the Valley, Bhaktapur, Patan and Kathmandu, as well as Nuwakot to the west, Pharping to the south, and Banepa, Dhulikhel, and Panauti the east. (Petech 1984: 183).

affected their treatment of his narrative. During Vanaratna's early years in Nepal he seemed to treat it as a staging ground for his journeys to Tibet, and did not appear make a substantial investment in the local population. To be sure, there are significant gaps in our knowledge about Vanaratna's activities during this period, but we are given no indication from *gZhon nu dpal* that Vanaratna regarded Nepal as a potential long-term residence. Vanaratna only took a serious interest in Nepal following his second, hugely successful visit to Tibet. It was during this period that he established a seat in Patan, expanded his base of local affiliates, began a formal relationship with the royal court, and otherwise began to put down roots and engage with the Valley and its population more substantively. By the time he returned to Tibet for the third and final time, Vanaratna had developed a deep affinity for the Kathmandu Valley and its people, and considered it his primary home. Thus both Vanaratna's personal orientations to Nepal and those of his biographers may account for the different ways Vanaratna's years in Nepal are treated in the *ŽP* and *SG*.

Because of the clear demarcation between these earlier and later periods, both in terms of Vanaratna's personal narrative and the literary shift from the *ŽP* to the *SG*, Part II is comprised of two chapters that focus on these two periods separately. Chapter Four covers the period from 1423 to 1432, relying primarily on the *ŽP* to explore Vanaratna's early experiences of the Kathmandu Valley before turning to a discussion of his meditation retreat at the Śāntipur Temple, his visionary experiences there, and the implications of that event for our understanding of his relationship with local Buddhist community and its religious teachers. Chapter Five explores the years 1438 to 1468, mining the *SG* and *NTSG* for the wealth of data it offers on the political, religious, and cultural conditions of fifteenth-century Nepal. Both chapters also draw freely from the art-historical record, bringing the material and artistic culture of the Kathmandu Valley into the conversation on Vanaratna's life and activities in the place that would, above all the other Buddhist communities he visited, become his home.

Chapter Four

The Early Years: 1423-26 and 1427-ca. 1432

With Vanaratna's transit from the plains of north India to the foothills of the Himalaya, he once again transitioned between distinct Buddhist ecumenes. Unlike his shift from the predominantly (but not exclusively) Sanskritic and Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna environment of his youth to the Theravaṃsa-Pāli ecumene of Sri Lanka, Vanaratna's departure from India for the Himalaya was not so much a qualitative shift as it was a geopolitical one. With the key exception of his six years in Sri Lanka, Vanaratna's training and religious work was solidly grounded in the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna system that had dominated late-stage Indian Buddhism. From his youth in Sadnagara, through his travels in South India, and onwards to his residence in Magadha, Vanaratna primarily operated in Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna context for nearly all of his forty years in South Asia, albeit with significant degrees of local inflection. At every stop along the way, Vanaratna encountered Buddhist community after Buddhist community in a state of decline so steep that they were on the verge of disappearing altogether. Nowhere was this reality more stark to him than in Magadha, where his biographies are explicit about the state of disarray and dereliction of India's Buddhist community. Thus with his arrival in Bodh Gayā he had essentially reached the end of the road, literally and figuratively, of his journey through Buddhist India.

For a *paṇḍita* of Vanaratna's training and ambition, these circumstances were clearly unsatisfactory, and from his vantage point in the north Indian plains he was undoubtedly aware of the radically different conditions available to him in the mountains to the north. From travelers and pilgrims plying the ancient overland routes from the Tibetan plateau, across the Himalayan range, and down to the Indian plains, he surely would have heard about the thriving Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna communities of Nepal and Tibet. Familiar as he was with the practices, rites, and treatises of Sanskrit Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, the prosperity of the Himalayan Buddhist communities would have undoubtedly been alluring. The kingdoms of Nepal and Tibet would once have been considered peripheral to the Buddhist ecumene centered in Magadha, but as Buddhism waned in India the Buddhist cultures of the Himalaya forged ahead, developing unique culture expressions in doctrine, literature, ritual technologies, and artistic styles. The Himalayan Buddhist ecumene had now emerged as a distinct and independent ecumene with its own centers and peripheries, networks and nodes, while India and Indian Buddhism had been relegated to the periphery. Thus as Vanaratna made his way north he was arguably moving closer to the center of the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna world from its hinterlands in north India. While this entailed a significant shift in his geographic, political, and socio-cultural references, there was a clear continuity in the religious cultures he transited between, making the transit easy to navigate for someone with his background in the Sanskritic Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna tradition.

Though Nepal and Tibet still looked to and valorized India as the source of their Buddhist heritage, the dynamic between these Himalayan kingdoms and Buddhism's homeland was rapidly changing. In the fifteenth century, the Kathmandu Valley was a primary node in the Himalayan Buddhist ecumene, a key hub in a network spanning much of the Himalayan range, extending across the Tibetan plateau, and reaching further into west, central, and east Asia. Nepal had long been connected to both India and Tibet through trade and religious migration, with the Kathmandu Valley serving as both a transit point for Tibetan and Indian Buddhist masters traveling back and forth from the Indian plains to the Tibetan plateau, and as a key

generator of Buddhist culture in its own right. By the time Vanaratna arrived in 1423, the Kathmandu Valley was reaching the cultural heights of the medieval period, a time of efflorescence that extended roughly from the reign of Jayasthitimalla (r. 1382-1395) to the passing of Jayayakṣamalla (r. 1428-82). The medieval period marked the kingdom's emergence from a period of political fracturing, foreign invasion, and natural disaster, a change led by a series of strong rulers who brought political stability to the Valley and ushered in a period of cultural renaissance. For Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley, this was a time of significant local innovation and evolution. Rooted in the bedrock of Indian, Sanskritic Buddhism for centuries, the Newar Buddhist community of Nepal increasingly defined its own cultural values and demarcated its own space within the broader Himalayan and South Asian region. They did this through the composition of Buddhist narratives and scriptures that grounded the community, its sacred sites, and the physical terrain in the perennial landscape of Buddhist lore. This was specifically accomplished through literary innovations captured in works like the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* and *Svayambhū Purāṇa* that re-articulated local Buddhist formations in the language of supra-regional Buddhist mythology.² This innovation unfolded within a kingdom that was formally and predominantly Hindu, and which was being increasingly governed according to normative Brahmanical scriptures and social structures. Thus the evolution of Nepalese Buddhism was at once a product of its emergent place within the South Asian and Himalayan Buddhist world, and a reaction to stressors within the local political and religious environment.³ As we will see, many of these innovations, evolutions, and tensions play out in Vanaratna's narrative and as his stature in the local community grew over the years, he became a key agent in the vibrant Buddhist scene in fifteenth-century Nepal.

First Residency: 1423-26

Vanaratna arrived in the Kathmandu Valley in approximately 1423 after an overland journey of unspecified duration and route. His arrival marked the beginning of a three-year period in the Valley, a length we can be confident about from gZhon nu dpal's chronology, which explicitly states Vanaratna first reached the border of Tibet in 1426. gZhon nu dpal tells us little about this three-year period, but what he does tell us provides some intriguing hints about the Buddhist community he encountered there and the general contours of his life:

Following his prophecy, the master and an entourage of students, totaling about fourteen, made their way to Nepal. At that time a great *paṇḍita* named Śīlasāgara had also come to Kathmandu and was training disciples. Taking advantage of this coincidence, Vanaratna learned from him the rite for the supreme generation of the mind of awakening according to the tradition of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Vanaratna said that he requested [these teachings] on generating the mind of awakening because Śīlasāgara was, generally speaking, a great *paṇḍita*, but more specifically because his capacity to benefit others came through the direct grace of noble Avalokiteśvara. [Vanaratna] spent much of his time in Nepal meditating, but also taught on the *8000-line Prajñāpāramitā* twice and found other occasions to teach different aspects of the Dharma to others. Nonetheless, he spent most of his time immersed in *samādhi* without the investing much energy into

² Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 95-102, 108-9.

³ Tuladar-Douglas 2006: 129-43; Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 94-5, 98.

looking after disciples or his entourage.⁴

As is clear from this account, Vanaratna gathered a small contingent to travel with him to Nepal, but it is entirely unclear if this group was comprised of students and personal attendants, or was just a collection of travelers with the same destination who banded together for companionship and security. We recall that, upon his arrival in Bodh Gayā in 1416 all of his roughly thirty companions that had left Sadnagara with him in 1405 elected to return home, so this group would have been comprised of an entirely new set of companions. As before we are not given any specific information about the group. It is possible that it included a layman (*upāsaka*) named Āditya, a self-declared native of Magadha who composed a eulogy to Vanaratna, the *Vanaratnastotrasaptaka*, while in Nepal, but there is no further evidence to confirm this.⁵ That Vanaratna was not invested in the majority of the group, nor them in him, is suggested by the fact that gZhon nu dpal notes at the end of the passage that Vanaratna did not pay much attention to them after their arrival.

When Vanaratna reached the Kathmandu Valley in 1423, Jyotirmalla (r. 1408-28) was in the final years of his reign. Jyotirmalla was the middle son of Jayasthitimalla (r. 1382-95), whose legendary reign is credited with bringing political stability to the Kathmandu Valley and initiating the cultural renaissance that the kingdom enjoyed during Vanaratna residence.⁶ Jyotirmalla had for a time ruled the Valley jointly as a junior monarch alongside his elder brother Dharmamalla (1367-1408) and younger brother Kīrtimalla (1381-1403), but had been ruling singly after his brothers' deaths in 1403 and 1408, respectively.⁷ The Kathmandu Valley appears to have remained relatively stable during his reign, apart from the political machinations of the Rāmas of Banepa who used their soft power as chief ministers to the kings in Bhaktapur to periodically challenge and undermine the authority of the ruling house.⁸ Jyotirmalla ruled from Bhaktapur, as would his son and successor Jayayakṣamalla, while Patan, the most heavily Buddhist of the Valley's main cities, was governed with semi-autonomy by a group known as the *mahāpātras*, a powerful and hereditary council of civic leaders who will play a prominent role in Vanaratna's later narrative.⁹ As a scion of the royal line, Jyotirmalla was officially and personally a devotee of Śiva and Viṣṇu, but like the other members of his dynasty was strategic in his patronage, and known from epigraphic and manuscript evidence to have sponsored a number of Buddhists institutions and monuments.¹⁰ None of this is described in the *ŽP* of course, likely because Vanaratna did not take any interest in politics at the time and had not risen to a

⁴ *ŽP* 13v.1-5: lung bstan la brten nas rim gyis bal por dpon slob bcu bzhi tsam zhig mdzad nas phebs | de'i tshe bal po na mkhas pa chen po śī la sā ga ra yang phebs | gdul bya rjes su 'dzin pa gyi yod 'dug pa dang dus mtshungs pas khong la byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i lugs kyi byang chub mchog tu sems bskyed pa cho ga dang bcas te legs par gsan | de'i rgyu mtshan yang spyir śī la sā ga ra de mkhas pa chen po yin | bye brag tu 'phags pa spyan ras gzigs kyi dngos su rjes su bzung bas (*ŽP*^b; dngos su *om. ŽP*^a) gzhan la phan 'dogs nus pa zhig snang bas | sems bskyed zhus pa yin gsung | der bal por yang phal cher thugs dam kho na la bzhugs | shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa brgyad stong pa tshar gnyis gsungs | de la sogs pa'i gzhan la chos 'chad pa yang dum re byas gsung | 'on kyang phal cher ting nge 'dzin la bzhugs pa ma gtogs 'khor gang slob ma skyong ba'i spros pa cher ma mdzad.

⁵ For the Sanskrit text of this hymn, see Hahn 1996. There are two Tibetan translations, one by gZhon nu dpal (Tōh. 1117) and the other by bSod nams rgya mtsho (Öta. 5101). In the colophon of the text itself Āditya is identified as a native of Magadha (*kr̥tir magadhadeśīyādityānām*), while it is only in the Tibetan translator colophons that Āditya is reported to be an *upāsaka* (*dge bsnen*). This hymn will be discussed further in the next chapter.

⁶ Regmi 1965: 345-72; Petech 1984: 137-46.

⁷ Regmi 1965: 372-82; Petech 1984: 146, 151.

⁸ Regmi 1965: 382-409; Petech 1984: 151-61.

⁹ Regmi 1965: 423-5.

¹⁰ Regmi 1965: 412-35; Petech 1984: 161-68.

stature that attracted the notice of the court. His status changed dramatically during his later years in Nepal, but during this period he seems to have kept a relatively low profile.

gZhon nu dpal does offer some description of Vanaratna's religious activities in these early years, but the details are minimal. We are not told where Vanaratna resided nor under whose patronage, but we learn something of the ways he participated in the religious life in the Valley. From the *ŽP* we discover that Vanaratna was not the only foreign Buddhist in town; a *paṇḍita* named Śīlasāgara had also settled there and had attracted a circle of followers. Pratapaditya Pal, reading only from the *DN*, has suggested that Śīlasāgara was a Nepalese monk, but the more precise syntax of the *ŽP* makes it clear that he too had come to the Kathmandu Valley from abroad.¹¹ Vanaratna joined Śīlasāgara's circle of disciples, where he learned the specific rites for generating the mind of awakening (*bodhicitta*; *byang chub kyi sems*) based on Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. gZhon nu dpal is careful to note why a *paṇḍita* of Vanaratna's stature might become the disciple of another Buddhist master, the reason being in this case Śīlasāgara's specific connection to Avalokiteśvara, one of the most popular Buddhist deities of the Kathmandu Valley. It is possible to hear in this description hints of the formative influences of the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* (GKV), a Buddhist scripture composed by the Newar community in the fifteenth century. As studied by Will Tuladar-Douglas, the GKV is a Sanskrit work that promoted the cult of Avalokiteśvara in his form as Karuṇamāya, one of his most important forms for Newar Buddhists.¹² Though ostensibly *buddhavacana*, this work incorporates a large body of material from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and is written in a distinctly Newar register of Sanskrit, clearly demonstrating its much later provenance. It is impossible to pinpoint the date of its composition with precision, but Tuladar-Douglas argues cogently that it dates sometime between the late thirteenth century and 1493.¹³ Clearly the slim evidence offered in this passage of the *ŽP* does not allow us to make anything but the most tenuous connection between Śīlasāgara and the formation of the GKV, but the fact that Vanaratna encountered a circle of Buddhists explicitly connected with the cult of Avalokiteśvara and engaged in the close study of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is worthy of note. During his later residency Vanaratna would compose what would become a popular hymn to Avalokiteśvara, the *Ratnamālāstotra*, which is said to be based on his study of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, a main source text of the GKV. This at the very least suggests that Vanaratna took an enduring interest in the cult of Avalokiteśvara and contributed to its growing body of local literature.

In addition to acting as a student in Nepal, Vanaratna also continued in his role as teacher. As in Bodh Gayā, he taught on the *8000-Line Prajñāpāramitā*, giving instruction to Nepalese audiences on at least two separate occasions. We are also told that he gave a variety of other teachings from time to time, but without further details on the context for these teachings it is difficult to assess Vanaratna's status as a teacher during his early years in Nepal. Nonetheless, the fact that he gave public and perhaps private teachings indicates that there were both audiences and patrons interested in receiving teachings from him, and that he was otherwise taken seriously as a *paṇḍita* during his first tenure in the local Buddhist scene. It is also noteworthy that Vanaratna's public teachings are again limited to exoteric Mahāyāna material, and that he is not known to have taught on the Vajrayāna at this time. In point of fact, there is no reference of any kind to esoteric Buddhism during his first residency, underscoring the fact that

¹¹ Pal 1989: 191. The *ŽP* states clearly that, presumably like Vanaratna, Śīlasāgara "also came...to Nepal" (*bal po na...yang phebs*).

¹² Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 102.

¹³ Tuladar-Douglas 2006: 1-4, 12-25, 57, 65-6, 71.

he may not yet have truly come into his own as a *vajrācārya* and was not presenting himself as such within what was a very robust local Vajrayāna community. This will change radically during his second period of residence in Nepal, but for now it seems that, as was the case in India, Vanaratna was not openly acting as a teacher of the Vajrayāna.

Vanaratna appears to have initially regarded the Kathmandu Valley as a stepping stone for his further journey to Tibet and did not invest himself deeply in the local community or otherwise begin establishing roots there, as is evident in gZhon nu dpal's statement that he did not accept any students during this period. As articulated through the prophecy he received in Bodh Gayā, it was further to the north in Tibet where his greater purposes would be fulfilled. As he prepared for his impending travel across the Himalaya he relied on local informants to tell him what he could expect there, and their advice was anything but encouraging:

Wondering if he should depart for Tibet, [Vanaratna] sought advice from some people who appeared to be yogis (*dzo gi*) and who had traveled there. They told him that [the terrain] was rough, which made travel difficult, and that it was so cold that food was hard to digest. They also said that the people were caricatures of religious practitioners,¹⁴ and otherwise greatly disparaged [Tibet]. They said over and over that going there was exhausting and impractical.¹⁵

Given the religious, mercantile, and cultural ties between Nepal and Tibet, it is surprising that Vanaratna could not find better informants and was given such negative reports about conditions in Tibet. As we will see in the next chapter, however, it seems that there may have been an ebb in the flow of ecclesiastical traffic between Nepal and the Kathmandu Valley in the fifteenth century, and that the citizens of Nepal were perhaps no longer as accustomed to or well-informed about Tibet and its Buddhist culture.¹⁶ It is also possible that this statement represents a cultural chauvinism on the part of Vanaratna's Newar informants, an incredulosity at the very thought of seeking religious fortune outside the Kathmandu Valley. Whatever the case, Vanaratna was so unsettled by their reports that he initially abandoned his plans to travel to Tibet, ignoring both his personal ambitions and prophetic encouragements. gZhon nu dpal reports that he briefly returned to Bodh Gayā, but was troubled by negative omens and his own discomfort at ignoring the prophecies he had been given. Thus after only a short time back in India, he regrouped and traveled northwards again, this time succeeding in reaching the Tibetan plateau.¹⁷

Interlude: Vanaratna's First Journey to Tibet in 1426

Vanaratna's first journey to Tibet will be covered in detail in Part III, but the most crucial aspect of his first visit for our understanding of his second residence in Nepal is that he considered it an utter failure, and returned to the Kathmandu Valley within a year with low confidence, dejected

¹⁴ *conj.* As in the case of *dzo gi* above, gZhon nu dpal's use of *a tsa ra*, a corruption of the Sanskrit term *ācārya*, seems here to be deliberately pejorative.

¹⁵ ŽP 13v.5-6: der bod du 'byon nam dgons nas bod du byin pa'i dzo gi 'dra ba la gtam dris dus | bod de shin tu rtsub pas lam bgro gka' | shin tu grang bas kha zas 'ju dka' | mi nams kyang a tsa ra zer nas brnyas pa chen po byed par ngang | 'o brgyal 'byon pa mi 'thad zer ba mang du byung.

¹⁶ The NTSG reports that bSod rnam rgya mtsho noted the awe of the citizens of Bhaktapur at seeing a Tibetan of his regal stature and civilized bearing. They were, it seems, more accustomed to road-weary uncultured merchants from the borderlands rather than representatives of Tibet's elite religious society. See Ch. 5, pp. 144-5.

¹⁷ ŽP 13v.6-14r.1.

by his inability to fulfill the promise of his prophecy. Not speaking Tibetan and lacking a capable translator for much of the time, Vanaratna was unable to communicate with the religious and political leaders he met. He was treated courteously enough, but was largely ignored as a *paṇḍita* and left on his own as he made a pilgrimage around central Tibet.¹⁸ During his travels he did manage to secure an audience with reigning Phag mo grus monarch Grags pa rgyal mtshan (r.1374-1432), and hoped this was the king of his prophecy, but because a skilled translator was not available they could do little more than exchange pleasantries during what was only a brief audience. The lack of an advanced translator capable of supporting him in religious and political settings proved to be a key challenge that Vanaratna could not overcome.¹⁹ Apart from a single, brief, and unexpected reference to a teaching on the practice of Acala,²⁰ Vanaratna is not recorded as giving teachings at any point during his first year in Tibet. Quite the contrary in fact; at this point the *ŽP* is full of reminders of Vanaratna’s failure to communicate with anyone beyond a transactional level. These day-to-day failures, and particularly his perfunctory and unproductive audience with the king, lead Vanaratna recognize that the favorable conditions for relying on a Tibetan king as prophesied were simply not present. Vanaratna’s notes his disappointment, thinking, “I really haven’t accomplished anything in Tibet,” and so made the decision to return to Nepal where he could resume his meditation practice.²¹

Second Residency: ca. 1427 - 1432

After failing to secure the kind of success and fortune that inspired his journey to Tibet, Vanaratna returned to Nepal to reflect on his experiences and acquire the additional training that would make him a more attractive and capable master for a Tibetan audience. Vanaratna spent roughly the next six years of his life in the Kathmandu Valley, a lengthy stay about which gZhon nu dpal tells us practically nothing. In fact, he describes only a single event from that period in the *ŽP*: Vanaratna’s retreat at the Śāntipur temple. Though we are not told precisely how long his retreat lasted, it seems implausible that Vanaratna remained in meditative retreat at Śāntipur for the full six years. Vanaratna’s retreat at Śāntipur is certainly a pivotal moment in his life and narrative, but gZhon nu dpal’s silence on Vanaratna’s other activities in this time leave us disadvantaged in properly understanding his relationship with the Nepalese Buddhist community during these years, and what impact that relationship had on the next phase of his career.

Despite the fact that gZhon nu dpal leaves us largely in the dark about Vanaratna’s activities during this six-year period, his account of Vanaratna’s retreat at Śāntipur is compelling, and allows us to make tentative assessments about this transformative time in Vanaratna’s life.

¹⁸ As we will see in Ch. 6, his first journey was not an complete failure, and many of the connections he made at this time would be instrumental in his later successes in Tibet. This includes his meeting with Rong stong Shes bya kun rig, the beginning of his long-term collaboration with the translator ’Jam dpal ye shes, and the beginning of his studies with the Tibetan master Kun dga’ blo gros rgyal mtshan.

¹⁹ Vanaratna did meet ’Jam dpal ye shes, the man who would become his main oral interpreter, on this visit, but their meeting came too late for him to change the trajectory of his first trip to Tibet.

²⁰ *ŽP* 15r.6. In this scene, gZhon nu dpal’s syntax makes it less than clear who was giving teachings to whom.

²¹ *ŽP* 15v.5: de nas bdag nyid chen po’i dgongs pa la | da ni bod du don bya ba ci yang med dgongs nas slar bal por thegs nas phal cher thugs dam la bzhugs.

gZhon nu dpal makes two additional references to Vanaratna’s disappointment, once at *ŽP* 15r.1-2 where he notes that Vanaratna acknowledged that the prophesied conditions were simply not present, and again at *ŽP* 29r.1-2 where he specifically states that Vanaratna “lost confidence” (*thugs ches pa ma byung*) in the prophecy after the audience with Grags pa rgyal mtshan.

We do not know what prompted Vanaratna to enter retreat at the Śāntipur temple (image 18), which sits in the shadow of the Svayambhū *mahācaitya* atop a hillock in northwest Kathmandu (image 17), nor do we have a record of any previous visits he may have made to Svayambhū or the Śāntipur temple, and what previous connection, if any, he had with the Buddhist communities at the site or specific masters residing there. It is possible that Svayambhū's status as one of Buddhism's most sacred sites in the Valley was the primary lure; perhaps it was the Śāntipur temple's reputation as center of Cakrasaṃvara worship; or, perhaps there was a specific Buddhist master or community he sought out there. Whatever the case may be, Vanaratna's stay at Śāntipur marks a pivotal moment in his life, one that reinvigorated him and dramatically altered the course of his career. And while this is the first reported visit Vanaratna made to Śāntipur, it is not the last; both the Svayambhū *mahācaitya* and the Śāntipur temple remain key sites for Vanaratna during his years in Nepal, and his experiences during this retreat echo throughout his later narrative.

gZhon nu dpal describes Vanaratna's stay at Śāntipur twice: first as a vignette sandwiched between the lengthier descriptions of Vanaratna's first and second journey to Tibet, and then again in the epilogue to the ŽP where the story is told with greater elaboration. The initial, concise version gives us very few details about Vanaratna's experiences, highlighting instead the transformative nature of his retreat, and the confidence it instilled in him for a return to Tibet:

He stayed and meditated in the antechamber of the Śāntipur temple, which was located at the base of Svayambhū. [During his retreat] he experienced a great, exalted wisdom that transcends any worldly example, and felt that the great purpose prophesied by the lord Śabaripā had now been actualized. He then received another, new prophecy that the time had come for him to benefit the teachings in Tibet as was previously foretold.²²

By contrast, gZhon nu dpal's depiction of Vanaratna's retreat in the epilogue gives us a far more extensive, detailed, and personal look into the events at Śāntipur and their implications for Vanaratna's career. This description also draws from the lore of the Śāntipur temple and its environs at Svayambhū, and so is worth citing at length:

Back in Nepal, [Vanaratna] spent time at the Śāntipur temple at the base of the Svayambhū [*mahācaitya*]. In the past, the *paṇḍita* Vāgīśvara—a venerable and learned monk—came [to Nepal] from India, stayed in strict meditation, and achieved mastery [in his practice]. After that, he upheld the conduct of a *siddha* by taking a wife and living as a householder. At first, most of the Nepalese people were critical of this, believing he had not received enough training. Eventually, however, some recognized this as an astounding form of conduct and declared him a *siddha*.

At that time the king of Nepal had restored the Svayambhū *caitya* and built the Śāntipur temple. Confident that the master Vāgīśvara was a *siddha*, the king sent a messenger to request him to consecrate [the *mahācaitya*]. The messenger went to the village where the master was staying and saw [Vāgīśvara's] wife—an unattractive, fierce woman—collecting firewood. Confident this was the master's wife, he asked her where

²² ŽP 15v.5-16r.1: khyad par 'phags pa shing kun gyi rtsa ba na sā nta pū ri zhes bya ba'i lha khang zhig yod pa de'i mdo khyams su thugs dam mdzad pa na | bla na med pa'i ye shes chen po 'jig rten gyi dper bya ba las 'dad pa brnyes (ŽP^b; mnyes pa ŽP^a) pas sngar śa ba ra dbang phyug gi lung bstan de'i don chen po 'grub par skad pa de yang de'i tshe mngon du gyur | slar yang bod du bstan pa la phan pa'i ngar gyi lung bstan pa yang da dus la bab pa'i lung bstan gsar pa (ŽP^b; gsar pa om. ŽP^a) yang byung ba.

he could find the master. “Inside,” she said. He went inside, and as he presented the king’s request, the master asked his wife to offer [the messenger] some hospitality. She proceeded to mix cow urine and chunks of rock into a kettle and put it on to boil. This produced an abundance of wonderfully flavored food, which she gave to the messenger. The master told the messenger, “You go on ahead and inform the king. We’ll come later.” The messenger traveled a long way, but when he reached a tree near the Svayambhū *caitya* he found the master as his wife resting there. The master said: “You were sent ahead of us while we remained behind, and yet we’ve have been waiting quite a while.” They then continued on together. The king showed him great honor, and [the master] consecrated the Svayambhū *caitya*. The master then directed them to prepare the requisites for a *gaṇacakra* attended by thirty-seven people, an order the king fulfilled as instructed. The master and his wife then entered the ritual site alone and closed the door behind them. While they were inside the king wondered “There are only two people in there, but we prepared for many more... what kind of hedonism is this?” He then opened the door to look inside and saw the thirty-seven deities of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala actually manifest and performing the *gaṇacakra*. It is said that the emanations are still gathered there to this day performing a *gaṇacakra*. Apart from the temple priest, no one is allowed to go in, and the priest never talks about [what is happening inside].

During the time [Vanaratna] stayed in a place such as this his meditation was greatly enhanced. One day there were two yogis—a married couple—inside the temple. The yogi said, “There is an excellent yogi sitting outside, it would be nice if we showed him some hospitality.” The yoginī then handed [Vanaratna] a set of red clothes that she had acquired in the south. When he wrapped his body with them, His Eminence said that his virtuous practice was greatly enhanced, and that he gained certainty in the many key points of secret mantra. [Vanaratna] said that the male and female yogis were in fact manifestations of the master Vāgīśvara and his consort.

A short time later he had a dream in which he met his guru Buddhaghōṣa, who promptly turned into a large lamp. The lord himself turned into a slightly smaller lamp. The lamp Buddhaghōṣa had turned into then shot high into the sky, and the lord did exactly the same, following after him until he realized that he had passed far beyond the Summit of Existence. The tongue of fire that was Buddhaghōṣa, however, did not reach quite as far...²³

Just as happened in his dream the night before, the next day he met his first guru, the great Buddhaghōṣa in the temple. He prostrated to him, and [Buddhaghōṣa] asked, “Have you not met the lord Śabaripā?” [Vanaratna] lit up with joy and said “Yes, I did meet him. Where is he?” “He is here now,”²⁴ [Buddhaghōṣa] replied. In one corner of the room sat Śabaripā, large in form, black in color, and with a prominent nose. A vase had been placed in front of him. [Vanaratna] made prostrations, and prayed that he follow the Vajrayāna properly. [Śabaripā] replied “The basic truth of the Vajrayāna path is extremely profound, and will bring you mastery of the state of buddhahood in this very life. However, it will not be suitable for you to teach it in the concept-bound state of monk.” [Vanaratna again] prayed: “I will maintain the external conduct of a monk, but

²³ A short passage in which gZhon nu dpal cites a verse from the *Kālacakra Tantra* to explain Vanaratna’s dream vision as been omitted here.

²⁴ *Conj.* The Tibetan contains a quote that records Buddhaghōṣa’s response in Sanskrit or another Indic dialect: *pha vi na*. Based on the what follows, this is tentatively read as *bhāvin*.

may I also uphold, with deep faith, the true way of union.” “Well said, well said fortunate one!” [Śabaripā] replied. He then opened the maṇḍala of Cakrasaṃvara and, performing the role of *vajrācārya*, introduced Lord [Vanaratna] to it.

[Vanaratna] sequentially received the five *vidyā* initiations, the *ācārya* initiation, secret initiation, *prajñā-jñāna* initiation, and the highest fourth initiation. While in equipoise with the wisdom goddess he was given during the wisdom-knowledge initiation,²⁵ he found stability in the merging of his mind with the infinite innate bliss connected to the descent of four joys. It was an experience of bliss that, even in its most minute quantity, utterly surpassed [the experience] of melting bliss. This innate bliss is present as the essence of the infinity of beings, is free from the corrosion of habitual tendencies, and is identical with all the phenomena of the three times. When [Vanaratna] actualized this bliss, renowned as natural and innate, he also actualized the great self-resounding sound (*nāda*) that overwhelms all worldly sounds. As the elements traveled upwards, the bliss that spread through his pores could not be matched by even a million-fold magnification of the descending bliss. After this experience, [Vanaratna] was able to offer many oral instructions [on it]. On the same occasion he asked Śabaripā how many instructions he should receive. Śabaripā said “Receive whatever kinds are appropriate, [but] the teachings on the six branch yoga open up the meaning of all the tantric systems.²⁶

²⁵ This appears to refer to the human sexual partner he was entrusted with during the initiation.

²⁶ *ŹP* 29r.2-31r.5: de nas slar bal por byon pa'i res 'phags pa shing kun gyi rtsa ba na śānta pūri zhes pa'i lha khang zhig yod par thugs dam la bzhugs | de yang sngon rgya gar nas paṇḍi ta ngag gi gbang phyug ces rten (*ŹP*^a; brten *ŹP*^b) dge slong yin zhing rab tu mkhas pa zhig bal por byon nas | thugs dam gtso bor mdzad pas grub pa brnyes | de nas grub pa'i kun du spyod pas btsun mo zhig dang lhan cig bzhugs nas khyim pa lta bur mdzad pa na | bal po'i mi phal che bas | dang por 'dis bslab pa ma thub pa yin snyam nas 'phya zhing | de nas 'ga' zhig gis ngo mtshar ba'i spyod pa 'dra yang mthong nas grub thob yin no zhes gleng ba yang yod pa'i tshe | bal po'i rgyal pos 'phags pa shing kun la gso nam byas nas | śānta pū ri'i lha khang de yang brtsigs te | slob dpon ngag gi dbang phyug de grub thob yin nges snyam nas de rab tu gnas pa mdzad par gsol ba 'debs pa'i pho nya btang nas | pho nya des slob dpon dpon bzhugs pa'i grong der phyin pa na bu med mdog mi sdug cing gtum pa zhig bud shing gi las byed pa mthong ba na | slob dpon gyi btsun mor nges nas slob dpon ga na bzhugs dris pa na | nang na'o zer | der nang du phyin te | slob dpon la rgyal po'i 'phrin gsol ba na | slob dpon gyi btsun mo de la 'di la mgron gyis shig gsungs te | btsun mo des phru ba'i nang du ba lang gi lci ba dang rdo ba'i dum bu kha cig btsud nas btsos pa na | phru ba'i nang na nas ro mchog dang ldan pa'i bza' ba mang po byung nas | pho nya de la drangs | de nas slob dpon gyis pho nya la | khyed sngon la song la rgyal po la zhus shig | nges gnyis po phyi nas 'ong zhes gsungs nas pho nya bas rings par phyin pa na | 'phags pa shing kun la nye ba'i shing sdong pa zhig gi drung na | slon dpon btsun mo dang bcas pa bzhugs 'dug ste | khyed sngon la btang pa da bar du lus | nges gnyis kyis 'dir ring du bsgugs pa yin gsungs nas lhan cig tu byon te | rgyal pos kyang bkur sti cher byas nas shing kun gyi rab gnas mdzad | de'i tshe slob dpon gyi gsung gis da tshogs 'khor zhig byed dgos pas mi sum cu rtsa bdun ldang ba'i tshogs chas skyol zhig gsung nas rgyal pos kyang tshogs chas gsung ba bzhin byas te | slob dpon dang btsun mo gnyis kho na nang der bzhugs bas sgo bcad de 'dug pa'i tshe rgyal po'i bsam pa la | mi ni gnyis las med | tshogs chas no mang du song na | da ji ltar longs spyod pa yin bsam nas | sgo phye nas bltas pa'i tshe | bde mchog lha sum cu rtsa bdun gyi dkyil 'khor dngos su sprul nas tshogs mdzad pa mthong | de nas sprul pa ma bsdu par (*ŹP*^a; ma brtul bar *ŹP*^b) ding sang gi bar du tshogs la logs spyod par grags shing | dkon gnyer ma gtogs nang du 'gror mi ster | dkon gnyer gyis kyang gtam mi zer ba zhig yod par 'dug.

de lta bu'i gnas der bzhugs dus thugs dam 'phel | khyad par nyin cig gi tshe na | lha khang nang de na | rnal 'byor pa bza' (*em. gza' ms.*) mi gnyis 'dug pa la | rnal 'byor pa de na re | phyi na 'dug pa 'di rnal 'byor pa bzang po zhig 'dug pas 'o skol gyis mgron bya bar rigs so gsung ba na | rnal 'byor ma des | lho phyogs nas blangs pa yin zer ba'i gos dmar po cig gnang nas bdag nyid chen po 'i sku lus la bkab byung bas | de la brten nas dge sbyor shin tu 'phel zhing gsang sngags kyis gnang mang po la nges pa skeyes gsung ste | rnal 'byor pho mo gnyis slob dpon ngag gi dbang phyugs yab yum gnyis por snang (*ŹP*^a; gnang *ŹP*^b) gsung | de nas ring por ma lon par mtshan cig mnal lam du | nyid kyi bla ma sangs rgyas dbyangs dang mjal | de nas sangs rgyas dbyangs de mar me chen po zhig tu song | rje nyid ni de bas cung zad chung ba'i mar me zhig tu song | de nas sang rgyas dbyangs mar mer gyur pa de nam mkha'

Based on these two accounts the basic facts of Vanaratna’s stay at Śāntipur can be summarized as follows: after returning from a trip to Tibet he deemed a failure, Vanaratna entered into a long retreat at the Śāntipur temple, likely staying in a nearby rest house and using the antechamber of the temple for formal practice sessions. During this retreat of undisclosed length, Vanaratna was granted full initiation into the practice of Cakrasaṃvara, a sequence of initiations that also included the *ācārya* initiation that authorized him to teach the Vajrayāna. In the course of the initiatory sequence, which involved the support of a sexual partner, Vanaratna had a breakthrough meditative experience of non-dual bliss, which both instilled in him a new confidence and granted him the authority to teach from his realization. gZhon nu dpal embellishes the basic elements of the scene by weaving in the mythology of the Śāntipur temple and the more visionary elements of Vanaratna’s experiences, a framework that flags the importance of this encounter for Vanaratna’s later career in Nepal and Tibet, but which also may obscure, perhaps intentionally, some of the key details that would help us contextualize his experiences at the Śāntipur temple in the historical milieu of the Kathmandu Valley in the fifteenth century.

The Śāntipur temple is among the most hallowed Buddhist sites in the Kathmandu Valley, and is the center of the Cakrasaṃvara cult, the most popular system of Vajrayāna practice for the Newar community.²⁷ According to the most widely known mythology recorded in the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*, the story of Śāntipur begins near the end of the previous age, the Satya Yuga, and is tied closely with the origins of the Svayambhū *mahācaitya* itself. At that time the *caitya* was miraculously erected at the command of the *mahāsiddha* Śāntikara²⁸ to cover and protect the primordial light of buddhahood—which had previously shone freely from the hillock where the *mahācaitya* now stands—from the ravages of the coming Kali Yuga. On the same occasion Śāntikara also founded five “mansions” (*pura*) surrounding the *caitya*. One of these

la ring du 'phur ba na | rjes kyang de kho na ltar byas te rjes su bsnyegs pas | da ni srid pa'i rtse las kyang ring du
brgal snyam pa zhig tu phyin | 'on kyang sang rgyas dbyangs kyi me lce de'i tshad du ma sleb pa zhig rmis gsung
ste...[verse omitted]...mdang de lta bu'i mnal lam byung ba'i de ring de | lha khang der thog mar bla ma chen po
sang rgyas dbyangs dang mjal nas phyag mdzad pa na | khyod śa ba ra dbang phyug dang mi mjal lam gsung ba na |
dgyes ches te los mjal | khang pa'i grwa gcig na dpal śa ba ra dbang phyug sku bo che zhing mdog gnag pa shangs
mtho ba zhig mdun na bum pa gcig bzhag nas 'dug pa la | phyag mdzad de rdo rje theg pa'i lam gyi de kho na nyid
kyis rjes su bzung du gsol zhes zhus pa na | rdo rje theg pa'i lam gyi de kho na nyid ni shin tu zab pa yon zhing tshe
'di nyid la sangs rgyas nyid 'grub par byed pa yin na'ang | rtog pa can gyi dge slong gi rten la bstan du mi mi rung
ngo zhes gsung ba na | bdag phyi rol dge slong gi kun tu spyod pa yin mod kyi | rnal 'byor gyi de kho na nyid pa
shin tu dad na rjes su gzung du gsol zhes zhus pa na | skal ba dang ldan pa legs so legs so zhes gsung pa nas bde
mchog 'khor lo'i dkyil 'khor gyi 'khor lor bsgyur nas | dpal śa ba ra nyid rdo rje 'dzin pa chen po'i rnam pas rje nyid
dkyil 'khor du bcug ste | rig pa'i dbang lnga dang | slob dpon dang gsang ba dang | shes rab ye shes dang | bla na
med pa'i bzhi pa rnam rim par bskur te | de yang shes rab ye shes kyi dus su gnang ba'i ye shes kyi lha mo de la
snyoms par zhugs na | yas babs kyi dga' ba bzhi'i bde ba mtha' yas pa'i lhan cig skyes pa de la sems ro gcig tu brtan
por mdzad pa na | ji zhig ltar la zhu ba'i bde bas bye ba phrag stong gi char yang mi phod pa'i bde ba | ngo bo nyid
kyi tshul gyis sems can mtha' dag la gnas pa | bag chags kyi g.ya' dang bral ba | dus gsum gyi chos ma lus par ro
gcig pa | rang bzhin lhan cig skyes pa zhes bya ba'i sgra bo che de mngon du mdzad pa na de nyid kyi mthus 'jig
rten gyi sgrar snang ba ji snyed pa zil gyis gnan pa'i nā da'i rang sgra chen po dang bcas te | kham s thams cad gyen
du gshegs nas gang gi tshe ba spu'i bu gar (ZP^b; ma spu'i bu gtan ZP^a) 'jug pa'i bde ba de la yang yas babs kyi dga'
bas bye ba'i char yang bskrun du med pa | de lta bu'i bde ba sku nyams su bstar nas | gdams pa yang mang du rtsal
bar snang ste | de'i tshe śa ba ra la gdams pa ci tsaṃ gsan zhes zhus pa na | ci rigs ci rigs pa dag thos te | rgyud ma
lus pa'i don la 'jug pa yan lag drug gi rnal 'byor gsungs pa yin gsungs.

²⁷ About which see von Rospatt 2014: 63-65.

²⁸ Here I use the name found in the “long version” of the *Svayambhū Purāṇa*. This same figure is alternately named Śāntīśrī and Śāntāśrī in the short- and middle-length versions (von Rospatt 2014: 53, note 14).

was the eponymous Śāntipur, often likened to a cave rather than a building, into which Śāntikara retired and settled into deep meditation.²⁹ The mythology of Śāntipur is further elaborated in another story from the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* in which Śāntikara was sought out by the king Guṇakāmadeva to save the Kathmandu Valley from a drought caused by recalcitrant nāgas. Śāntikara advised the performance of an elaborate *pūjā* to appease the nāgas, to which Guṇakāmadeva obliged. The rite was successfully performed in the presence of the assembled nāgas, bringing an end to the drought and averting the ensuing famine; however, before the nāgas were allowed to depart, Śāntikara demanded some of their blood, which he used to draw a maṇḍala that would be preserved for use in times of future drought.³⁰ Though the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* states this maṇḍala was stored at Nāgapura, another of the five “mansions,” the role of Śāntikara in the story has led to the popular belief that the *nāgamaṇḍala* was stored at Śāntipur, a point that will be relevant below.³¹

What the mythologies recorded in the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* do not do is link the Śāntipur temple to the Cakrasaṃvara cult. As this is a key factor in Vanaratna’s experiences at Śāntipur and critical for his subsequent career, it is unsurprising that gZhon nu dpal ignores the mythic account from the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* and instead focuses on a lesser-known mythology of the Śāntipur temple which privileges its origins as a site of Cakrasaṃvara worship: the tale of the Indian *siddha* Vāgīśvara and his *gaṇacakra* inside Śāntipur.³² This version appears to attribute the construction (Tib. *brtsigs pa*) of the Śāntipur temple to an unnamed Nepalese king on the same occasion he sponsored a renovation of the Svayambhū *mahācaitya*. More importantly, and uniquely, this narrative also establishes the origins of Cakrasaṃvara worship there. Vāgīśvara, also known as Vāgīśvarakīrti, was an eleventh-century Indian master who is believed to have served as one of the gatekeepers at Vikramaśīla monastery prior to his move to Nepal.³³ Similarities in their narratives have led some scholars to identify Vāgīśvara with the original founder of the site, Śāntikara,³⁴ but this is not a detail gZhon nu dpal dwells on. If the basic elements of the story told in the *ŽP* have a kernel of historicity and Vāgīśvara did consecrate the newly-constructed, or perhaps newly-renovated temple, this may have been connected with a renovation of the Svayambhū *caitya* believed to have taken place ca. 1120.³⁵ Historical concerns aside, the myth of Vāgīśvara at Śāntipur is primarily a tale of the founding of the cult of Cakrasaṃvara at the site, one that largely ignores any indigenous agents and narratives, emphasizing instead the Indian origins of the Cakrasaṃvara lineage rooted there.

It has been previously noted that the Cakrasaṃvara system is largely absent from

²⁹ See *Svayambhū Purāṇa* Ch. 9.

³⁰ See *Svayambhū Purāṇa* Ch. 8.

³¹ Wright 1887: 83, 85-6; Slusser 1979: 75-81; von Rospatt 2014: 46, 59-61.

³² A similar telling of this myth is found in Tāranātha’s TĀR. This version is so similar to the version in the *ŽP*—some passages are verbatim—that it would appear that Tāranātha either drew from the *ŽP* as a source for his account, or that both the *ŽP* and the TĀR drew from a shared source. There are key differences, however, including the TĀR’s detail that Vāgīśvarakīrti had two wives, a “dancing girl” (*sgegs mo*) and the same dark-complexioned terrifying woman we meet in the *ŽP*; the omission of the scene in which Vāgīśvarakīrti’s consort makes the messenger delicious stew with rocks and cow urine; and, the fact that the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala arranged for the *gaṇacakra* consists of sixty-two deities instead of thirty-seven as in the *ŽP*.

³³ TĀR (ff. 119v.4-120r.4).

³⁴ Such as Hubert Decler (1998). The Indian *siddha* Vāgīśvara should also not be confused with the Nepalese master of the same name who lived in Pharping and was one of the Tibetan master Mar pa Chos kyi blo gro’s teachers. About this figure, whom is often conflated with the Indian *siddha*, see Roberts 2007: 153.

³⁵ Shakya and Vaidya 1970: 55-57; von Rospatt 2011:162-3.

Vanaratna’s early biography,³⁶ and yet it becomes one of his main personal practices and a regular part of his teaching repertoire in his later career. It is here at Śāntipur that the Cakrasaṃvara cycle first substantively enters his narrative, and does so in a dramatic, visionary manner that establishes an Indian pedigree for Vanaratna’s lineage despite the Nepalese setting in which it was received. gZhon nu dpal accomplishes this by first telling the story of Vāgīśvara, the Indian *siddha* who not only first unfolded the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala at Śāntipur, but remains there eternally to bestow his blessing and sanction on those who came after him. The founding of the temple and the beginning of Cakrasaṃvara practice at Śāntipur is entirely an Indian affair, with the unnamed Nepalese king serving merely as an instrument to establish the proper narrative conditions for Vāgīśvara’s actions. Though it is not the immortal Vāgīśvara who confers the initiation on Vanaratna, he and his wife do make an appearance to demonstrate their acceptance of Vanaratna through their gift of red clothes, which are also explicitly stated to have been “acquired in the South,” and thus presumably in India. This gift awakens in Vanaratna a new, clearer understanding of the Vajrayāna, setting the stage for the spiritual breakthrough that follows. Vāgīśvara and his wife then exit the narrative, but their role in establishing the Indian origins of Cakrasaṃvara practice at Śāntipur, and their approval of Vanaratna’s presence has set the proper framework for the events that follow.

From what can be gleaned from gZhon nu dpal’s narrative, Vanaratna spent time meditating within Śāntipur’s antechamber (Tib. *mdo khyams*),³⁷ the public area of the temple separated from the inner sanctum by a gilded door (image 18). The inner precincts of the temple that lie beyond that door are traditionally closed to all but two authorized, hereditary leaders from Kathmandu’s Newar community, which gZhon nu dpal notes was the custom then just as it is now.³⁸ Beyond this door is the part of the temple where Vāgīśvara and his wife are said to have prepared the first Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala at Śāntipur, and where they are believed to perform their perpetual *gaṇacakra*. Despite the restrictions on entry to the inner areas of the temple, we do know something of the temple’s layout from a Nepalese *paubhā* of uncertain date that depicts king Pratāpamalla’s (1641-74) descent into Śāntipur’s lower chambers (image 20),³⁹ an unauthorized entry he made in order to retrieve Śāntikara’s *nāgamaṇḍala* during a period of drought in the Valley. In the *paubhā* Pratāpamalla can be seen standing in a cell in the lower left corner of the image. This is the antechamber in which Vanaratna would have stayed, with the eternal Cakrasaṃvara *gaṇacakra* unfolding behind its door somewhere in the chambers below. In the description of Pratāpamalla’s journey into the bowels of the temple, (a successful journey by all accounts), he does not mention traversing a large tantric *gaṇacakra* attended by the maṇḍala deities themselves, but he does report discovering a manuscript of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* in the corner of the central chamber of the temple’s second level.⁴⁰

Though Vanaratna remained outside the door to the inner sanctum for the duration of his

³⁶ Apart from the brief, independent reference to Vajrayoginī mention in Chapter One (p. 16).

³⁷ Śāntipur’s antechamber is quite small and open to the public, thus it seems unlikely that Vanaratna spent his meditation sessions there. In the SG we learn that there was a guest house (Tib. *gzims khang*) onsite at the time (SG 49v.1), so it was so it was perhaps there that Vanaratna actually resided.

³⁸ Access to the inner chambers of Śāntipur is only granted to two people: the eldest member of the Newar *buddhācārya* community, the caretakers of the Svayambhū *mahācaitya*, who acts as the patron (*yajamāna*) for the rites officiated at Śāntipur, and to the head *vajrācārya* of Makhhan Bāhā in Kathmandu, who serves as the chief ritual officiant (*purohita*) for rites performed there. These two continue to meet at Śāntipur on a monthly basis to perform the required Cakrasaṃvara rites (Locke 1985: 255, 282; von Rospatt 2014: 49).

³⁹ For a study of this impressive painting, see Slusser 1979.

⁴⁰ Slusser 1979: 80. The location of the manuscript appears to be represented in the painting by a copper vessel.

retreat, the door was not a barrier to those within, such as Vāgīśvara and his wife, who were free to come out and grant their blessings to Vanaratna. Vāgīśvara’s crossing of the threshold between the inner sanctum and the antechamber is a key moment in the narrative, but it is not the most significant visionary experience to unfold for Vanaratna within the Śāntipur temple. Vanaratna meets two of his Indian gurus—his preceptor from Mahācaitya Vihāra, Buddhaghōṣa, and his primary tantric master from Śrī Parvata, Śabaripā—inside the temple, and it is they who are most instrumental in his initiatory transformation. Vanaratna’s vision of Buddhaghōṣa begins in dream, where they both manifest as oil lamps whose flames reach high into the sky. Despite being the smaller of the two lamps, the flame of the disciple Vanaratna reaches slightly higher than the flame of the guru Buddhaghōṣa, a clear allusion to the fact that Vanaratna has now exceeded the stature and realization of his guru. The vision continues in Vanaratna’s waking reality the next morning, when Buddhaghōṣa appears to him in person.⁴¹ Buddhaghōṣa’s role is to do little more than inform him that Śabaripā has also arrived, but his presence serves a more indirect purpose: we are told that the two black stone images from Vanaratna’s prophetic vision at the Mahābodhi temple in Bodh Gayā were none other than these two men, Buddhaghōṣa and Śabaripā,⁴² thus this scene brings them together again at the moment of Vanaratna’s critical breakthrough that established the conditions for their prophecy to be fulfilled. Buddhaghōṣa then exits the narrative, ceding the visionary stage to its main protagonist, Śabaripā.

Though the language of the *ŽP* is vague, it seems that Śabaripā appears in the antechamber either in person or in the form of a black statue, similar to the form he took during Vanaratna’s Bodh Gayā vision.⁴³ Vanaratna prostrates to Śabaripā while making the supplication that he be able to “follow the Vajrayāna properly.” Śabaripā responds with a blunt directive: Vanaratna’s monastic status will impede his ability to teach the Vajrayāna to others. Vanaratna balks at this, perhaps reticent to abandon the vows he first received from Buddhaghōṣa as a young man in Sadnagara and then maintained throughout his twenty-five years of travel and training. Instead he offers his guru a compromise, committing to the secret sexual practices required of him on the Vajrayāna path while externally maintaining his monastic discipline. The further implications of this exchange, which get to the heart of a debate about Vanaratna’s monastic status, will be discussed shortly, but for the moment this scene hints at the fact that Vanaratna had not truly been initiated into or authorized to practice the Vajrayāna. Though gZhon nu dpal was careful to highlight his Vajrayāna training earlier in his biography, this scene represents a significant step forward in his training. It would appear that only now, when he was well past the age of forty and had visited or lived in a number of diverse Buddhist communities in South Asia, that Vanaratna finally receives full initiation in the Vajrayāna path. It is a moment that serves as a clear line of demarcation between the earlier and later stages of his career.

This moment is marked by the complete set of initiations Vanaratna receives into the

⁴¹ While it is certainly within the realm of possibility that Buddhaghōṣa traveled to Nepal, it is highly unlikely. Setting matters of distance and the difficulty of travel aside, Buddhaghōṣa was likely too old for such an arduous journey, or was no longer alive. Buddhaghōṣa was Vanaratna’s preceptor when he took novice vows at eight years of age, and was still active at Mahācaitya when Vanaratna received full ordination and his *paṇḍita* degree twelve years later. Roughly twenty-five years had passed between Vanaratna’s departure and his retreat at Śāntipur. Assuming Buddhaghōṣa was at least approaching middle-age when Vanaratna began his studies in Sadagara, Buddhaghōṣa would have been at a very advanced age or deceased in the by the time of Vanaratna’s Śāntipur retreat.

⁴² *ŽP* 31r.5.

⁴³ In the NTSG Chos grags ye shes says that bSod nams rgyam tsho made offerings to a stone image of Śabaripā while staying at Śāntipur, but indicates that the statue in question was made by Vanaratna. NTSG^b 357.11-12: paṅ chen rin po ches bzhengs pa’i rnal ’byor dbang phyug gi rdo sku.

Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala inside the Śāntipur temple, and the meditative experiences it awakens in him. The initiation, ostensibly given by Śabaripā in the *ŽP*, is based on a Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala of unspecified arrangement, but later accounts clearly indicate this was the *trayodaśātmaka*,⁴⁴ or “thirteen-deity” maṇḍala of Cakrasaṃvara that Vanaratna would teach widely in Tibet.

Vanaratna receives the five *vidyā* initiations—water, crown, vajra, bell, and name—followed by the remaining initiations of the higher tantras, the secret, *prajñā-jñāna*, and the “fourth” initiation. This set of four (counting the five *vidyā* initiations as one), comprise the full sequence of initiations authorizing Vanaratna to train in all levels of Cakrasaṃvara practice, a system that by all accounts he was not initiated into or authorized to practice prior to this moment. In addition to these initiations, Vanaratna was also granted the *ācārya* initiation that authorized him as a teacher of the Vajrayāna and to confer initiation. Beyond receiving authorizing initiations, Vanaratna also had meditative experiences that, in the words of gZhon nu dpal, made it possible for him to offer oral instructions. It is thus at this moment, more so than any other in his early biography, that Vanaratna finally reaches the status of a tantric master, a *vajrācārya*.

We have seen that gZhon nu dpal, and perhaps Vanaratna before him, had been careful to demonstrate that Vanaratna’s Vajrayāna training was consistent throughout his life. We have been told that Vanaratna received a solid grounding in the Vajrayāna during his years at Mahācaitya Vihāra, that he was initiated into a number of tantric maṇḍalas there, including the Kālacakra, and that he was trained in the six-branch yoga. And yet it is only here, at the Śāntipur temple, that we have the first incontrovertible evidence of his Vajrayāna training. If we take this scene to demarcate Vanaratna’s prior and subsequent engagement with Vajrayāna, the difference is quite stark. Apart from gZhon nu dpal’s description of Vanaratna’s training at Sadnagara, the veracity of which can reasonably be called into question, references to the Vajrayāna in his earlier narrative are brief, vague, and generally tangential to the arc of his biography. From this point forward, however, there is a radical change in Vanaratna’s repertoire, with the teaching and practice of Vajrayāna becoming predominant in his narrative. It is only following his initiation at Śāntipur that Vanaratna begins to teach openly and widely on esoteric matters, and to confer initiations from a variety of tantric systems. And it is precisely this capacity to teach on and grant initiations into the major Vajrayāna systems that changes his fortunes so radically in Tibet. One cannot therefore not help but read between the lines of his earlier biography and of this scene to see that it was here at Śāntipur that his career as *vajrācārya*, a Vajrayāna master, truly began.

Many questions about Vanaratna’s retreat and initiation, and indeed on this entire six-year period in Nepal, remain unanswered. gZhon nu dpal’s account blends the visionary and the real, obscuring from our view the historical, and more importantly, local realities of the event. Despite taking place at the Svayambhū *mahācaitya*, perhaps the most sacred Buddhist site in the Kathmandu Valley, Vanaratna’s retreat and initiation are steeped in Indianness; not a single Nepalese actor is to be found. The absence of any Nepalese agent in Vanaratna’s initiation is a key omission, one that may be intended to confirm the Indian pedigree of his Cakrasaṃvara lineage while effacing any record of the actual Nepalese master or masters who conferred the initiation. The Cakrasaṃvara system is the most important Vajrayāna system for the Newar Buddhists of the Kathmandu Valley, so it is of little surprise that Vanaratna first came in contact with a living, viable Cakrasaṃvara lineage in Nepal. As the most important site for the Cakrasaṃvara cult in Nepal, the Śāntipur temple would likewise have been an obvious site to meet with such a master and receive initiation into the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala. It would be logical to conclude, gZhon nu dpal’s version of events aside, that Vanaratna was initiated into

⁴⁴ See SG 36v.6-37r.1 and NTSG^b 305.5-7

the thirteen-deity Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala by a Newari *vajrācārya*, rather than through the visionary intercession of Indian masters

That the *ŽP* is silent about this fact, or at least obscures it behind a more Indo-centric mythology, is in line with what appear to be other attempts by Vanaratna and/or gZhon nu dpal to hide the more inconvenient realities of Vanaratna's training. As we have seen, there are hints that gZhon nu dpal overlooked Vanaratna's early Theravaṃsa influences and Pāli training because it would not align well with Tibetan views of the so-called "inferior vehicle" (*hīnayāna*), nor with Vanaratna's status as a Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna master. A similar dynamic may be at play here; as an Indian master working on Tibetan soil, and given the valorization of India among Tibet's Buddhist community, any teachings or initiations he received from Nepalese masters may have been regarded as inferior. By occluding a local context behind visionary rhetoric and symbolism that was Indic in orientation, Vanaratna or gZhon nu dpal not only established the Indian origins of his Cakrasaṃvara lineage, but augmented Tibetan perceptions of his realization and spiritual potency. This was done at the expense of the local teachers under which he was initiated and trained, faceless and nameless masters whose identity will forever remain lost to us.⁴⁵

An argument based on an absence of evidence is difficult to make, but it would nonetheless appear that Vanaratna truly emerged as a Vajrayāna master after his second residence in Nepal, and may have done so through his relationship with Nepalese *vajrācāryas*. We can say with reasonable certainty that he was first initiated into the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala and first received the requisite initiation to serve as a *vajrācārya* during his retreat at the Śāntipur temple; this much is explicit in gZhon nu dpal's narrative. When we survey Vanaratna's biography up to this point, references to Vajrayāna are few, and are always given in the context of study or private practice. With a single ambiguous exception,⁴⁶ at no point in Nepal, India, or Tibet is Vanaratna recorded as giving teachings or initiations on Vajrayāna systems prior to his retreat at Śāntipur. As we will see, upon coming out of retreat and traveling to Tibet for the second time, he begins to teach the Vajrayāna and confers initiations openly and extensively, and thus achieved the immense success that eluded him during his first year there.

Not only does Vanaratna henceforth begin to regularly give teachings and initiations into the Cakrasaṃvara initiation he received at Śāntipur, he also begins to give teachings and confer initiations from a range of esoteric systems that are entirely absent from his early biography. Given that Vanaratna spent the better part of six years in Nepal between his first and second visits to Tibet, and that his repertoire expanded exponentially during his second visit, we can surmise that he received much broader training than gZhon nu dpal's account indicates, and that his relationship with the Newar community was deeper and more extensive than reported. As will be discussed in the next chapter, many if not all of Vanaratna's extant writings concern esoteric cycles and a pantheon of deities that were of particular relevance to the Newar Buddhists of Nepal: Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa, Yogāmbara, the *pañcarākṣā* goddesses, Avalokiteśvara, Gaṇeśa, and above all the thirteen-deity maṇḍala of Cakrasaṃvara and a range of *sādhana*s for Vajrayoginī/Vajravārāhī. His engagement with the Newar Buddhist community was therefore clearly not limited to this single experience at Śāntipur, but endured for years and involved a

⁴⁵ At least one later Tibetan author, Kun dga' grol mchog, called the veracity of gZhon nu dpal's description of the scene at Śāntipur into question. Kun dga' grol mchog challenges the details of Vanaratna's initiation when exposing the fact that gZhon nu dpal omitted reference to a Tibetan master under whom Vanaratna was known to have studied. We will consider Kun dga' grol mchog's statement in Chapter Seven.

⁴⁶ The brief and cryptic reference to an initiation into the practice of Acala mentioned above.

number of systems that might first have been accessible to him in Nepal. None of this clearly points to Vanaratna's study at the feet of Nepalese masters, but it does, at the very least, open the door to the possibility that Vanaratna was more deeply engaged with the local Buddhist scene than the ŽP communicates, and that like many of his early stops in his journey, he remained an avid student even as he came into his own and a *paṇḍita* and *vajrācārya* of great renown.

Vanaratna: Monk or a Tantric Householder?

It has been argued that Vanaratna gave up his monastic vows during his years in Nepal, took a tantric consort as his wife, and lived as a “householder-monk” of the type that is commonplace in the contemporary Newar Buddhist community. That the tradition of voluntary, celibate monasticism began to wane towards the end of the medieval period—leaving only the hereditary, caste-based form of monasticism—makes it easy to interpret Vanaratna's narrative in light of the later tradition,⁴⁷ but evidence that this was the case for Vanaratna is entirely conjectural and in opposition to Vanaratna's stated views on the matter. The argument for Vanaratna's lay status can be traced back to the work of Pratapaditya Pal, who in his 1985 study of the fifteenth-century Nepalese *paubhā* commemorating Vanaratna's death (image 1), titled the work “Vanaratna's Wife Distributing Alms,” without offering any evidence backing this identification.⁴⁸ Pal continued his argument for Vanaratna's lay status, this time in more detail, in a 1989 article where he cites the DN and its lengthy quotation of a series of songs purportedly composed by bSod nam rgya mtsho which Pal argues demonstrate that bSod nam rgya mtsho met Vanaratna's “spouse” in Nepal. Hubert Decler tacitly accepted this view in a 1999 article, where he discusses the same *paubhā* and notes that it depicts a distribution of alms by Vanaratna's “widowed consort.”⁴⁹ Setting aside for now a discussion of who the central figure in the *paubhā* may in fact be,⁵⁰ Pal's reasoning is based on a faulty interpretation of the verses from the DN, which do not support his claim as strongly as he may have hoped.

The verses in question were originally included in Chos grags ye shes's NTSG, and were subsequently extracted and arranged in sequence by gZhon nu dpal (or his colleagues) in the DN. These verses have come to be known as the “seven encouragements” (*dbugs dbyung*), and describe a series of visions bSod nam rgya mtsho had of Vanaratna prior to and during his journey to Nepal in 1465.⁵¹ Only one of the songs, the last, purportedly describes actual events in Nepal. Though the songs describe bSod nam rgya mtsho's visions before his meeting with Vanaratna, they were likely composed much later, and use cryptic and allusive language that makes it difficult to unravel the visionary from any factual content the verses may contain. To complicate matters, Chos grags ye shes may have borrowed the motif of “encouragements” and used it as a literary device to structure this section of the NTSG and align bSod nam rgya mtsho's outer journey to Nepal with the inner transformation that he experienced there.⁵² Pal mines these “seven encouragements” for data on Vanaratna's “spouse,” whom he believes is referenced throughout the songs. The key problem with his argument is that he believed all seven songs describe bSod nam rgya mtsho's in-person encounters with Vanaratna and his spouse,

⁴⁷ Gellner 1992: 162-7.

⁴⁸ Pal 1985, 207.

⁴⁹ Decler 1999: 87.

⁵⁰ This *paubhā* and its importance to the study of Vanaratna will be discussed in the Conclusion.

⁵¹ The individual encouragements are scattered throughout the NTSG, but can be read together in the DN (10.30r.2-31v.7.) and in translation in the *Blue Annals* (816-20).

⁵² Ehrhard 2002: 70, note 37.

rather than describing the content of bSod nam rgya mtsho's visions prior to his arrival in Nepal. Pal made this error because he based his reading not on the Tibetan verses as found in the NTSG or DN, but rather on Roerich's translation in the BA, where Roerich makes an erroneous speculation in a parenthetical note that led Pal to believe the content of the entire sequence of songs took place in Nepal. In the third encouragement, Roerich was not aware that the term *rin po che'i gling* referred to the estate of bSod nam rgya mtsho's patron Amoghasiddhi,⁵³ which was located in southern Tibet, and instead back-translated the term as "Ratnadvīpa" in parentheses, further conjecturing that this refers to Nepal. Pal unreflectively follows suit, stating that the songs describe events that took place in person in Nepal.

In songs three and five, bSod nam rgya mtsho makes reference to a "mother," whom he had visions of alongside his "father," Vanaratna. This "mother" is given the cryptic name Mig mangs (checkered) in song three,⁵⁴ and is described as appearing in "full ornamentation," in song five, alongside Vanaratna who manifests in glowing golden robes.⁵⁵ Both of these songs describe bSod nam rgya mtsho's vision before his arrival in Nepal, and because of the visionary context it is not at all clear if this "mother" is intended to refer to a human consort/wife or another divine feminine figure, such as Vanaratna's personal deity Vajrayoginī.⁵⁶ Most critically for Pal's argument, however, is song six wherein bSod nam rgya mtsho describes a vision he had of Vanaratna in the sexual embrace of a nun. bSod nam rgya mtsho had this vision while in Charikot, to the east of the Kathmandu Valley, while en route to visit Vanaratna. In this vision Vanaratna appeared to bSod nam rgya mtsho "sporting in the secret and blissful embrace of a *bhikṣuṇī*."⁵⁷ Though this reference to Vanaratna's use of a consort is at least unambiguous, this nun is not referred to as "mother," nor is she equated with the previous references to one. This fact does not give Pal pause in conflating the references, and claiming that his nun and that mother "may well have been his spouse," and that her presence in these otherwise visionary verses "confirm" his argument that "the lady...in the Nepali painting...is very likely Vanaratna's consort."⁵⁸

The seven songs of encouragement are a fascinating series of verses, pregnant with symbolic meaning and literary value, that reflect the personal and spiritual dimensions of bSod nam rgya mtsho's relationship with Vanaratna. They may also have been a deliberately contrived literary motif arranged, if not composed, by Chos grags ye shes for that purpose. It is certainly possible that the content of the verses reflect genuine experiences and reflections of bSod nam rgya mtsho reported to Chos grags ye shes, but they should not be taken as clear evidence of Vanaratna's monastic status, marital status, or his reconciliation of his monastic vows and tantric commitments. Far more productive for this purpose is a consideration of Vanaratna's own position on the matter, and of the copious evidence available from statements made by his students, colleagues, and admirers. We must also be careful to distinguish between Vanaratna's reliance on a tantric consort in specific initiatory, ritual, and meditative contexts, and taking a wife and living as lay, householder monk as is typical in the contemporary Newar tradition.

⁵³ Ehrhard 2002: 64.

⁵⁴ DN: 10.30v.7-31r.1; BA 819; Pal 1989: 818.

⁵⁵ DN 10.31r.3-7; BA 819; Pal 1989: 193-4.

⁵⁶ In the fifth encouragement bSod nam rgya mtsho calls out to this mysterious female as Vajra Tārā, but we should not put too much stock in this as he refers to Vanaratna as "Vairocana vajra" in the same line.

⁵⁷ DN 10.3r1.7-31v.3: bhi kṣu nī yis bder 'khyud pa'i | gsang ba'i rol mo bskul ba la. See also BA 819-20 and Pal 1989: 194.

⁵⁸ Pal 1989: 194.

As we have seen above, Vanaratna presents his own opinion (in the words of gZhon nu dpal) on the relationship between his monastic ordination and the potentially contradictory requirements of Vajrayāna practice in the scene of his initiation at the Śāntipur temple. The *ŽP* alludes to Vanaratna’s reliance on a tantric consort during his initiation into the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala at Śāntipur:

While in equipoise with the wisdom goddess provided for him during the wisdom-knowledge initiation, [Vanaratna] found stability in the merging of his mind with the infinite innate bliss connected to the descent of four joys.⁵⁹

This is the only known reference in either of the main biographies, the *ŽP* and *SG*, to Vanaratna’s use of a tantric consort, but considering that such practices are highly secret, the absence of further data from the *rnam thars* is not unsurprising. The way in which gZhon nu dpal frames this acknowledgement is perhaps the best benchmark for understanding Vanaratna’s personal negotiations of any conflict between the full ordination he maintained from the age of twenty, and the requirements of his new status as a *vajrācārya*. gZhon nu dpal records this conversation between the Śabaripā and Vanaratna just prior to his initiation:

[Vanaratna] made prostrations [to Śabaripā], and prayed that he follow the Vajrayāna properly. [Śabaripā] replied “The basic truth of the Vajrayāna path is extremely profound, and will bring you mastery of the state of buddhahood in this very life. However, it will not be suitable for you to teach it in the concept-oriented state of monk.” [Vanaratna again] prayed: “I will maintain the external conduct of a monk, but may I also uphold, with deep faith, the true way of union.” “Well said, well said fortunate one,” [Śabaripā] replied.⁶⁰

In this exchange Vanaratna offers a compromise readily accepted by his guru: he will maintain his monastic ordination, but uphold the commitments of Vajrayāna practice when appropriate to do so. By all accounts Vanaratna maintained this approach throughout his life, as the few references to Vanaratna’s reliance on a consort (including the above) are found only in formal meditative or initiatory settings. This includes bSod nams rgya mtsho’s seven songs, which only discuss Vanaratna’s potential reliance on a consort in the language of secrecy and vision, not in the pragmatic language of day-to-day life. By contrast, references to Vanaratna’s status as a fully ordained monk, both those he made himself and those by others, are legion.

We might be inclined to regard gZhon nu dpal’s account of this scene as potentially revisionist or apologist, but Vanaratna’s priority on his monastic status is supported in numerous sources. Vanaratna is frequently referred to, and refers to himself, as a *sthavira* or *mahāsthavira* in a number of contexts, identifying him as an elder monk in the tradition. The term is used self-referentially on at least one occasion, and is counted among the most common epithets he is given by his colleagues. Use of the term to describe Vanaratna both predates his arrival in Nepal,

⁵⁹ *ŽP* 30v.6-31r.1: de yang shes rab ye shes kyi dus su gnang ba’i ye shes kyi lha mo de la snyoms par zhugs na | yas babs kyi dga’ ba bzhi’i bde ba mtha’ yas pa’i lhan cig skyes pa de la sems ro gcig tu brtan por mdzad pa.

⁶⁰ *ŽP* 30r.2-4: phyag mdzad de rdo rje theg pa’i lam gyi de kho na nyid kyis rjes su bzung du gsol zhes zhus pa na | rdo rje theg pa’i lam gyi de kho na nyid ni shin tu zab pa yon zhing tshe ’di nyid la sangs rgyas nyid ’grub par byed pa yin na’ang | rtog pa can gyi dge slong gi rten la bstan du mi mi rung ngo zhes gsung ba na | bdag phyi rol dge slong gi kun tu spyod pa yin mod kyi | rnal ’byor gyi de kho na nyid pa shin tu dad na rjes su gzung du gsol zhes zhus pa na | skal ba dang ldan pa legs so legs so zhes gsung pa

and is applied to him by his Indian, Nepalese, and Tibetan affiliates. The earliest known use of the term for Vanaratna is found in the verse of praise to Vanaratna composed by Maṇṣasūrya in Andhra, where he calls Vanaratna a *mahāsthavira*.⁶¹ Likewise, Vanaratna is called a *mahāsthavira* in the colophon to the *Kṛtpañjikā*, part of the collection of texts associated with the *Kālapasūtra* that were in Vanaratna's possession in Magadha prior to his departure for Nepal.⁶² It is worth noting that this manuscript was prepared under Vanaratna's patronage, making the inclusion of this epithet close to self-referential. Perhaps contemporary to this is the manuscript of the *Bodhicaryāvatāraṭīkā* copied at Vanaratna's instigation, where he is referred to as both a *mahāsthavira* and a *śākyabhikṣu*.⁶³ While living in Nepal, Vanaratna was the subject of the *Vanaratnastotrasaptaka*, a Sanskrit eulogy composed by Āditya, a native of Magadha, in which he refers to Vanaratna as a *bhikṣurāja*, a "king of monks," and uses the phrase *vanaratna-mahāsthavira* as the refrain in the final *padas* of verses three through seven.⁶⁴ Vanaratna's Tibetan oral translator 'Jam dpal ye shes calls him a *mahāsthavira* in a lineage history he appended to their collaborative translation of Nāgārjuna's *Ṣaḍāṅgayoga*,⁶⁵ and Vanaratna is referred to as *sthavira* or *mahāsthavira* in seven of the colophons accompanying translations attributed to him and his Tibetan colleagues.⁶⁶ We also have an image of Vanaratna, painted in Tibet during or shortly after his lifetime, in which he is portrayed in full monastic regalia, and not with the accoutrements of a *mahāsiddha* or lay-oriented attire (image 2). Perhaps most significantly, in a colophon from the Vanaratna Codex, a manuscript likely scribed by Vanaratna himself in 1455, he refers to himself as a *śākyabhikṣu* and *mahāsthavira*.⁶⁷

Thus if we are to take Vanaratna at his own word, and if we are to believe his closest Tibetan colleagues and Indian admirers, then the evidence overwhelmingly points to the fact that Vanaratna maintained the full ordination he received in his youth in Sadnagara through to his death in Nepal. It could be argued that the terms *bhikṣu*, *śākyabhikṣu*, *sthavira*, and *mahāsthavira* are equally applied to and used self-referentially by householder monks in the Newar tradition,⁶⁸ which would negate much of the evidence presented here, but that fact that use of the terms are as pervasive as they are at every phase of Vanaratna's life, were employed by people of diverse Buddhist backgrounds and persuasions, and were used in contexts where he likely had direct input, it would appear that maintaining, and reaffirming, his monastic status was of significant importance to him. This in no way need preclude the fact that he relied on a consort in specific religious contexts, but the emphasis placed on the terminology of monasticism is too much to simply dismiss, and is in perfect agreement with the position he staked out for himself when the issue was first raised during his initiation at Śāntipur. This evidence, at the very least, significantly problematizes the otherwise wholly unsupported claim that Vanaratna married and lived with his wife in the Kathmandu Valley.

⁶¹ See Chapter 3, p. 54.

⁶² Hori 2019: 48, 60.

⁶³ Shastri 1917: 51

⁶⁴ Hahn 1996: 36-7.

⁶⁵ Ōta 4792: 52v.3-4

⁶⁶ Tōh. 1233, 1352, 2334, 4123, 4395, and Ōta. 4654 and 4665.

⁶⁷ VC 45v.10.

⁶⁸ Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 131-3.

Conclusion

The data provided in the *ŽP* for Vanaratna's first two residences in the Kathmandu Valley—covering approximate years 1423-6 and 1427-32—are unfortunately limited and only give us the most fleeting of glimpses of Vanaratna's experiences in Nepal during these years. Despite *gZhon nu dpal*'s brevity, a few observations about Nepal, Nepalese Buddhism, and Vanaratna's experiences are nonetheless possible. We know that Vanaratna arrived in the Kathmandu Valley in 1423, during the reign of Jyotirmalla, who continued to rule throughout Vanaratna's initial residence. We are not told explicitly where Vanaratna lived during his first stay in the Valley, and the information we do have—that he attended teachings by the Indian *paṇḍita* Śīlasāgara, periodically gave teachings of his own, and was supported in extended periods of meditation retreat suggests—could equally indicate that he lived in Patan or Kathmandu, both active centers of Buddhist life in Nepal. That he was not the only foreign Buddhist *paṇḍita* in town demonstrates the vitality and cosmopolitan character of the Buddhist scene, one which Vanaratna also benefitted from, as evinced by his occasional teachings to local audiences. He did not initially avail himself of expertise of local Vajrayāna masters, but instead continued to focus on exoteric topics, much as he had in India. Vanaratna seems to have kept a low profile during these years as he prepared himself practically and spiritually for his journey to Tibet, and relied on local informants for advice on his travels. The local Nepalese population—or at least the professional religious he queried—offered him disparaging views of what he could expect to find there. So negative was their opinion that Vanaratna was discouraged from his journey to the point that he briefly abandoned the idea of continuing onward. This slim evidence alludes to perhaps what was a negative opinion of Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley, a view that may reflect a general cultural chauvinism, or may have resulted from a slowdown in the flow of religious elite to and through the Kathmandu Valley, perhaps as a result of the collapse of Buddhism in India.

Upon his return to Nepal at the end of his disappointing first journey to Tibet, Vanaratna reflected on the reasons for his failures and sought to remedy them by undergoing the kind of training that would best position him for a more successful return. *gZhon nu dpal* only intimates at the totality of Vanaratna's activities and experience during these years—roughly 1427 to 1432—but his account of Vanaratna's retreat at Śāntipur is compelling and insightful, even if it requires further interrogation. Lacking the proper grounding and authorization in the Vajrayāna, Vanaratna entered into retreat at the Śāntipur temple, perhaps because of the accessibility of Nepalese *vajrācāryas* well-versed in the Cakrasaṃvara cycle. Receiving full initiation into the maṇḍala via the standard, complete set of Vajrayāna initiations, and receiving the *ācārya* initiation that would allow him to teach, confer initiations, and preside over tantric rites, Vanaratna elevated himself to the level of a *vajrācārya*. After presumably spending much of the three years between his first and second trip to Tibet training in this and other Vajrayāna practices, again likely in coordination with local gurus, Vanaratna gained both the skill set and confidence to make a return journey to Tibet. As we will see in Part III, his second journey to Tibet was an immense success, success that can largely be attributed to his years spent training in Nepal and at the Śāntipur temple. Reading between the lines of *gZhon nu dpal*'s allusive narrative, it would seem that the key intervention was Vanaratna's willingness to sit at the feet of Nepalese gurus and train in the practice or practices that were most central to the Newar Buddhist tradition. This speculative interpretation points to the Śāntipur temple as a center of the Buddhist Vajrayāna community in fifteenth century Nepal, an active site where *vajrācāryas* were

available to teach and train disciples, and where the infrastructure was in place to accommodate the extended stays of students from outside the area. The training on offer there must have been vital and extensive, as Vanaratna emerged from his time at Śāntipur transformed. After years training in the Vajrayāna at the foot of the Svayambhū *mahācaitya* and perhaps elsewhere in the Valley, Vanaratna evolved into the master whose legacy is celebrated to this day. This was, however, only the beginning of Vanaratna's relationship with Nepal and the Newar Buddhist community; it was one that would only grow and deepen over his next thirty years in the Kathmandu Valley.

Chapter Five

The Later Years: ca. 1438 - 1467

The preceding chapter explored Vanaratna's early years in Nepal, the period between 1426 and approximately 1432 when his activities in the Kathmandu Valley were primarily oriented towards preparing for his journeys to Tibet, and on his own spiritual advancement through personal retreat and training with local teachers. Nothing from the material available to us from this period indicates that Vanaratna took an enduring interest in the religious and political life of Nepal; it seems instead that he regarded Nepal as a stepping stone to future, though at times elusive successes in Tibet. Everything we do know about Vanaratna's experiences during this time comes from the account provided by gZhon nu dpal in the *ŽP*, which despite being terse and superficial, nonetheless help us contextualize Vanaratna's early relationship to Nepal and its Newar Buddhist community, and offers an insightful view into the religious environment of the Kathmandu Valley in the first half of the fifteenth century.

As we transition from Vanaratna's first extended stay in the Kathmandu Valley to his second, we observe two important shifts, one in Vanaratna's personal narrative and the other in the literature that records it. The first of these shifts is the topic of this chapter and will be explored in detail below; namely, the shift in Vanaratna's orientation towards Nepal's religious and political community, a shift that saw him emerge as a key agent in the dynamic and at times contentious political and religious environment of the Kathmandu Valley and that propelled him into the role of an *ācārya* to the Newar Buddhist community and *paṇḍita* to the Malla kings. The following chapter will examine the years 1438 to 1468, which bracket the period in which Vanaratna settled in the Kathmandu Valley, established his seat at Gopicandra Vihāra, developed his scriptural and literary repertoire, and offered his services as literary and religious scholar to the Bhaktapur court. Vanaratna's much longer residency during these years is broken only by a single trip outside the Kathmandu Valley—to Tibet between 1453-55—and so marks the period in which his career as a *paṇḍita* in Nepal eclipsed his career in Tibet.

The second shift we witness is literary; it is at precisely the moment between the end of Vanaratna's second journey to Tibet and his return to the Kathmandu Valley that we shift from gZhon nu dpal's account in the *ŽP* to bSod nams rgya mtsho's narrative in the SG. bSod nams rgya mtsho's *rnām thar* of Vanaratna is, like gZhon nu dpal's before him, a work of immense literary talent combined with acute historical awareness. The key difference between the *ŽP* and the SG, at least in regard to its description of Vanaratna's life in Nepal, is bSod nams rgya mtsho's interest in and strong grasp of the religious, political, and social conditions of the Kathmandu Valley. Compared to gZhon nu dpal, bSod nams rgya mtsho knew Vanaratna for a much shorter time and was in his presence for little more than two of the many years covered in the SG. bSod nams rgya mtsho was in Vanaratna's company from 1454 to 1455, the time when he first met Vanaratna and traveled across Tibet with him, and from 1465-66, the year he traveled to Nepal to continue his studies at the feet of his Indian guru. Despite the relatively short time they spent together, bSod nams rgya mtsho became a close student of Vanaratna and dedicated himself to preserving and transmitting the *paṇḍita*'s lineages in Tibet through his teaching, translation, and literary efforts. This dedication manifested in his desire to visit Vanaratna in Nepal, which all available evidence suggests was unique among his most prominent Tibetan students. bSod nams rgya mtsho's time in Nepal gave him an increased sensitivity to the religious environment in which his teacher operated, a sensitivity that is clearly apparent in the

Nepal sections of the SG. His personal knowledge of the Kathmandu Valley and its residents was further enhanced by his willingness to leave Vanaratna's side and explore the Kathmandu Valley on his own, creating a deep well of experience from which he could draw when composing the SG than would have been possible if his experiences in the Valley were determined solely by his relationship with Vanaratna. For all of these reasons, the SG stands as both an exemplar of the *rnam thar* genre, and an invaluable resource for the study of fifteenth-century Nepal.

A similarly valuable resource for the study of both fifteenth-century Nepal and Vanaratna's career there is the biography of bSod nams rgya mtsho composed by his close disciple Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi grags pa ye shes, the NTSG. Precisely because bSod nams rgya mtsho was willing to emerge from Vanaratna's shadow, travel the Kathmandu Valley on his own, and forge his own relationships with prominent religious and political figures, the NTSG is rich in material unique to bSod nams rgya mtsho's experiences there that are not reported in the SG. Like his teacher, Chos grags ye shes possessed high literary talent and a keen eye for historical detail, thus the NTSG records a wealth of information on the places around the Valley bSod nams rgya mtsho visited and the people with whom he interacted, much of which is absent from Vanaratna's narrative.

Vanaratna's Return from Tibet

In continuing the study of Vanaratna's life in Nepal begun in the previous chapter, we momentarily skip over Vanaratna's second, hugely successful journey to Tibet, which took place roughly between the years 1432 and 1438. It was during this period, which is described in great detail by gZhon nu dpal in the *ŽP* and by Chos grags ye shes in the NT*ŽP*, that Vanaratna experienced a sea-change in his career and saw his aspirations, as well as the prophetic encouragements he received in India, finally came to fruition. After his transformative retreat at the Śāntipur Temple, Vanaratna returned to Tibet with a new-found confidence and expanded Vajrayāna repertoire, and found a much more favorable set of conditions than he encountered during his first trip. Early in his visit he finally gained an audience with a Tibetan king just as prophesied in Bodh Gayā: the recently-enthroned Phag mo gru monarch Grags pa 'byung gnas. It was this meeting, and Grags pa 'byung gnas's subsequent patronage, which can be argued was the catalyst that launched his career as an influential and widely-revered teacher in Tibet. With the talented oral translator 'Jam dpal ye shes at his side, Vanaratna served as a *paṇḍita* and *vajrācārya* for elite ecclesiastical community surrounding the Phag mo gru court, and, as his reputation grew, traveled widely throughout central Tibet at the invitation of Tibetan teachers and monastic abbots. It was also during these years that Vanaratna first met gZhon nu dpal and forged the close and highly productive relationship with him that resulted in a number of translations of his works and canonical, as well as gZhon nu dpal's biography of his teacher, the *ŽP*. When Vanaratna finally left Tibet, he did so as a celebrated master whose departure was lamented by the king, his court, and many of the great Buddhist figures of the time. Brimming with confidence and flush with gold, Vanaratna descended from the Tibetan plateau with the aspiration to return to India, and his old home in Bodh Gayā. At this point in his narrative, both the *ŽP* and SG give us the impression that Vanaratna only intended to transit through Nepal on his way to India, and certainly did not have plans to establish his primary seat there and attain successes that rivaled those he found in Tibet. Vanaratna's plans are made most evident in the response he gave to Grags pa 'byung gnas's pleas that he remain in Tibet, ideally for the rest of

his life. Vanaratna demurred by saying:

“I gave you an appropriate and valuable series of initiations and instructions. Now, to succeed in my own great purpose, I will spend some time Nepal, a place of clean land and water, [and then go to] Vajrāsana, where I will build a stone statue of my great guru, Buddhaghōṣa. Then I will go into seclusion for a few years and enhance my spiritual activity. If I succeed in this wish, I can return [to Tibet], if possible.”¹

On his way back to Nepal, Vanaratna fulfilled a long-standing invitation from Lha dbang rgyal msthan (1404-1464),² the king of Mang yul Gung thang, which required him to follow a route that passed through this kingdom in mNga ris instead of taking the more easterly route through Chubar and Dolakhā that he used for all his other trips between Nepal and Tibet. This route also afforded him the chance to visit the famous Āryavati (*'phags pa wa ti*) image of Avalokiteśvara at sKyid rong.³ After lingering in Gung thang for some time to give teachings and initiations under the patronage of the royal family and the resident bla ma Chos dpal bzang po (1371-1439), Vanaratna continued onwards to Nepal, stopping first at sKyid rong where he made lavish offerings to the Avalokiteśvara statue and continued to give teachings to the royal family, local clergy, and members of his entourage.⁴

For the account of this journey we have, in addition to bSod nam rgya mtsho's version of events, a brief description provided by Vanaratna's oral translator 'Jam dpal ye shes,⁵ who accompanied Vanaratna to Gung thang and then escorted him all the way to the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley. According to both the SG and NTCZ, Vanaratna was received at the border by an escort of unknown size who were to take him safely to the Kathmandu Valley. The precise composition of the group is unknown, but 'Jam dpal ye shes reports that there was a significant contingent of Sherpa religious leaders (*sher pa chos mdzad pa*) among them, led by a dignitary known only as Sher pa mkhan chen. The mkhan chen himself would only escort Vanaratna as far as the Tibet border, but the rest of the Sherpas accompanied him all the way to Kathmandu (*yam bu*), passing through Nuwakot (*bal po 'i rdzong*) along the way. Perhaps because he did not know when he would return to Tibet, and certainly because of his translator's devotional service, Vanaratna gifted 'Jam dpal ye shes with a painting (*thang ka*) of the Kālacakra he used for in his own meditation practice.⁶

¹ ŹP 20r.5-20v.1: rje btsun dam pa'i gsung gis dbang dang man ngag la sogs pa khyed la phan gdags pa 'os pa'i rim po ni bgyis | da nged rang gi don chen po bsgrub pa'i slad du bal po phal chad gnas dang chu bzang | rdo rje'i gdan du bla ma chen po sangs rgyas dbyangs kyi sku 'dra rdo las bsgrub pa gcig kyang bzhengs | de nas dben par re shig 'dug pa lags | nged lo shes cig dge sbyor 'phel (ŹP^a; der dge sbyor 'phel ŹP^b) | 'dod pa grub na slad kyis 'ong ba'ng srid do gsung.

² The invitation was made prior to Vanaratna's second trip to Tibet, but Vanaratna instead chose to accept the invitation of Si tu Rab btan of rGyal rtse, and so did not have another opportunity to visit Gung thang until almost a decade later (ŹP 16r.1-2).

³ This is the famous image of Avalokiteśvara in his form of Khasarpāṇi that had traditionally been housed at sKyid rong. The image was one in a set of four sandalwood images of Avalokiteśvara said to be carved from a single tree. The others in the set are believed to include the Red Lokeśvara (Newari: Buṅgadyo) and White Lokeśvara (Janabāhādyo) statues in the Kathmandu Valley, and the image of Avalokiteśvara at the Potala Palace in Lhasa. The sKyid rong image is presently housed at the Dalai Lama's residence in Dharamsala, India (Stearns 2007: 499-500, note 369).

⁴ NTCZ 32v.4-5.

⁵ This account, which is found in 'Jam dpal ye shes's *bLa chen chos dpal bzang po 'i rnam thar* (NTCZ) has also been studied in Ehrhard 2017.

⁶ NTCZ 33r.1-3.

Curiously, 'Jam dpal ye shes states that Vanaratna's journey from sKyid rong to the Kathmandu Valley passed uneventfully (*nyes byed med pa*), which is quite different than the picture painted by bSod nams rgya mtsho, whose description of the journey focuses entirely on the difficulties Vanaratna faced. According to the SG, prior to departing sKyid rong Vanaratna received warning that the road was dangerous, prompting him to seek the assistance of local deities, who granted him a mantra to protect him from thieves. Their intervention was timely, as a powerful Nepalese official named Koka Sāhu and his men were lying in wait for Vanaratna along the road just outside the Valley. Learning of this in advance, Vanaratna dutifully employed the mantra, and a torrential rainstorm prevented Koka Sāhu from accosting Vanaratna and his party.⁷ His escape from Koka Sāhu was short-lived, however; Koka Sāhu would continue to harass Vanaratna after he arrived in the Valley, and through his doggedness may have inadvertently catalyzed the very conditions that compelled Vanaratna to remain in the Valley, and which in turn catalyzed his future success there.

The Taxman Cometh

Apart from Jayayakṣamalla, the king for the majority of Vanaratna's residence in Nepal, no single figure features as prominently in Vanaratna's narrative in Nepal as Koka Sāhu. Based on the accounts given by bSod nams rgya mtsho in the SG and Chos grags ye shes in the NTSG, Koka Sāhu appears to have served the kings of Bhaktapur as something like a customs agent, one that, according to Chos grags ye shes, was specifically assigned to assess and extract tariffs from travelers arriving from Tibet.⁸ Because the Nepalese kingdom's wealth was significantly enhanced by tariffs on goods traded between Tibet and Nepal or that passed through the country,⁹ it is not surprising that Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho would have dealings with such an official, but the degree to which he intervenes in their lives, and the extent to which he is described in both Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho's biography indicate that Koka Sāhu was a prominent and powerful figure in Valley politics.

Though we are never told what specific position Koka Sāhu held in the Malla administration, he is described by both bSod nams rgya mtsho and Chos grags ye shes as a *gnas po*, an elusive term that means something like "resident" or "host,"¹⁰ a designation that may refer to the fact that his residential compound was used to "host" newly arrived travelers while their tariffs were calculated and exacted. This is in fact precisely what happened to bSod nams rgya mtsho when he first arrived in the Valley in 1465; according to the NTSG, bSod nams rgya mtsho spent his first night in Kathmandu at Koka Sāhu's home, which was located near Jamala Vihāra, the home of the Sveta Lokeśvara image in the old city of Kathmandu.¹¹ Based on what we know from bSod nams rgya mtsho's description of Vanaratna's return to the Valley, it would appear that Koka Sāhu managed a network of informants who could alert him to the pending arrival of prominent, and potentially wealthy travelers like Vanaratna, and was in command of a personal militia, labeled "bandits" (*jag pa*) by bSod nams rgya mtsho, that he could marshal to waylay such a traveler on the roads leading into the Valley. Koka Sāhu also had significant

⁷ SG 33v.6-34r.5.

⁸ NTSG^b 352.20-1: *gnas po de yang bod thams cad la dngos po ci lon blta*.

⁹ Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 111.

¹⁰ We will see later that another official in Dolakhā who was involved in tariff collection was given the title *gnas po* as well.

¹¹ NTSG^b 352.198-24. On this temple, one of the three most important Avalokiteśvara/Matsyendranātha images in Kathmandu, see Slusser 1982, vol. 1: 379-80; vol. 2, maps 4 and 7.

freedom and power to enforce the kingdom’s tax laws within the Valley, as is evinced by the fact that he hounded and harassed Vanaratna during the *paṇḍitas* brief stay in the city of Kathmandu, and eventually drove him to seek sanctuary in Patan, where he was afforded some protection by the leaders of the Buddhist community there. Given his persistent antagonism, it is unsurprising that both bSod nams rgya mtsho and Chos grags ye shes refer to Koka Sāhu as “ill-natured” (*rang bzhin ngan pa*) and “like a nasty crow” (*bya rog ngan pa lta bu*).¹² For his part, Vanaratna believed that that his initially poor standing in the eyes of the king and the nobility was due in large part to Koka Sāhu’s slander at court.¹³

We are given further insights into Koka Sāhu’s position in the Malla government and the tax laws he was tasked to enforce in a sequence of events that ensued upon bSod nams rgya mtsho’s arrival in the Valley in 1465. When he reached Bhaktapur at the end of his arduous journey from Tibet, bSod nams rgya mtsho quickly found himself in the custody of Koka Sāhu and sequestered at his residence in Kathmandu:

They spent that night in Kathmandu at the home of the host, Koka Sāhu, which was located near the *vihāra* housing the Jamala Avalokiteśvara. He gave the host many excellent gifts. The host would investigate all Tibetans to see what goods they brought, and though he was a man of dubious character, he sincerely showed respect to the great man and offered him unfailing hospitality. [bSod nams rgya mtsho] gave him two *zho* of gold, and said “We will need provisions to stay here a long time.” He was surprised, and asked “What do you plan on doing with this amount of goods? Are you staying longer than the Year of the Monkey? Will you be putting on a *pūja*?” They said that they would indeed need to perform *pujās*, and that they would be requesting many *gaṇacakras*. [Koka Sāhu] agreed that they needed many provisions.¹⁴

Through this scene, ambiguous though it may be in places, we learn something of Koka Sāhu’s position and the kinds of negotiations that could take place between a high-profile Tibetan visitor and the local tax official. It is clear from this account that Koka Sāhu was an official empowered by the king to inspect the goods of Tibetans entering the Valley. Whether or not he hosted most of them at his personal compound in Kathmandu is unclear, but perhaps bSod nams rgya mtsho was afforded this honor because he was a prominent, and clearly wealthy, religious official. The offering of “many excellent gifts,” which can surely be read as “bribes,” seemed to be expected, and it is apparent that Koka Sāhu was at least temporarily mollified by what bSod nams rgya mtsho offered him. Less clear is what the two *zho* of gold bSod nams rgya mtsho paid him was intended for; it could have been the taxes on the goods he carried with him, but the language of the passage also suggests that bSod nams rgya mtsho asked Koka Sāhu to serve as a broker in acquiring additional goods he would need during his stay. Koka Sāhu was initially surprised by the amount of goods requested, and inquired further about the amount of time bSod nams rgya mtsho intended to remain in the Valley and what the purpose of the goods would be. Whatever

¹² SG 34r.3-4, 34v.1.

¹³ SG 36r.1.

¹⁴ NTSG^b 352.17- 25: de nub yam bur ’phags pa dza ma li’i gtsug lag khang gi nye glos gnas po ko ka sā hu’i khang par bzhugs te | gnas po la gñang sbyin bzang po mdzad | gnas po de yang bod thams cad la dngos po ci lon blta zhing | gdug pa’isems dang bcas pa zhig na’ang | skyes chen ’di la dang ba’i blos gus par gyur te | zhabs tog g.yo med du phul | de nas gnas po la gser zho do gñang ste | nged rñams ’dir sdod ring gi chas kha dgos shes stsal bas | kho ha las te | ci tsam gyi chas khas ci mdzad pa yin | khyed rang lo sprel nas bzhugs pa yin nam | pū ja gñong ba yin zhu ba la pū ja’ang gñong dgos sam la ga ṇa cakra mang po zhu ba yin pas yo byad mang po dgos shes bka’ gñang |

conversation ensued, it satisfied Koka Sāhu’s suspicious so that he agreed to the amount of goods requested. The scene is insufficiently detailed to draw concrete conclusions about the exchange, but its general contours indicate that there were restrictions on the amount of time a Tibetan visitor could stay in the Valley, what goods they could acquire, and the use to which those goods could be put. It would further seem that goods used for religious services, in this case “*pūjās*,” were considered legitimate and permissible. In total, these considerations were likely a part of the calculation on the taxes to be levied against bSod nams rgya mtsho, and it would appear that his religious purposes kept the tariffs to a reasonable minimum.

The royal bureaucracy and its representative Koka Sāhu were not finished with bSod nams rgya mtsho, however, as is evident from the scene that unfolded the next day at Gopicandra Vihāra:

After the earlier tax on his gold and other offerings, [bSod nams rgya mtsho] was worried that the devious king would become greedy. And indeed, as soon as [bSod nams rgya mtsho] offered [Vanaratna] a long, unbroken bolt of ceremonial fabric, the king was aware of it and sent the host [Koka Sāhu] to argue that additional taxes were owed. His Eminence [bSod nams rgya mtsho] said, “It would be better if the king didn’t speak this way; it is utterly shameful if he does. No matter what it is the king wants, it is something that I, a renunciant, have offered to my guru out of faith. It is not right for him to take it as it was permissible for me to give it.” He then gave [Koka Sāhu] the bolt of fabric, who left with it feeling embarrassed. He reported back to the king, saying regretfully, “He is a great Tibetan, and for that reason I feel ashamed at my own behavior.” He added, “From now on we cannot let this happen again. After this you must demonstrate greatness.” For the rest of his time in Nepal the Lord used his provisions in service of the precious great *paṇḍita*. Even though it was confirmed that the provisions of the master and disciples would not be taken from Gopicandra, the precious great *paṇḍita* said, “Use your provisions to perform a *gaṇacakra*, but if we don’t combine our goods the people of Nepal will learn there is a great Tibetan bla ma here, only to come and say ‘they didn’t even give us food!.’ I would hear a lot about it.”¹⁵

This scene is illuminating on two points: first, it is plainly evident that Koka Sāhu served at the explicit order of the king, and could be dispatched at moment’s notice to any part of the Kathmandu Valley, including the semi-autonomous Buddhist enclaves of Patan, with the authority to seize whatever goods or taxes the king demanded; second, as was suggested in the scene above, items that were intended for religious use—be it as part of a religious *pūjā*, or in this case as offerings to one’s guru—belonged to a special category of goods that were protected from excessive taxes, at least in theory if not in always in practice. The special status of religious goods is further demonstrated in a scene that will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. In short, one of Jayayakṣa’s sons wanted to acquire a bolt of saffron cloth bSod nams rgya mtsho brought as an offering for Vanaratna. A moment of political awkwardness ensued,

¹⁵ NTSG^b 353.7-14: der gser la sogs pa’i ’bul ba mngon tshan can sngas na | rgyal po gdug pa can de brnab sems skyes dogs | dar chen dkar po kha ’brel cig gi mjal dar phul bas | de ma thag rgyal pos tshor nas | gnas po mngags te snga ’phrul dgos shes brtsad du byung ba la | dam pa ’dis | de ’dra rgyal po mi zer la che | zer na ngo yang tsha | cis kyang rgyal po dod na | nged bya bral bas bla ma la dad pas phul ba de len par mi rigs | nged kyis byin pas chog gsungs nas | dar chen kha ’brel zhig gngang bas | gnas poo skyengs thabs kyis khyer nas song | de rgyal po la bsnyad pas khong rang bod kyi mi che ba rang yin pa’i don gyis | nged rang ngo tsha ba rang byas ’dug ces ’gyid cing | physis nged rnams yod ring de ’dra lan cig kyang ma byung | de physis kyang khyad chen po byung ba ’dra gsung.

but in the end bSod nams rgya mtsho was able to keep the bolt of cloth because, as stated by Chos grags ye shes in the NTSG, “it was deemed shameful to purchase mendicant’s clothes since [Jayayakṣa] became king of the realm.”¹⁶ bSod nams rgya mtsho appears to invoke this special status when Koka Sāhu seizes the offering cloth he was presenting to Vanaratna; bSod nams rgya chides Koka Sāhu for depriving a religious renunciant such as himself of the goods he brought specifically to make use as a religious offering, and reminds him that such religious offerings to a spiritual master are permitted, with the further implication that they should not be taxed and that insisting on it would be improper. In Chos grags ye shes’s telling, Koka Sāhu was embarrassed by the encounter, possibly because he knew it violated protocols, but was powerless to refuse the king’s command. None of this definitively identifies a formal law governing taxes and trade, but the repetition of a similar set of sentiments at least points to a body of common practice that was perhaps enshrined by edict or royal decree, and may have even represented a provision of the kingdom’s tax code.

Home at Last: Vanaratna’s Seat at Gopicandra Vihāra

Returning to Vanaratna’s narrative, Koka Sāhu’s seemingly relentless pursuit of the *paṇḍita* has important implications for the arc of Vanaratna’s life in the Kathmandu Valley, and it could be argued that if it were not for the taxman’s early pressure on Vanaratna, his career there may have followed a very different course. Koka Sāhu’s harassment of Vanaratna also gives us a unique glimpse into the politics of the Valley at the time, as it creates something of a diplomatic incident that attracts the attention and intervention of the powerful civic leaders of Patan, the *mahāpātras*. The incident begins almost immediately upon Vanaratna’s arrival in the Kathmandu Valley, shortly after his initial escape from Koka Sāhu’s grasp on the road into the Valley. When he finally reached the Kathmandu Valley, Vanaratna and his entourage were first escorted to Thām Bahī (*stham vi ha ra*; image 17),¹⁷ a monastery in the city of Kathmandu widely known by its Sanskrit name, Vikramaśīla. Located in what is now the Thamel neighborhood of Kathmandu, but which was then located a short distance outside the city walls,¹⁸ this monastery had served as the home for a number of Indian masters residing in or passing through the Kathmandu Valley. The earliest among them was Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna, otherwise known as Atīśa, who stayed there in the mid 11th century,¹⁹ while Vibhūticandra (ca. twelfth-thirteenth centuries) also served as its periodic abbot during his stays in the Kathmandu Valley.²⁰ As was very likely the case with Gopicandra Vihāra, Vanaratna’s future seat in Patan, Thām Bāhi was home to so many prominent foreign Buddhist masters, Vanaratna included, because it was not counted among the principal hereditary monasteries of the Kathmandu Valley.²¹

bSod nams rgya mtsho does not offer any details about Vanaratna’s time at Thām Vihāra, but based on his account it would appear that Vanaratna did not stay there for long, which was entirely due to Koka Sāhu’s harassment. bSod nams rgya mtsho states that Vanaratna was never comfortable at Thām Bahī because staying so close to city of Kathmandu left him exposed to

¹⁶ NTSG^b 352.15: khong rang yul ’di’i rgyal po byas nas bya bral ba’i gos nyo ba ngo tsha ba yin pa.

¹⁷ SG 34r.6.

¹⁸ See Slusser 1985 vol. 2, map 7.

¹⁹ It is frequently claimed that Thām Bahī was founded by Atīśa, an argument disputed by Locke, who suggests that it predates him (1985: 412-13).

²⁰ Stearns 1996: *passim*; Locke 1985: 411

²¹ Locke 1985: 407.

Koka Sāhu. Across the Bagmati river in predominantly Buddhist Patan, a group of local leaders learned of Vanaratna’s predicament and intervened on his behalf. bSod nams rgya mtsho writes:

[Vanaratna] was never comfortable in and around Kathmandu because Koka Sāhu was acting like a nasty crow. The king of Patan, Jayapāla, understood the situation and invited him to Patan. The three of the Licchavi royal line, Yakṣasena and the rest, offered him the great and glorious Gopicandra Vihāra.²²

This brief scene that begins with Koka Sāhu’s harassment and ends with Vanaratna’s move from Kathmandu to Patan reveals something of the political status of the Valley’s three main cities. At the time of Vanaratna’s return to the Kathmandu Valley, the kingdom of Nepal was twelve years into the reign of Jayayakṣamalla (1428-82), who ruled over a unified, stable, and prosperous kingdom from Bhaktapur. While Jayayakṣa’s reign is regarded as the high-water mark of the Medieval Malla period, signs of the kingdom’s political fracturing were on display, and as Vanaratna discovered, it was easy for a foreign *paṇḍita* to become unwittingly entangled in the political maneuverings of local leaders. In this instance at least, it worked out much to Vanaratna’s benefit.

The key agents of Vanaratna’s rescue are a group of civic leaders identified in the SG as the “king” of Patan Jayapāla, and three members of the Licchavi noble family headed by one Yakṣasena. Neither Jayapāla nor Yakṣasena are known to us from other sources, but it would appear that bSod nams rgya mtsho is here describing the *mahāpātras*, the powerful leaders of Patan, a city council of sorts comprised of seven prominent families (*saptakutumba*) who ruled over the city with increasingly independent authority during the medieval Malla period.²³ Among the seven families that made up this council, three of them (*tribhayapātra*) traditionally took a leading role in the governance of Patan. Thus it is perhaps these three who are referred to by bSod nams rgya mtsho as the “three of the Licchavi royal line.”²⁴ We are unfortunately otherwise in the dark about Yakṣasena, as there is no one by that name listed among the *mahāpātras* in the historical record. A copperplate inscription at Ibā Bahī in Patan dating to 1427 lists three prominent and two lesser *mahāpātras* of Patan: Rājasimha Malladevavarman, Udayasimha Mallavarman, Jayadharmasimha Mallavarman, Rudrasimha Mallavarman, and Jayabhīma Mallavarman.²⁵ This list is not complete, and dates to more than a decade before the events described by bSod nams rgya mtsho, making it possible that there was a change in leadership among the seven families, and that our available historical sources simply do not record the names of the leading nobles in Patan in the middle decades of the fifteenth century.

We are on equally uncertain ground when identifying the “king of Patan,” Jayapāla. As Tuladhar-Douglas argues, this could have been the royally-appointed governor of Patan, and

²² SG 34v.1-3: yam bu sogs su ko ka sā hu bya rog ngan pa lta bu des thugs so mi bsod pa la | ye rang gi rgyal po ja ye pā las de’i tshul rig nas ye rang du spyān drangs | litstsha vi’i rgyal rigs jakṣa se naḥ sogs gsum gyis go bi tsandra’i gtsug lag khang chen po phul ba.

²³ Regmi 1966: 423-5; Petech 1984, 191-2; Slusser 1985, vol. 1: 62; Tuladhar-Douglas 2006: 135. As discussed in the previous chapter, the *mahāpātras* were already asserting their autonomy in Patan during the reign of Jayayakṣa’s father, Jyotirmalla.

²⁴ As noted by Tuladhar-Douglas, it is likely that the designation of these families as Licchavis is dubious, and that the *mahāpātras* may have identified themselves with this prestigious royal house of Nepalese and South Asian antiquity to bolster their genealogical claims to authority.

²⁵ Regmi 1965: Appendix A 56-57; Petech 1984, 167. Regmi shows convincingly that Udayasimha wielded the most influence among the *mahāpātras* of the time and was active at Jayayakṣa’s court (Regmi 1965: 424, 445-49).

goes so far as to suggest he could be an otherwise unknown Malla relation of Jayayakṣa. This is certainly plausible, as the style of shared rule by members of the royal family was common among the Mallas of the period.²⁶ Later in Vanaratna’s biography we find additional references to a “king” of Patan as one among a group of “three kings” who assembled at Bhaktapur to consider permitting Vanaratna to visit Tibet in 1452.²⁷ Thus, evidence from Tibetan sources would suggest that a system of joint rule or power sharing among three “kings” was in place, one of whom was undeniably king Jayayakṣamalla in Bhaktapur, and which also included the otherwise unknown Jayapāla in Patan. One would expect a governor of Patan to be found elsewhere in the historical record, particularly if he was indeed a member of the royal family. Thus, we need to approach bSod nams rgya mtsho’s account with some care, but because he lived in Patan for a year and was surely familiar with Vanaratna’s patrons there both from his own experiences and from Vanaratna’s reports, we cannot easily dismiss his reference to Jayapāla and a distinct royal governor of Patan as spurious. Also curious is the fact that whenever the “three kings” are referenced in the SG, only Bhaktapur and Patan are mentioned explicitly, not once is the city of Kathmandu connected with one of these three rulers.²⁸

Whatever the prevailing power structure, Vanaratna’s clash with Koka Sāhu demonstrates the semi-independence of Patan’s leadership at the time of Vanaratna’s return from Tibet. Koka Sāhu, an agent of the Bhaktapur court, had a free hand to torment Vanaratna in and around Kathmandu, but found his hand restrained when Vanaratna was granted the protection of Patan’s political leadership. This protection was not absolute, as we know from the scene in the NTSG reported above that Jayayakṣa could send Koka Sāhu to Patan when he felt the kingdom’s taxation practices were being violated, but it is also clear from the Tibetan *rnam thars* that Vanaratna enjoyed much greater freedom in Patan, and no longer felt besieged by government officials like Koka Sāhu as he did in Kathmandu. Thus, while this sequence of events from the SG is illuminating for our understanding of the politics of the Kathmandu Valley in the mid-fifteenth century, its impact on Vanaratna’s narrative is perhaps of greater significance. It has already been noted that Vanaratna was keen on returning to India, and so planned for only a short stay in the Kathmandu Valley. His initial decision to stay at Thām Vihāra in Kathmandu, home of many transiting Indian masters over the centuries, fits well with this itinerary. When Vanaratna was driven from Thām Vihāra by Koka Sāhu’s harassment, a new set of conditions was created, one in which he received the political patronage of Buddhist leaders in Patan, the *mahāpātras*, and culminated in their decision to grant him Gopicandra Vihāra. This was a pivotal moment in his relationship both with the Buddhist community of Patan and with the Kathmandu Valley as whole; though he did not fully accept it as such yet, Vanaratna was home.

When Yakṣasena and the other leaders of Patan offered him Gopicandra Vihāra, Vanaratna accepted it with reluctance. Concerned that he was being asked to oversee the *vihāra* in an

²⁶ Tuladar-Douglas 2006: 139, note 72. Jayayakṣa is believed to have had seven sons, Rāyamalla, Ratnamalla, Raṇamalla, Rāmamalla, Arimalla, Purnamalla, and Bhīmamalla, all of whom were granted some degree of political responsibility during Jayayakṣa’s reign and then continued to govern after his death. Among them, Ratnamalla governed Patan (and Kathmandu), perhaps even before Jayayakṣa’s death, and did so together with his younger brother Rāmamalla. There is no indication that either of these sons attempted to challenge or circumvent Jayayakṣa’s authority during his lifetime. Jayayakṣa also nominally shared power with his brother Jayajīva Malla, but there is likewise no record that he had any influence in Patan or challenged his brother’s authority in any way. See Regmi 1965: 439-444, 452-65; Petech 1984: 161-82.

²⁷ SG 41r.3. This scene from the SG is cited in full below.

²⁸ This may reflect the fact that Bhaktapur and Kathmandu were more closely aligned, with the ruler of Kathmandu being an appointed subordinate and likely relation of the king of Bhaktapur (Alexander von Rospatt, personal communication).

official capacity, he invoked his status as an *avadhūta* in order to deflect any obligations his new patrons might be imposing on him:

The three of the Licchavi royal line, Yakṣasena and the rest, offered him the great and glorious Gopicandra Vihāra. When they did, he told them “I am an *avadhūta*, so I take no personal responsibility [for the *vihāra*]. I will only stay here as long as it makes sense to.” And so he [agreed to] stay.²⁹

Despite his initial reluctance, Vanaratna would remain at Gopicandra for the rest of his life—apart from a single additional trip to Tibet—and would become its *de facto* abbot. Under his watch the *vihāra* became a vital site for the Newar Buddhists of Patan, and it was there that he built his career as a celebrated *paṇḍita* and *vajrācārya* in service of the Newar Buddhist community and the Bhaktapur court.

Gopicandra Vihāra, better known by its Newari name Pintu Bahī (image 18), is located in the northernmost neighborhood of the old city of Patan, and is counted among a corporation of fifteen major *bahīs*, institutions that were primarily monastic rather than tantric.³⁰ Pintu Bahī is believed to have been founded by an Indian disciple of Sunaya Śrī Mīśra. Sunaya Śrī Mīśra was an Indian master who moved to Patan from Kapilavastu in the late twelfth century and founded the monastery of I Bahī,³¹ and the unnamed Indian disciple who founded Pintu Bahī may have traveled with him at that time. The Indian origins of this monastery may explain why it was suitable option for the *mahāpātras* to offer Vanaratna; like Tham Bahī, there seemed to be no hereditary or caste-based preclusion to hosting a foreigner. The fact that Vanaratna was given stewardship of the *vihāra* also suggests that it was considered a branch monastery of one of Patan’s larger, hereditary institutions. Such a monastery would not have had a stable *saṅgha* dedicated to its upkeep, and would only have been active when resident was appointed by the local community to oversee it. Such a situation is evident in Vanaratna’s narrative, which notes that the *vihāra* was in a state of neglect when he took charge of it. The SG states explicitly that the *vihāra* was in need of repair to bring the facilities up to living standards, and that Vanaratna himself renovated a small shrine room in the middle of the complex for his personal use.³² Gopicandra was already in possession of a small collection of Buddhist scriptures, including a copy of the *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, which were kept in an alcove in the room where Vanaratna would meditate.³³ Over the years he would make improvements to Gopicandra, including the commission of a large gilded and bejeweled statue of Vajradhara that he erected there after finally abandoning his plans to return to Bodh Gayā and build a statue of Buddhaghōṣa there. The statue of Vajradhara is described in detail by bSod nams rgya mtsho:

Because he could not fulfill his wish to build a statue of the lord Buddhaghōṣa in Vajrāsana, he instead decided to build a golden statue of Vajradhara. It was

²⁹ SG 34v.3-4: litstsha vi’i rgyal rigs jakṣa se naḥ sogs gsum gyis go bi tsandra’i gtsug lag khang chen po phul ba’i dus (*em. du SG*) a va dhu tīḥ yin bdag gir mi byed | ji tsam rig (*em. rigs SG*) pa de srid du ’dug pa yin gsung nas bzhugs.

³⁰ Locke 1985: 199; 207-9; Gellner 1987: 386. 390-2.

³¹ Locke 1985, 203. The earliest datable reference to Pintu Bahī is found in the colophon to a manuscript of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* composed at the *vihāra* during the reign of Jayasthitimalla in 1391/ N.S 511 (Petech 1984, 141).

³² SG 34v.3: de’i dbus kyī mchod khang chung ngu zhig ’dug pa la zhig gsos kyang mdzad.

³³ SG 36r.6: shes rab kyī pha rol tu phyin pa ’bum gyi glegs bam sogs bzhugs pa’i skye tshang gcig yod pa.

approximately five *rgyab mtho* [in height],³⁴ precisely proportioned, and embellished with beautiful ornaments made of a variety of precious gems. Behind the [deity’s] throne was a façade presenting the lineage masters of the six yogas. To the right and left of the central image he erected images of Chos rgyal grags pa and Pad dkar.³⁵ It was altogether wonderfully executed.³⁶

According to bSod nams rgya mtsho, the statue became a famous landmark known as “the Magnificent Vajradhara,” and was made available for public viewing during an annual ten-day festival.^{37 38} The image is no longer *in situ*, but Hubert Decler believes he has identified it in a Sotheby’s auction catalog (image 19).³⁹ Some years later Vanaratna later added a smaller, but equally renowned golden statue of Tārā to the shrine that was said to come to life and speak.⁴⁰ This statue too is now lost, likely to the private art market.

Once Vanaratna had settled in at Gopicandra, the *vihāra* rapidly grew into a hub of Buddhist activity that attracted Nepal’s nobility, local residents, and visitors from India and other places abroad.⁴¹ Vanaratna appears to have followed a regular routine that balanced teachings and ritual activities in service of his students and patrons, with ample time for his own private meditation practice. bSod nams rgya mtsho describes Vanaratna’s daily schedule as consisting of early morning ablutions followed by a half day of teachings, initiations, and other activities dedicated to the spiritual needs of the community. His teachings ranged from general discussions of religious terminology, to initiation instructions and personal guidance on individual practices. In his capacity as a *vajrācārya*, Vanaratna would also regularly preside over *gaṇacakras* at Gopicandra, and performed frequent *homa* rites in service of the local community’s more practical ritual needs. Over the years he would add philanthropic work to his daily schedule, receiving large numbers of supplicants throughout the day and using Gopicandra as a foodbank to serve the underprivileged in the community. When Vanaratna’s daily religious and charitable

³⁴ The precise measure of a *rgyab mtho*, literally “back height,” is unknown but could, as the term suggests, be the length of the back of an average human torso.

³⁵ It is unclear precisely what figures are intended here. It is possible that Chos rgyal grags pa refers to the Phag mo gru monarch Grags pa ’byung gnas, but that would seem an odd inclusion, unless Vanaratna considered the king to be the patron of the image. The name *pad dkar* is too generic to warrant a guess.

³⁶ 37v.4-6.: de nas rdo rje’i gdan du rje sangs rgyas dbyangs kyi sku bzhengs bzhed ’dod yod pa ma grub pas | de’i dod du rdo rje ’chang gi gser sku rgyab mtho lnga tsam yod pa | phyag tshad kyi nges pa dang mthun zhing rin po che sna tshogs kyi rgyan bzang pos spras pa | khrid rgyab [.....] ma’i rgyab yol gyi ngos la sbyor drug gi bla ma brgyud pa rnams | sku g.yas g.yon du chos rgyal grags pa dang pad kar gyi bzhengs sku gnyis dang bcas pa mchog tu rgyu rkyen phun sum tshogs pa gcig bzhengs.

³⁷ The ten-day festival mentioned in the SG may refer to the ten days around the full moon during *gumlā*, the “month of merit” that generally coincides with August. During this time Buddhist monasteries around the Valley will open their doors to the general public and display their images, texts, and other sacred possessions. On *gumlā*, see Lewis 1993, especially pp. 322-26 and 334-36.

³⁸ SG 38r.2.1-2: des na byin rlabs kyi cho ’phrul chen po dang ldan pa’i don gyis lo re zhing mchod pa’i dus ston bzang po zhag bcu shas tsam sbrel ba mdzad nas yul mi phal che ba mjal du ’jug | thams cad kyis kyang vajra dha ra ma hā vi ci tra zer nas ngo mtshar du ’dzin par snang ngo.

³⁹ Personal communication, February 10th, 2019. Neither Hubert nor I could track down the precise catalog or from which Hubert scanned the image, nor the image’s lot number. There is some question about this identification, most notably because the iconography of the main deity seems to identify it as Mañjuśrī, not Vajradhara. Hubert based his identification on the surrounding lineage deities, which in his immense experience is an uncommon feature of Newari statuary.

⁴⁰ SG 51v.1-6.

⁴¹ SG 34v.3-4: ’ju ’ju mam sogs gnyug mar gnas pa dang | rgya gar sogs nas glo bur du lhags pa’i chos don du gnyer ba rnams.

activities were complete, bSod nams rgya mtsho tells us that he would prepare his single meal of the day and retire to his private cell, where he would spend the remainder of the evening in mediation.⁴²

A Buddhist *Paṇḍita* in a Buddhist Land: Vanaratna's Religious Activities and the Newar Buddhist Community

bSod nams rgya mtsho's description of Vanaratna's activities at Gopicandra clearly demonstrates that Vanaratna was an active member of the local Buddhist community, and that he spent much of his time engaged in religious activities in service of his students, patrons, and the general population. But for all of the detail the biographical materials otherwise offer on Vanaratna's life in the Kathmandu Valley, they are surprisingly silent on the specifics of his relationship with the local Buddhist community. In other words, the *rnam thars* tell us much about the setting in which Vanaratna worked, but almost nothing about what that work was. When we turn our attention to Vanaratna's corpus and the archival record, however, we find a wealth of additional data that fills in some of the gaps in our knowledge on Vanaratna's engagement with the local community.

The *rnam thars* are frustratingly silent on precisely what Vanaratna taught to his Nepalese disciples, but his collected works, which survive primarily in Tibetan translation but with a few key Sanskrit witnesses preserved in Nepalese archives,⁴³ reveal a body of work that seems clearly intended for a specialized Nepalese audience. Among this collection, the majority of his writings concern esoteric topics and practice systems and are composed in the Vajrayāna ritual genres of *sādhana*, *vidhi*, and *maṇḍalopāyika*, but also include a small number of commentarial works. The remaining texts in his corpus are primarily comprised of *stotras* and *stavas*, hymns to deities prominent in both the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist pantheons. In Vanaratna's collection of writings we see a clear reflection of the religious priorities of the Newar community, a body of work that aligns closely with the scriptural systems and deities that are of enduring importance in the Kathmandu Valley. Thus in examining Vanaratna's extant oeuvre it becomes clear that much if not all of it was defined or directed by his decades-long engagement with the Newar Buddhist community.

Focusing on Vanaratna's literary output necessarily biases us towards those aspects of Vanaratna's activities that are best suited to the written medium, leaving us in the dark about the nature of his public teachings and other modes of oral instructions. This is an unfortunate but unavoidable lacuna, as only the *rnam thars* or other biographical sources could have filled this gap. We are not entirely uninformed about Vanaratna's public teachings, however; bSod nams rgya mtsho does describe an elaborate teaching program Vanaratna gave early in his residency at Gopicandra that can perhaps be taken as indicative of his mode of teaching throughout his years in the Valley. bSod nams rgya mtsho tells us that upon his return from his second journey to Tibet, Vanaratna began a six-month course of teachings on the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus, including its 8000-, 25,000-, and 100,000-line iterations.⁴⁴ We have already seen that Vanaratna taught on

⁴² SG 34v.3-35r.2; 49v.1-6.

⁴³ Separate from these witnesses are the Sanskrit texts preserved in the Vanaratna Codex, which are not compositions by Vanaratna, but rather works he compiled or translated in Tibet. This document will be treated extensively in Chapter Seven.

⁴⁴ SG 35r.3-4.

the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus twice during his first residency in Nepal, and that the topic was familiar to him from his years in Magadha. Thus, it comes as little surprise that Vanaratna would continue to emphasize these teachings upon his return to the Valley. It was surely more than personal preference, however, that motivated him to return to this topic repeatedly. The *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus is of singular importance and reverence for the Buddhists of the Kathmandu Valley; it is considered the centerpiece of the core canon of Newar Buddhists, the *navagrantha* or “nine-texts,” it is perhaps the most copied work in Nepal, is at the heart of the manuscript collections held at many of the Valley’s monasteries, and serves as the focal point of numerous public rituals and recitations.⁴⁵ The record of this teaching is revealing of the scope and scale of Vanaratna’s public teachings, and though bSod nams rgya mtsho does not offer further accounts of Vanaratna’s teaching repertoire in Nepal, we can see from this event that Vanaratna was inclined to put on large-scale public teachings at Gopicandra in addition to the more intimate instructions he would give to individuals and small groups as alluded to in bSod nams rgya mtsho’s generic description of his activities. The *rnam thars* do not specify the language of Vanaratna’s instruction; it is thus not clear if he taught in Sanskrit and relied on a local translator, if he learned Newari well enough to teach,⁴⁶ or if his Indic dialect was understandable to his Nepalese students.

As this account of Vanaratna’s teachings on the *Prajñāpāramitā* is the only explicit description of his teachings in Nepal available in the *rnam thars*, we now turn to his collected writings and the archival record to fill out the picture in more detail. Surveying Vanaratna’s oeuvre we find that three tantric systems predominate, systems that dovetail with the most essential tantric cycles of the Kathmandu Valley:⁴⁷ the Cakrasaṃvara cycle, for which Vanaratna composed works on both a specific configuration of the maṇḍala deities and works that focused solely on its principal female deity, Vajrayoginī; the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa system and its central figure Acala; and the cult of Yogāmbara, primarily represented in Vanaratna’s corpus by Dhūmāṅgārī, a fierce protectress associated with that cycle. To his body of literature focused on these three systems are added an assortment of stand-alone works that can also be shown to either have a clear origin in Vanaratna’s service to the Newar community, or to be of specific significance for them. This includes a ritual manual for the *Pañcarakṣā* goddesses, a cult of vital importance to the Newar community, a work on the nine planets (*navagraha*) which may in fact represent Vanaratna’s notes on teachings he received in Nepal, and a series of hymns which are either topically relevant to Newar Buddhists or can be definitively shown to have been composed in Nepal. This includes his *Śabarapādaśtotraratna*, the *Gaṇeśvarastava*, and the *Ratnamālāstotra*, the latter being of enduring popularity in Nepal. Given the strong likelihood that most, if not all of his extant corpus was composed for his Newar clientele, a closer examination of his works is as revealing for the priorities of the fifteenth-century Newar Buddhist community as it is of Vanaratna’s own spiritual priorities.

Cakrasaṃvara and Vajrayoginī

The largest single body of literature in Vanaratna’s oeuvre is dedicated to the Cakrasaṃvara system, and features works on both a specific arrangement of the full maṇḍala and a cluster of texts dedicated to Vajrayoginī in her Vajravārāhī form. The Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala and

⁴⁵ Locke 2005: 268; Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 92, 147-8.

⁴⁶ Considering he had spent at least nine years in Nepal prior to this period, this is a likely scenario.

⁴⁷ Gellner 1992: 252.

Vajrayoginī comprise the most essential tantric system for the Newar Buddhist community of the Kathmandu Valley.⁴⁸ In the *Adya Mahādāna*, a standard declaration of ritual intent (*saṃkalpa*) made at the beginning of rites performed by Newar *vajracāryās*, the Kathmandu Valley is described as a terrestrial instantiation of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala. As the central deities of the maṇḍala, Cakrasaṃvara presides as main tantric deity of the Valley, while Vajrayoginī is said to continuously grace the Valley with her presence.⁴⁹ Tantric shrines to Cakrasaṃvara far outnumber those of other tantric deities in the Valley, with Vajrayoginī holding a uniquely exalted position in the tantric pantheon of Nepal. She is worshipped at some of the Valley’s most celebrated shrines, including temples at Pharping (as Vajrayoginī), near Svayambhū (as Vidyeśvarī), Chapagaon (as Vajravārāhī), Patan (as Ākāśayoginī), and Sankhu (as Khaḍgavajrayoginī).⁵⁰

At the heart of Vanaratna’s collection of writings on Cakrasaṃvara practice, and of his teachings and initiations related to it, is the thirteen-deity arrangement of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala known plainly as the *trayodaśātmakacakrasaṃvaramaṇḍala*. It was this maṇḍala that Vanaratna was initiated into at the Śāntipur temple, and this arrangement served as the primary basis for the teachings and initiations he offered on Cakrasaṃvara throughout his career in Tibet. Like much else in the narrative of his years in Nepal, we are told little about the place of this maṇḍala and Vanaratna’s interpretation of it for his Newar students. There are only two explicit references to the Cakrasaṃvara cycle in the SG: it is mentioned once during a vision of Śabaripā Vanaratna experienced at Gopicandra Vihāra,⁵¹ and then a second time when he conferred the complete initiation on bSod nams rgya mtsho, also at Gopicandra. Given the prominence of the Cakrasaṃvara system for Nepalese Buddhists, and given the Nepalese origins of the practice for Vanaratna himself, it is reasonable to speculate that Vanaratna taught this practice to Newar initiates with some frequency.

The only information we have on Vanaratna’s lineage for this practice presents it as being passed directly from Śabaripā to Vanaratna at the Śāntipur temple.⁵² This short, visionary lineage likely obscures his actual lineage, including the local masters who initiated him in Nepal, making it difficult to know precisely which lineage Vanaratna upheld. There is evidence to suggest, however, that the lineage of the Indian *siddha* Ghaṅṭāpāda was a core influence on his own practice and transmission of Cakrasaṃvara practice. That Vanaratna held or otherwise had a strong affinity for Ghaṅṭāpāda’s lineage is evident from the three works on the Cakrasaṃvara lineage he translated with Tibetan lotsāwas, including two works on the *trayodaśātmakamaṇḍala*—the *Śaṃvaratrayodaśātmakārcanavidhi* (Ōta. 4655) and the *’Khor lo sdom pa’i lus dkyil gyi mngon rtogs* (Tōh. 1439), both translated with gZhon nu dpal in 1454/4—and the *Cakrasaṃvarapañcakramopadeśa* which Vanaratna both translated and made a copy of based on a Sanskrit manuscript witness he discovered in Tibet.⁵³ Vanaratna composed his own work on this maṇḍala, the *Trayodaśātmakaśrīcakrasaṃvaramaṇḍalavidhi* (Tōh. 1489), from which an extracted section on the fourth initiation circulated as two distinct but essentially

⁴⁸ Locke 2005: 272.

⁴⁹ Gellner 1992: 191-2; O’Neill 2020: 58-60.

⁵⁰ Slusser 1982: 325-6, 331; Locke 1985 (n.p).

⁵¹ SG 36v.2-37r.2.

⁵² In the *guruparamparā* given in the *Caturabhiṣekavyavasthāna*, an extract of the *Trayodaśātmakaśrīcakrasaṃvaramaṇḍalavidhi*, Vanaratna’s rather short lineage for the *trayodaśātmaka* maṇḍala is given as: Vajradhara, Vajrayoginī, and Śabaripā (Ōta. 4666 101r.7-8).

⁵³ SG 42r.3-42v.1; NTŽP 37r.2. The circumstances of Vanaratna’s discovery of the *Pañcakramopadeśa* manuscript be examined in Chapter Seven.

identical works with different titles: the *Caturabhiṣekaparakarāṇa* (Ōta. 3106) and the *Caturabhiṣekavyavasthāna* (Ōta. 4666). Vanaratna's writings on the practice of Cakrasaṃvara practice also include a lengthy and technical commentary on Kṛṣṇācārya's *Vasantatilakā*, the *Rahasyadīpikā*. Though this is by far Vanaratna's most extensive extant work on the Cakrasaṃvara cycle, it receives only incidental mention in the *rnam thars* as one among the many texts he taught at rTse thang in Tibet during his first extended teaching program at the Phag mo gru court. Despite the fact that it is not mentioned at all in connection to his career in Nepal, the *Rahasyadīpikā* is extant in Sanskrit in multiple witnesses preserved in the archives of the Kathmandu Valley, indicating that this sophisticated work on the subtle body yogas of the Cakrasaṃvara cycle was of enduring relevance to Cakrasaṃvara initiates within the Newar community.⁵⁴

The *trayodaśātmakamaṇḍala* of the Cakrasaṃvara cycle is among the most prominent system in Vanaratna's teaching repertoire, but both the *rnam thars* and his collected works clearly indicate that his personal devotions were focused on the chief female deity of the system, Vajrayoginī. gZhon nu dpal noted early in the *ŽP* that Vajrayoginī was Vanaratna's personal deity (*iṣṭadevatā*),⁵⁵ and his personal affinity for her practice is announced in a handful of other textual sources. This includes the colophon to the Tibetan translation of the *Rahasyadīpikā*, where Vanaratna is said to have “experienced the drop of *amṛta* at the feet of the blessed and glorious Vajrayoginī,”⁵⁶ and in the translator's colophon to Rūpyakalaśa's *Hevajrasādhanapañjikā*, where he likewise is said to have “touched the dust from the feet of the blessed Vajrayoginī.”⁵⁷ Despite gZhon nu dpal's insistence that Vanaratna received instruction in the practice of Vajrayoginī during his youth at Mahācaitya Vihāra, no further reference is made to her in the biographical materials until after Vanaratna's arrival in Nepal in 1423. We have no way of determining when precisely Vanaratna began seriously cultivating his practice of Vajrayoginī, but given his initiation into the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala at Śāntipur and his subsequent consistent promotion of the thirteen-deity maṇḍala, it is likely that Vanaratna's practice of and devotion to Vajrayoginī truly began after taking up his residency in the Kathmandu Valley. That Vanaratna would deepen, or perhaps discover his devotion to Vajrayoginī/Vajravārāhī in Nepal comes as little surprise given her immense popularity there. The number of shrines dedicated to her that dot the Kathmandu Valley has already been noted, and Vajrayoginī, especially in her form as Vajravārāhī, features prominently in the ritual life of Newar Buddhists, and is well-represented in the extant ritual and devotional literature preserved in the manuscript archives of Nepal.⁵⁸

When Vajrayoginī's status as Vanaratna's personal deity is described by his students and colleagues, she is consistently referred to in her primary form as Vajrayoginī, but when we look to Vanaratna's compositions it is her subsidiary forms, and specifically that of Vajravārāhī the predominate. Three of his four extant works on Vajrayoginī feature Vajravārāhī, each describing her with unique iconographies. The *Kramadvayavajravārāhīstotra*, a lyrical hymn of exceptional literary value, invokes the traditional iconography of Vajravārāhī, framing it, as the title

⁵⁴ See Samdhong and Dwivedi (1990: 1-4) for a list of the manuscripts witnesses for both Kṛṣṇācārya's *Vasantatilakā* and Vanaratna's *Rahasyadīpikā*. Unfortunately the sudden onset of the Covid crisis prevented direct consultation of this collection in the Kathmandu archives before this dissertation was submitted.

⁵⁵ *ŽP* 3r.7.

⁵⁶ Tōh. 1449 349r.1.

⁵⁷ Tōh. 1233 67v.6.

⁵⁸ Gellner 1992: 174, 283-9. A cursory search of online databases of manuscript collections in Nepal yield over eighty entries under Vajravārāhī's name alone.

indicates, within the two stages of *utpatti*- and *utpannakrama* practice. The *Vajraghoṇasādhana*, features a form a Vajravārāhī with a single head in the shape of a sow and otherwise follows a iconographical program that sets Vajraghoṇa apart as a distinctive form of Vajravārāhī.⁵⁹ The last of his three works on Vajravārāhī, the *Vajravilāsinīnāmavajravārāhīsādhana*, is a practice manual dedicated to Vajravārāhī in her eroticized form of Vajravilāsinī, who is iconographically similar to Vajravārāhī with the important exception of lacking charnel ground attire. This *sādhana* offers instruction in both *utpattikrama* and *utpannakrama* practices, with Vajravilāsinī's erotic form being particularly relevant to the latter.⁶⁰ The fourth of Vanaratna's works on Vajrayoginī is the *Ugratārāsādhana* (Tōh. 1726), a meditation manual on the terrifying form of Vajrayoginī, reminiscent of and often conflated the Hindu goddess Kālī,⁶¹ who is worshipped at Sankhu in the eastern reaches of the Kathmandu Valley and whose popularity in Nepal is attested by the significant collection of manuscripts related to her in the Nepalese archives.⁶² Vanaratna and his Tibetan colleagues would also translate two *sādhanas* by Śāsvatavajra, both entitled *Ugratārāsādhana* (Tōh. 1727 and 1728). The works of Śāsvatavajra on Ugratārā and related forms of Vajrayoginī are particularly popular in Nepal and Tibet through the work of Gautamaśrī, a Bengali *paṇḍita* who traveled through the region in the thirteenth century.⁶³

Vanaratna's record of teachings in Tibet is also instructive for our understanding of his relationship with Vajrayoginī and his promotion of her practice. Of specific note is the prominence he gave to a Vajravārāhī *sādhana* composed by the thirteenth-century master Avadhūtipā, the *Sarvārthasādhakavajravārāhīsādhana*. Vanaratna is explicitly reported to have taught on this text twice in the years 1454-55,⁶⁴ but may have incorporated it into his repertoire prior to his second journey to Tibet. During this earlier period, which post-dates his initiation at Śāntipur, Vanaratna is known to have taught on a collection of six works on Vajrayoginī known in Tibetan as the *Phag mo gzhung drug*,⁶⁵ which includes the Avadhūtipā's *Sarvārthasādhaka* in addition to Śūnyasamādhi's *Śrītattvajñānasiddhi* and *Jñānāveśa*, Śrīmatidevī's *Chinnamuṇḍāvajravārāhīsādhana*, Virūpakṣa's *Chinnamuṇḍāsādhana*, and Buddhadatta's *Śrīvajrayoginīhomavidhi*.⁶⁶ We know little about Vanaratna's lineage for this collection, but in the case of the *Sarvārthasādhaka* specifically there are hints of a Nepalese origin. A Sanskrit manuscript dated to 1448 (N.S 568)⁶⁷ is presently preserved in Nepal's manuscript archives, demonstrating that the text was in circulation in the Kathmandu Valley during Vanaratna's residence.⁶⁸ The text was translated twice into Tibetan, once by the Nepalese *paṇḍita* Bharendraruci (Virendraruci; ca. eleventh century) and the Tibetan translator rNgog bLo ldan

⁵⁹ According to Elizabeth English (2002: 66-68), there are two forms of Vajraghoṇa: the red-colored, four-armed, and sow-faced form used by Vanaratna in the *Vajraghoṇasādhana*, and a white-colored manifestation with similar accoutrements.

⁶⁰ On this form of Vajrayoginī, see English 2002: 84-94.

⁶¹ On the various forms of Ugratārā and their significance across South Asian religions and regions, see Bühnemann 1996.

⁶² A search of the NGMCP database yielded well over 150 manuscripts featuring Ugratārā.

⁶³ Sinclair forthcoming: 5-6.

⁶⁴ Vanaratna is known to have taught on the *Sarvārthasādhakasādhana* at sNe'u gdong in 1454/5, and then again a short time later at Byams pa gling (SG 43r.6; NTSN 39r.7).

⁶⁵ The DN alone contains a record of this teachings, which was given at rTse thang shortly after Vanaratna returned from a side trip to Bhutan (DN 22v.2).

⁶⁶ English 2002: 384, n. 4.

⁶⁷ In addition to this Sanskrit manuscript witness, the *sādhana* is also available in the *Sādhanamālā* with the generic title *Vajravārāhīsādhana* (no. 224; vol. 2, pp. 437-8).

⁶⁸ NAK 3/693 (microfilm# A 936/11), ff. 49r-51r.

shes rab (1059-1109), and later by gZhon nu dpal under Vanaratna's supervision (Tōh. 1604). A comparison of the two Tibetan translations with the Sanskrit witness reveals much greater alignment between the extant Nepalese manuscript and gZhon nu dpal's translation, suggesting the possibility it was this lineage that Vanaratna propagated in Tibet.

While reference to the *Phag mo gzhung drug* demonstrates that Vajrayoginī held a prominent place in his oeuvre by the time of his second visit to Tibet, the majority of references to Vajrayoginī in his teaching program occur during his third visit, which possibly indicates that Vanaratna had significantly expanded his repertoire of Vajrayoginī practices in the years between his second and third journeys to Tibet. In addition to the two occasions in 1453-55 on which Vanaratna taught the *Sarvārthasādhakavajravārāhīsādhana*, we find allusions to two of Vanaratna's own compositions during this period. The SG and NTSN both report that Vanaratna taught on a series of Vajravārāhī practices at this time, including a development stage practice of Vajravārāhī, which may refer to his *Kramadvayavajravārāhīstotra*, and a two faced form of Vajravārāhī, which could be a reference to the *Vajravilāsinīvajravārāhīsādhana* which features a two-faced form of the deity and which Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho are known to have translated together around this time.⁶⁹ Given that these texts appear among his teachings for the first time during his third journey, and given his extensive engagement with the Nepalese community in the years prior, it is possible to speculate that Vanaratna had incorporated a new body of Vajrayoginī practices into his practice and teaching repertoire, and composed a small collection of new works for his Nepalese students. When he returned to Tibet for the final time in 1453-55, he brought this collection of fresh teachings to Tibet so he could share them with his Tibetan disciples as well.

Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa

The second system represented in Vanaratna's corpus that can be directly linked with his Nepalese clientele is the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra*, and specifically its central deity Acala. Like the Cakrasaṃvara cycle, Vanaratna taught regularly on the practice of Acala in Tibet, and though we aren't told what text or texts he relied on, the practice is consistently referred to as the *mi g.yo bla na med pa*, which can be understood to categorize this practice of Acala among the highest *yoganiruttara* class of Buddhist tantra, and thus within the framework of the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra*. We have one such text extant in Vanaratna's corpus, the *Acalābhisamayasuratābhīdhāna*,⁷⁰ and in its introductory verse Vanaratna makes the following statement:

After paying homage to the host of *vīras*, glorious and powerful,
And then consulting both the tantra itself and other treatises,
I will now compose this *sādhana*

⁶⁹ SG 43r.6; NTSG 305.7-10.

⁷⁰ A Sanskrit witness of this text has been preserved among the photographs made by Rāhula Saṅkrtyāyana in Tibet, copies of which are currently held at the University of Göttingen (Göttingen Xc 14/40b). The manuscript is incomplete and thus lacks data on the circumstances of its origins, but paleographic evidence suggests a Nepalese provenance (See the learned comments at <http://tibetica.blogspot.com/2010/02/fragment-from-vanaratnas-acalabhisamaya.html>). Saṅkrtyāyana's images are unfortunately unclear, making study of this work in its original language a substantial challenge. My thanks to Péter-Dániel Szántó for sharing his draft diplomatic edition of the manuscript.

For the illustrious *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa[tantra]*.⁷¹

The Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa system is of particular significance to the Newar community, and the scope of its popularity and influence was largely, but not entirely, limited to the Kathmandu Valley.⁷² For Newar Buddhists, the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa cycle is second in importance only to the Cakrasaṃvara system, and forms an essential part of many of their ritual and initiatory practices.⁷³ That the introductory verse indicates that Vanaratna consulted both the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇatantra* and other related works before composing his *sādhana* is itself compelling evidence that he wrote it in the Kathmandu Valley as part of his work for his Newar Buddhist students, but the text's colophon, found only in Tibetan translation, provides additional, explicit evidence for the Nepalese origins of his text:

This faultless text, an *abhisamaya* of Acala, was written by the vow-holder Vanaratna after an initial supplication made by Sarvamitra, and the sincere encouragement of other esteemed people.⁷⁴

More will be said about the Nepalese master Sarvamitra below, but here we can understand his appearance at the head of a delegation of prominent local figures as a clear indication of the agency of Vanaratna's Newar students in the formation of his corpus, and as a demonstration of the priority of local cults in his religious and literary activity.

Vanaratna's engagement with the cult of Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa and Acala may have begun quite early in his tenure in Nepal, as suggested by gZhon nu dpal's record of a teaching he gave on the *mi g.yo bla na med pa* during his first visit to Tibet. We must view this account with some caution, however, as it could only be based on second-hand information given that gZhon nu dpal would not meet Vanaratna for several more years. More reliable is gZhon nu dpal's record of teachings on the *mi g.yo bla na med pa* during Vanaratna's second journey, as Zhon nu dpal was likely present for both of these events. Vanaratna is said to have taught on the practice twice, once just before and again just after his side trip to Bhutan in 1435. gZhon nu dpal also translated the *Acalābhisamaya* with Vanaratna, but this was likely to have occurred much later, no earlier than 1448. In his translator's colophon, gZhon nu dpal states that he prepared his translation "at the feet of Ānandasādhu,"⁷⁵ that is, the Phag mo gru monarch Kun dga' legs pa, who ascended the throne in 1448. It is certainly possible that Vanaratna composed his work much earlier, and that gZhon nu dpal only took up its translation under Kun dga' legs pa's patronage, but it would seem more plausible that the monarch only sponsored the translation after meeting and receiving teachings from Vanaratna in 1454. This would then suggest that Vanaratna composed the *Acalābhisamaya* at Sarvamitra's request between his second and third journeys to Tibet, and brought the Sanskrit manuscript of his new work with him when he departed Nepal for Tibet in 1453.

⁷¹ Tōh 1738 185v.2-3: dpal dbang dpa' bo'i tshogs la phyag byas nas | rang gi rgyud dang gzhung gzhan mthong ba las | dpal ldan drag chen sgrubs thabs zhes bya ba | de dag las phyung 'dir ni bri bar bya.

⁷² Gellner 1992: 256, 268-17, 377, n. 27; Mical 2016: i.2-i.3.

⁷³ Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 151.

⁷⁴ Tōh. 1783 291r.5-6: sdom brtson nags kyi rin chen gyis 'dir mi g.yo ba'i mngon rtogs kyi | skyon med gzhung ni dang por sarva mi tras gsol btab cing | dam pa gzhan gyis kyang bskul legs byas.

⁷⁵ Tōh. 1783 291r.7: dpal a mo gha siddhi zhes bya bas | dpal kun tu bzang po'i nags kyi grub pa'i rings lugs pa chen po zab pa dang rgya che ba'i gzhun lugs thams cad pa ā nanda sā dhu'i zhabs kyi drung du gsol ba btab ste.

Dhūmāṅgārī and the Cult of Yogāmbara

Also prominent in Vanaratna's corpus is the tantric cycle featuring Yogāmbara and his pantheon, a system rooted in the *Catuṣpīṭhatantra* that was and is widely practiced in the Kathmandu Valley. The popularity of this cult is attested by the extensive collection of Nepalese manuscripts dedicated to the cult, and by the substantial contributions made to its corpus by Newar Buddhists.⁷⁶ The most influential among them was perhaps Jagadānandajīvabhadra (ca. fourteenth century), whose *Yogāmbarasādhanavidhi* has risen to the status of scripture in the Kathmandu Valley and contributed to a substantial rise in status of the cult roughly a century before Vanaratna arrived.⁷⁷ The practice of Yogāmbara and his divine consort Jñānaḍākinī remains popular across the Valley, with shrines at many of the leading vihāras, including at Patan's Kwā Bāhā, where Yogāmbara and Jñānaḍākinī preside as the primary tantric deities.⁷⁸ Jñānaḍākinī was once the primary deity of the *Catuṣpīṭha* cycle, and though she was eventually eclipsed by Yogāmbara, her former primacy still resonates at the Mhaypī shrine on a small hillock near Naya Bazaar in Kathmandu. Though the *Catuṣpīṭhatantra* and the cult of Yogāmbara certainly spread to Tibet, it never achieved the same prominence there as it did among the Newar Buddhists of the Kathmandu Valley.⁷⁹

Among Vanaratna's writings, the cult of Yogāmbara is represented by three texts dedicated to Dhūmāṅgārī (Tib. *dud gsol ma*), a fierce protectress closely associated with the tantric system. These three texts, cataloged in the Tibetan canon as the *Anujñāvidhi* (Tōh. 1768), *Dhūmāṅgārīsādhana* (Tōh. 1769), and *Balividhi* (Tōh. 1770), appear to be interrelated and loosely sequential. It is unclear if these texts circulated together or separately in Nepal, as we have no Sanskrit witnesses to shed light on their arrangement, but they have been clearly separated in the Tibetan canon, an act that may have been first performed by bSod nams rgya mtsho, who translated all three texts and provided brief colophons for each.⁸⁰

Dhūmāṅgārī is a relatively obscure deity, and Vanaratna's three works are the only ritual manuals dedicated to her in the Tibetan bsTan 'gyur. That his three texts were meant to augment the practice of Yogāmbara is apparent from the collection itself, which references Yogāmbara as the central deity of the maṅḍala and instructs the practitioner to invoke him before supplicating Dhūmāṅgārī to dispel obstacles, guard *samaya*, and grant *siddhis*. Yogāmbara's traditional consort Jñānaḍākinī is nowhere to be found in this ritual, nor are other deities of the *Catuṣpīṭha* pantheon. Thus, it would appear that Vanaratna's three texts are supplementary to the main rites of the cult, a small but noteworthy contribution to one of Nepal's more popular tantric systems.

Vanaratna's interest in the cult of Yogāmbara and the protectress Dhūmāṅgārī included modifications he made to the latter's iconography based on his personal experiences with her practice. In the SG, bSod nams rgya mtsho notes that Vanaratna made his adaptations after a vision he had in dream:

[Vanaratna] had composed a *sādhana* and other works on Dhūmāṅgārī. Later, when a request was made that they be translated, he said, "According to the treatises,

⁷⁶ See the exhaustive survey of the extant literature on the *Catuṣpīṭhatantra* and cult of Yogāmbara/Jñānaḍākinī in Szántó 2012: 73-194.

⁷⁷ Szántó 2015: 321.

⁷⁸ Szántó 2012: 12.

⁷⁹ Gellner 1992: 174; Szántó 2012: 10-12.

⁸⁰ It is only in the colophon to the third text, the *Balividhi*, that he announces himself as the translator, suggesting that he received them as a set from Vanaratna.

[Dhūmāṅgārī] is said to hold a *khaṭvāṅga* as the implement in her right hand, but in a dream I had a clear indication that she holds a sword. Whichever you prefer is fine.”⁸¹

And indeed this difference is reflected in Vanaratna’s texts, where Dhūmāṅgārī is described as holding a *khaṭvāṅga* in her right hand in the *Anujñāvidhi*, and sword in the *Dhūmāṅgārīsādhana*.⁸² This modification suggests that Vanaratna had developed enough familiarity with the system, and was invested with the requisite authority, to make changes to the deity’s iconography in the texts he composed for the community of practitioners. We unfortunately have no further data linking Vanaratna’s three texts to his work among his Newari clients, but given that the popularity of the Yogāmbara cult in Nepal far surpasses its relevance to the Tibetan community, it is probable that these three texts were composed at the behest of his students in Nepal. As was the case with his Vajravārāhī *sādhana*s, the only record of Vanaratna teaching on the practice of Dhūmāṅgārī occurs in 1454/5, when he taught them at the Phag mo gru palace of sNe’u gdong. This again suggests that the text was composed between Vanaratna’s second and third journeys to Tibet, and that he brought his compositions to Tibet for the first time in 1453. At the very least, this record provides us with *terminus ante quem* for this collection of his writings.

Pañcarakṣā

Vanaratna’s corpus includes a single work dedicated to the *Pañcarakṣā* goddesses, the famous set of five protectresses around whom a large body of narrative, ritual, and apotropaic literature has developed. The deities of the *Pañcarakṣā*—Mahāpratisarā, Mahāsāhasrapramardinī, Mahāmāyūrī, Mahāmantrānusārīṇī, and Mahāśītavatī—have achieved tremendous fame throughout the Buddhist world,⁸³ but perhaps nowhere more so than Nepal, where they are the focus of a cult of enduring significance. The earliest Sanskrit recension of the *Pañcarakṣā* known in Nepal dates to 1105, and monastic libraries and archives of Kathmandu Valley contain a large number of different iterations and copies of this extremely popular collection.⁸⁴ *Pañcarakṣā* literature became especially popular in illustrated formats, surpassing even the *Prajñāpāramitā* in Nepal in this regard.⁸⁵ The list of ailments, obstacles, and adverse conditions the *Pañcarakṣā* are capable of remedying is exhaustive,⁸⁶ and because their practice requires no formal initiation, recitation of their texts, *dhāraṇīs*, and mantras is among the most frequent prescriptions given by Newar *vajracāryās* to their clients.⁸⁷ The *Pañcarakṣā* goddess are thus deeply woven in the fabric of Nepalese culture: their rituals are performed and texts recited as part of numerous religious, life-cycle, funerary, and calendrical rites, and they feature regularly in major festivals and celebrations; the goddesses adorn word work at many of the Valley’s temples, shrines, and monasteries; and, they are associated with sacred sites throughout the Kathmandu Valley.⁸⁸

⁸¹ SG 43v.3-4: dud sol gyi sgrub thabs la sogs pa’i rtsom pa dang | gong nas de dag gi ’gyur zhus pa’i skabs su | ’di’i g.yas kyi phyag mtshan gzhung las kha tvaṅ ge bshad na’ang | rmi lam gyi mtshan ma brtan po la ral gri yod pa ’ong ba yin | khyed rang gang mos pa chog gsung.

⁸² Tōh. 1768 255v.2; Tōh. 1769 266r.5.

⁸³ Lewis 2000: 123, 154.

⁸⁴ Lewis 2000: 128; Lewis and Bajracarya 2016: 92-3, Appendix I.

⁸⁵ Kim 2013: 131.

⁸⁶ See Lewis 2000, Table 6.1 (p. 127).

⁸⁷ Gellner 1992: 339.

⁸⁸ Gellner 1992: 186; Lewis 2000: 154-61.

Vanaratna's contribution to this corpus, the *Pañcarakṣārcanavidhi*, consists of a set of ritual practices, visualization schemes, and recitation formulas for the five goddesses arrayed together in a single maṇḍala. It does not relay any of the narratives of the goddesses, collectively or individually, that is a hallmark of *Pañcarakṣā* literature.⁸⁹ Thus, like many of Vanaratna's other works this text seems intended to augment an already robust corpus of literature with newly-formulated rites, rather than break entirely new ground. We are given no information on the time, place, or circumstances of Vanaratna's composition, but given the inestimable significance to the *Pañcarakṣā* goddesses to the Newar community, it would seem most likely this work was composed in Nepal. That Vanaratna's ritual manual was of little importance to his Tibetan students can be inferred from the fact that there is only a single instance of Vanaratna teaching on the subject recorded in the *rnam thars*. As with the previous cycles discussed above, Vanaratna only taught on this text during his final trip to Tibet, again suggesting that it was composed in Nepal and brought to Tibet for the first time on that journey. The general disinterest in this text on the part of his Tibetan disciples is also perhaps indicated by the fact that the single account of Vanaratna's teachings is found only in the *rnam thar* of the Byams gling paṅ chen bSod nams rnam rgyal, who reports receiving the teachings from Vanaratna a sNe'u gdong in in 1454/5.⁹⁰ This same teaching program is recorded in detail in both the SG and NTSG, and yet both texts omit the reference to Vanaratna's instructions on the *Pañcarakṣā*. It would seem that perhaps for bSod nams rgya mtsho and Chos grags ye shes, this instruction did not merit inclusion in their accounts.

The Navagrahapūjāvidhi

A curious entry in Vanaratna's corpus is the *Navagrahapūjāvidhi*, a work that, as the name implies, is an astrological text containing rites for nine deified celestial bodies: the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, the Eclipse (Rāhu), and Comets (Ketu). This ritual manual for the *navagraha* is framed within a rite for the *Pañcarakṣā* goddesses, who are invoked in a preliminary sequence of recitations and offerings before each of the *navagraha* are invoked in the order above. What makes this text particularly intriguing, and potentially informative for Vanaratna's activities in Nepal, is the fact that this seems not to be a work by Vanaratna at all, but rather a translation made by gZhon nu dpal from the notes Vanaratna took when he studied the *navagraha* rite. The text's colophon reads:

This translation was made by gZhon nu dpal from written notes made by the *paṇḍita* from eastern India, Vanaratna, when receiving teachings from his *ācārya*, named Haṃsa.⁹¹

We unfortunately have no further information on the identity of Vanaratna's teacher Haṃsa, either from the materials on Vanaratna or the broader historical record. It is possible to surmise that he was a Nepalese *ācārya* from the fact that cults for the *Navagraha* and the *Pañcarakṣā* goddesses, both included in the *vidhi*, were independently popular in Nepal and also frequently

⁸⁹ See Lewis 2000: 119-153.

⁹⁰ NTSN 39r.6.

⁹¹ Tōh. 3129 235v.7-236r.1: 'di ni rgya gar shar phyogs kyi paṇḍita nags kyi rin chen kyi | nyid kyi slob dpon hang sa zhes bya ba'i gsung zin bris su bgyis pa'i yi ge las gzhon nu dpal gyis bsgyur pa'o.

practiced in combination there.⁹² Because the *Navagrahapūjāvidhi* is a compilation of notes rather than a text composed by Vanaratna, it does not provide evidence of Vanaratna’s service to the Newar community, but it is as a reminder that Vanaratna studied at the feet of local teachers, and that his body of work evolved as much through his role as a student of Newar Buddhist masters as it was as a teacher for them.

Stotras and Stavas

The final group of texts from Vanaratna’s collected writings that shed light on his religious works in the Kathmandu Valley is a set of hymns—*stotras* and *stavas*—to a selection of deities that reflect the devotional preferences of Buddhists in the Kathmandu Valley. Vanaratna’s corpus contains four hymns: the *Buddhastavadaśa*, *Lokeśvararatnamālāstotra*, *Gaṇeśvarastava*, and Vanaratna’s eulogy to his guru, the *Śabarapādastotraratna*. We could also add to this list the previously-discussed *Kramadvayavajravārāhīstotra*, dedicated to Vajravārāhī. Of this set of hymns, three are particularly relevant to Vanaratna’s engagement with the Nepalese community, the *Lokeśvararatnamālāstotra*, *Gaṇeśvarastava*, and the *Śabarapādastotraratna*, as these three can be definitively tied to his work in Nepal.

Of the remaining two, the specific provenance of *Kramadvayavajravārāhīstotra* is unknown, though as discussed above there is every likelihood that it was composed in Nepal in conjunction with Vanaratna’s participation in the cult of Vajrayoginī there. The *Buddhastavadaśa*, on the other hand, can be shown with some certainty to have been composed in Tibet between 1426 and 1427, his first visit there. During that trip Vanaratna made a pilgrimage to the renowned Jo bo image of Śākyamuni in Lhasa. In the *ŽP*, gZhon nu dpal states that Vanaratna composed “a praise in ten verses in *toṭaka* meter” in the presence of the statue.⁹³ The *Buddhastavadaśa* is available only in Tibetan translation, so it is challenging if not impossible to determine if it was originally written in *toṭaka* meter, nor does bSod nams rgya mtsho provide additional information on the text’s origins in the translator’s colophon, but this would nonetheless seem to be the hymn in question and so can be excluded from the list of potential works Vanaratna composed in Nepal.

Unlike the preceding two hymns, the *Lokeśvararatnamālāstotra*, *Gaṇeśvarastava*, and *Śabarapādastotraratna* can be shown with high certainty to originate in Nepal and/or be of specific relevance to Vanaratna’s Nepalese students. Vanaratna’s eulogy to his teacher Śabaripā was most likely an act of personal devotion rather than a work specifically intended for the Newar Buddhist community, but it can still be irrefutably linked to his residency in Patan. The *stotra* was composed shortly after Vanaratna had a vision of his guru within the precincts of Gopicandra Vihāra, a vision that came to him in connection with a meditative breakthrough.⁹⁴ Though only available to us in Tibetan translation, it is apparent that Vanaratna poured the fullness of his literary craft into this composition; bSod nams rgya mtsho tells us that it was originally composed as a series of linked verses in the *indravajra*, *upendravajra*, *puṣpitāgra*, and *mālinī* meters. We do not know what relevance, if any the *Śabarapādastotraratna* had for the local Buddhist community, but one can imagine that Vanaratna did share it with at least some of his close disciples and patrons.

⁹² Lewis 2000: 155, 157, image 6.3

⁹³ *ŽP* 14v.3-4: lha sar phebs nas jo bo’i drung du tro ṭa ka’i rgyud kyi tshigs su bcaḍ pa pa bcu pa’i bstod pa de mdzad.

⁹⁴ SG 37v.2-3.

Of much greater relevance for Vanaratna's Newar clients is his *Gaṇeśvarastava*, a set of eight verses in praise the elephant god. This hymn would have been most relevant to the Brahmanical community, but Gaṇeśa was and is revered by Buddhists for his powers to remove obstacles, secure wealth, and grant boons. The Nepalese provenance of the *Gaṇeśvarastava* is clear from bSod nams rgya mtsho's colophon, which records the moment he received the text, carried from Nepal to Tibet by messenger:⁹⁵

The *Gaṇeśvarastava*, composed by the venerable *ācārya Śrī* Vanaratna, is complete. It was sent as a gift by the *paṇḍita* himself, a lord who has attained *siddhis*, from Gopicandra Vihāra in the great city of Patan in Nepal out of kindness and for the sake of generating the supreme *siddhi*.⁹⁶

When bSod nams rgya mtsho visited Nepal several years later he received a reading transmission for Gaṇeśa (whether of the *stava* or of another text is unclear), at which time Vanaranta explained the importance of Gaṇeśa to the Nepalese community, and thus presumably why he would have been compelled to write a praise to the elephant-headed god in the first place:

When [bSod nams rgya mtsho] was given the recitation transmission for Gaṇapati, [Vanaratna] said that [Gaṇeśa] was the patron deity for all those who live in Nepal.⁹⁷

Though his hymn to Gaṇeśa was surely significant to the local population, among all of the hymns Vanaratna composed, none was more popular in Nepal than his *Lokeśvararatnamālāstotra*. This text, which is extant in multiple manuscript copies held in Nepal's archives and which has been edited and published by Janardan Pandey,⁹⁸ also makes a prominent appearance in Vanaratna's *rnam thar*, where it's origins in and significance for the local Buddhist community is stated directly:

At one time [Vanaratna] had a strong experience of great referenceless compassion, a state of equanimity that regarded the entire realm of beings without bias. Based on this he first studied the secrets of noble Avalokiteśvara's body, speech, and mind according to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, and then composed the *Āryāvalokiteśvararatnamālāstotra*, a poem written in *śārdūlavikrīḍita* and other meters. These days [his *stotra*] is widely popular among the people of Nepal.⁹⁹

It has already been noted that the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* was of special importance to the Newar

⁹⁵ bSod nams rgya mtsho's receipt of this text is briefly described in the NTSG (NTSGb: 314.22-23).

⁹⁶ Tōh. 1175 253v.2-3: tshogs kyi dbang phyug gi bstod pa zhes bya ba | slob dpon dpal nags kyi rin chen zhabs kyois mdzad pa yang dang par gang ba'o | 'di ni dngos grub brnyes pa'i dbang phyug paṇḍi ta chen po de nyid kyois dpal bal po'i yul gyi grong khyer chen po ye rang gi dgon pa śrī go pi candra nas | dngos grub mchog gi bka' drin gyis btsa' ba'i phyir skyes su stsal ba.

⁹⁷ NTSG^b 357.15-17: thogs kyi bdag gi bzlas lung gnang ba'i 'phros la | 'di bal yul na sdod pa thams cad kyi dā na pa ti yin gsung ba.

⁹⁸ As text number 68 in his edition of the *Buddhastotrasaṃgraha* (1994).

⁹⁹ SG 50v.5-51r.1: yang lan cig | dmigs pa med pa'i snying rje chen po ris med pa'i sems can gyi khams la mnyam par 'jug pa ches lhag par 'khrungs pa'i rkyon gyis 'phags pa spyen ras gzigs dbang phyug gi sku gsung thugs kyi gsang ba | za ma tog bkod pa'i mdo dang mthun par gzigs pa las brtsams nas | de dang rjes su mthun pa'i 'phags pa'i bstod pa rin po che'i phreng ba zhes bya ba stag rnam par rtsen pa la sogs pa'i sdeb sbyor gyis bcings pa de mdzad par snang ste | 'di ring sang bal po rnam la shin tu dar bar yang 'jug go.

community, and was particularly influential during a period of reformation and renaissance in the Buddhist community during the fifteenth century. The *Kāraṇḍavyūha* was one of the touchstones for the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*, a collection of devotional and didactic stories featuring Avalokiteśvara that was composed in the Kathmandu Valley in the fifteenth century. Tuladhar-Douglas calls the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* an “unquestionably Newar text,” and locates it among a corpus of texts that marked the evolution of a distinctly Newar mode of Buddhism defined on its own terms through the agency of local Buddhist actors.¹⁰⁰ Thus it would come as little surprise that Vanaratna, ever the avid student, availed himself of the opportunities to study a Buddhist scripture of such importance to his host community, and then make his own inspired contribution to the cult of Avalokiteśvara in which the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* and *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* were intricately linked. We can also tie Vanaratna’s composition to the spiritual landscape of the Kathmandu Valley; among the key sites for the cult of Avalokiteśvara is Bungamati, home of the *buṅadyo*, the red Padmapāṇī/Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara image considered the patron deity of Patan and an object of formal royal worship from at least the twelfth century onwards.¹⁰¹ Such was the popularity of Vanaratna’s *Lokeśvararatnamālā* that a tutor of the Bhaktapur princes gave it to them to study, memorize, and then recite before the Avalokiteśvara image at Buṅgamati.¹⁰²

Local Circles

From the preceding survey of Vanaratna’s corpus we can trace the influence of Nepalese cults, texts, and practices in his own exegetical, ritual, and literary priorities. For some of his works, such as the *Acalābhisamaya*, *Navagrahapūjavidhi*, and *Lokeśvararatnamālāstotra*, we can even connect his writings with local figures who count themselves among his students, teachers, and admirers. As is the case with Vanaratna’s teaching and ritual repertoire in Nepal, the Tibetan *rnam thars* are equally silent about the local circles Vanaratna worked within, leaving us largely in the dark about the relationships he formed throughout his many years in the Kathmandu Valley. To remedy this lack of information in his biographies, we can once again turn to Vanaratna’s corpus and the archival record for additional information on Vanaratna’s Nepalese collaborators. And though the group we are able to identify is relatively small in relation to what was surely a much larger circle of his teachers, students, and patrons, it nevertheless allows us to gain a broader perspective on the religious scene in which Vanaratna worked and thrived.

At the core of the group Nepalese figures we are able to identify are three names recorded in a single line of transmission that has Vanaratna at its head. In the colophon to a manuscript of Abhayākaragupta’s *Varṣāpaṇavidhi* dated to 1469 (N.S. 589), the Newar masters Sarvamitra, Ravicandra, and Rūparāja follow Vanaratna in the text’s transmission history as provided by the scribe, Rūparāja himself.¹⁰³ We have already met the first figure from this list, Sarvamitra, who appeared in the colophon to the *Acalābhisamaya* as the leader of a group of peers who first requested Vanaratna to compose the treatise from the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa* cycle. This second occurrence of Sarvamitra’s name confirms him not just as a prominent member of the local Buddhist community who received teachings from Vanaratna, but also a lineage holder who both received transmissions from Vanaratna and passed them on to his own disciples. We unfortunately know little else about Sarvamitra, including which city he lived in, which

¹⁰⁰ Tuladhar-Douglas 2006: 2, 189-90.

¹⁰¹ Locke 1980: 298-325; Locke 1985: 29; Tuladhar-Douglas 2006: 5-6.

¹⁰² SG 51r.1-5. More will be said about the context of this event below.

¹⁰³ University of Tokyo Library cat. no. 307: 26r.2-4. First reported in Szántó 2012: 236, note 59.

monastery he was associated with, other lineages he may have held, and so forth. But taken together we can safely argue that Sarvamitra was among Vanaratna's regular students, received a number of teachings from him, and considered himself a holder of Vanaratna's lineage.

The next figure in the *Varṣāpaṇavidhi*, Ravicandra, cannot be tied to Vanaratna as directly, but there is evidence to suggest that he was known to Vanaratna and may even have been included among his immediate disciples. The slim evidence for this comes from a manuscript of Ghaṇṭāpāda's *Pañcakramopdeśa* that was scribed by Ravicandra in 1450 (N.S. 570).¹⁰⁴ Though Vanaratna is not mentioned there, we do know that he prepared a translation of the *Pañcakramopdeśa* with his Tibetan colleagues in 1455 under the title *Cakrasaṃvarapañcakrama*. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, Vanaratna prepared this translation based on two different Sanskrit witnesses, and because there are significant consistencies between the recension scribed by Ravicandra and Vanaratna's Tibetan translation, there is reason to believe Vanaratna was familiar with, if not in possession of the copy prepared by his contemporary Ravicandra. Knowing that Ravicandra was actively working as a scribe in 1450 when Vanaratna was in residence in Kathmandu, and that he is listed following Sarvamitra the lineage of the *Varṣāpaṇavidhi*, it would be not be unreasonable to conclude that Vanaratna and Ravicandra were acquainted, if not actively connected as guru and disciple.

The third member in the transmission lineage for the *Varṣāpaṇavidhi* is Rūparāja, who is listed as the scribe of the *Varṣāpaṇavidhi*, and also appears as a scribe in colophons to a *Pañcarakṣā*¹⁰⁵ manuscript dated to 1489 (N.S. 609), and to an undated manuscript of Raviśrījñāna's *Amṛtakaṇikaṭippaṇī* on the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti*.¹⁰⁶ Based on the date of the *Pañcarakṣā* manuscript it would appear that Rūparāja was significantly younger than Vanaratna, and may not have met him or formed an active relationship with him. Nonetheless, given Rūparāja's connection to Ravicandra and by extension Sarvamitra, it could be speculated that Rūparāja was also within Vanaratna's orbit in the Kathmandu Valley. Even if we can't definitively link Rūparāja with Vanaratna, the connection between him and known members of Vanaratna's circle make the further details about him provided in the manuscripts colophons useful in contextualizing the wider milieu in which Vanaratna worked. From the colophons to the *Pañcarakṣa* and *Amṛtakaṇikatippaṇī* manuscripts he copied, we learn that Rūparāja was a resident of Maṇisaṅgha Vihāra, a monastery in the south of the old city of Kathmandu also known by its Newari name, Mikhā Bāhā.¹⁰⁷ As a *bāhā*, Maṇisaṅgha Vihāra was under the direction of *vajrācāryas*, and Rūparāja is identified as such in the colophon to the *Pañcarakṣa* manuscript. From the Tibetan *rnam thars* we learn very little about Vanaratna's connections to the Buddhist community beyond Patan. Thus, Rūparāja's potential ties to Vanaratna and his local lineage may expand our understanding of the range of Vanaratna's activity and renown.

Because there are only tenuous links between Vanaratna and Rūparāja, the details of his context, taken in isolation, are insufficient for establishing Vanaratna's ties to the wider Buddhist community, particularly in the city of Kathmandu. We do, however, have further evidence of Vanaratna's relationship to the Buddhist community in Kathmandu through another local figure with clear ties to Vanaratna, a monk named Dharmarakṣita. In the colophon to a manuscript the

¹⁰⁴ NAK A 936/11 f. 68v.5.

¹⁰⁵ NAK A 47/5: 86v.1.

¹⁰⁶ Lal 1994: 110.

¹⁰⁷ Locke 1985: 334; Slusser 1982, vol. 2: map 7, #74.

Kṛṣṇayamāri Tantra, Dharmarakṣita directly identifies himself as a devotee of Vanaratna,¹⁰⁸ and is also identified as a *bhikṣu* in residence at Ṣaḍakṣara Vihāra (Dugaṃ Bahī), a monastery in the old city of Kathmandu not far from royal palace on what is now New Road (Nayamārga). During the Malla period this monastery enjoyed considerable prestige, and was counted among the most influential monasteries in the city of Kathmandu.¹⁰⁹ The fact that one of its residents was a student of Vanaratna potentially demonstrates that his influence and range extended into the *vihāras* of Kathmandu, and makes it more plausible that he had come into contact with Rūparāja and Maṇisaṅgha Vihāra. The evidence from Dharmarakṣita, and perhaps Rūparāja as well, provides us with testimony to Vanaratna’s fame across the Valley, adding Kathmandu to the list that already includes two other major cities of the Valley, Patan and Bhaktapur.

The last individual connected to Vanaratna to consider is one about whom we know practically nothing: the *ācārya* Haṃsa with whom Vanaratna studied the rites of the *navagraha* as indicated in the colophon to the *Navagrahapūjavidhi* described above. We do not know precisely who Haṃsa was, where he lived, if he was of a Buddhist or Brahmanical persuasion, nor if he was even Nepalese. The content of the text suggest both a Buddhist and Nepalese provenance, allowing us to tentatively include him among the local figures with whom Vanaratna worked.

Studies in the Valley

From the above evidence we know of at least two individuals who counted themselves among Vanaratna’s students (Sarvamitra and Dharmarakṣita), two of unknown relationship (Ravicandra and Rūparāja), and one who was his teacher (Haṃsa). It is possible, if not probable, that each of them took on a number of roles in Vanaratna’s life, at times approaching him as a student, at times providing him with patronage, and at times offering him teachings, transmission, and initiations into local lineages and practices. We have already seen that Vanaratna studied and perhaps even received initiation at the feet of teachers in the Kathmandu Valley, including the Indian *paṇḍita* Śīlasāgara who instructed him in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and its rites for conferring the commitments of a *bodhisattva*. We are also faced with the very real possibility that Vanaratna was taught by and received initiation into the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala from Newar masters at the Śāntipur temple. Both of these scenes took place before, and set the stage for, Vanaratna’s second, career-defining journey to Tibet around 1430. We have additional evidence, albeit circumstantial, that Vanaratna remained an avid student throughout his years in Nepal, and continued to find opportunities to train and expand his literary and spiritual horizons.

The record of texts and topics that Vanaratna studied in Nepal is short, representing only a small number of the lineages available to him and to which he availed himself. We know from the SG that Vanaratna studied the *Karaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* in Nepal, and then composed his own *Avalokiteśvararatnamālā* based on it. We likewise know from Vanaratna’s own writing that he studied works from the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa corpus before composing his *Acalābhisamaya*. We can also be fairly assured that he studied astrology, or at least the ritual practices associated with the *navagraha*, under the *ācārya* Haṃsa while in Nepal. Only in this final case can we be confident

¹⁰⁸ Shastri 1917, 144: likhitam asti śrīvanaratnamahāsthaviraparamaguroś caraṇāmbujasevikenā śrīṣaḍakṣarīmahāvihāriyabhikṣuśrīdharmarakṣitena.

Note that the date given by Shastri, 1380 (N.S. 500), is clearly in error. Without consulting the manuscript, which is held by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, it is impossible to know if this is an error in the manuscript itself or in Shastri’s reading.

¹⁰⁹ Locke 1984: 388-9.

he studied under a specific teacher, rather than engage in self-study. Whatever the context, it does seem clear that Vanaratna remained a student of Buddhism even as he grew into a respected teacher, and showed a strong interest in local texts and lineages. He studied them not only to pursue personal intellectual and spiritual interests, but to contribute to the body of Buddhist literature and otherwise offer those teachings and lineages to his students, both in Nepal and across the Himalaya in Tibet.

Popular Religion in the Valley

In addition to providing some detail of Vanaratna's religious life in Nepal, his biography also offers useful, if fleeting glimpses of the more popular strata of religiosity observed in the Kathmandu Valley. In typical hagiographical style, Vanaratna's engagement with religious cults specific to Valley are articulated as encounters with the deities themselves, rather than its officiants or devotees, but the mere fact that such cults are mentioned in his biography, along with the few details bSod nams rgya mtsho does offer, is instructive about their existence and popular appeal in the fifteenth century. We are unfortunately limited to only two such references in the SG: the cult of the goddess Harasiddhi and the cult of the nāgas.

The most substantive account of a local cult to appear in Vanaratna's biography is that of the Harasiddhi (image 20), a goddess counted among the nine emanations of Durgā (*navadurgā*), and who has a specifically dubious reputation in the Kathmandu Valley as being a recipient of human sacrifice.¹¹⁰ Despite this sinister character, Harasiddhi is a widely popular deity for citizens of the Kathmandu Valley, one venerated by all irrespective of their religious identity.¹¹¹ Her appearance in the SG, which counts as the earliest attestation of her cult in the Kathmandu Valley, features in Vanaratna's narrative shortly after his return from his second trip to Tibet and during his six-month teaching program on the *Prajñāpāramitā*. In bSod nams rgya mtsho's telling, Vanaratna met the goddess in person while traveling outside the walls of Patan, just to the south of the city:

Early one evening during [his teachings on the *Prajñāpāramitā*, Vanaratna] left the city on an outside errand. In the area to the south of the city there was a large, intense fire blazing, so he stopped to watch for a while. In the middle of the fire, which was creeping closer and closer to him, was a black-colored goddess who was fierce and ugly. Her fangs were bared, her breasts and hair were dangling free, and she was holding an exceedingly long spear in her hands. Wondering who this could possibly be, he made an attempt to hide in the bushes, but she came up very close and stayed there, displaying feelings of joy and veneration. She then stopped at the foot of a tree, fixed her gaze on him, approached and prostrated to him.

He asked her, "Who are you?"

"I am the protectress of this city, Harasiddhi," she replied.

Vanaratna again asked her, "Why have you come here?"

¹¹⁰ Regmi 1966 vol. 2, 596; Slusser 1982, vol. 1: 338-9.

¹¹¹ Regmi 1965 vol. 2, 558-60; 595-6.

“You live in this city, so I have come here joyfully to prostrate at your feet. Now, because of me, all [your] spiritual activities will succeed. You must by all means stay here.”

“Where will you go now?” he asked.

“My home is to the south of this city, so I’ll return there” she said, and then departed.

The next morning he asked around if there was a goddess Harasiddhi who lived in the area. “There certainly is,” every one unanimously told him. “She is the protectress of this place. She has tremendous magical power. Here home is in Jala, which is south of the city.”¹¹²

This scene, despite its hagiographical tone, indicates that both the cult of Harasiddhi and her temple to the south of the city of Patan were well-established and active in the mid-fifteenth century, and had likely been active for quite some time given that both the goddess, her temple, and her status as a protector of Patan were well known enough to be noted in the biography of Indian *pandita* written by his Tibetan disciple. Exactly as described in the SG, the Harasiddhi temple (image 21) is located to the south Patan in a local municipality that bears her name (as Harisiddhi), but is also known in Newari as Jala, the same name given to the village in the SG. Very little is known about the cult of Harasiddhi prior to the seventeenth century, and apart from the scene in the SG the earliest available attestation of the cult of Harasiddhi consists of a depiction of her temple on a *paubhā* commemorating the 1565 (N.S. 685) renovation of Svayambhū.¹¹³ It is only in the seventeenth century, and the reign of Pratāpamalla, that Harasiddhi begins to appear regularly alongside the other major deities of Nepal in epigraphic and numismatic sources. The earliest inscriptional evidence we have of Harasiddhi is a copperplate inscription of Pratāpamalla dated to 1658 (N.S. 778) celebrating the offering of a golden lintel by Śrīnivāsamalla to the Harasiddhi temple in 1663 (N.S. 783).¹¹⁴ The modern temple of Harasiddhi was believed to have been constructed by Pratāpamalla,¹¹⁵ but this must have been a renovation or reconstruction of an existing temple based on what we know from the account in the SG and the 1526 *paūbha*. Pratāpamalla appears to have taken an interest in the goddess and her cult, as is suggested by his renovations of her temple and his patronage of a popular dance troupe associated with it.¹¹⁶ It perhaps for this reason that the Nepalese historian

¹¹² SG 35r.5-35v.4: de’i skabs shed kyi srod mgo cig la phyi rol gyi bya ba la grong khyer gyi phyi rol du gshegs pa na | lho phyogs kyi sa’i mthil zhig na me dpung chen po gcig drag tu ’bar zhing ’dug | der yun ring du gzigs pas med de sku mdun ngos la je nyer song ba’i dbus na | lha mo’i gzugs mdog nag mo drag cing mi sdug pa | mched ba gtsigs shing nu ma dang skra ’phyang ba | lag gnyis na śā kti shin tu ring ba re thogs pa zhig ’dug | ’di su yin dgongs nas shing tshang tshing gcig gi khrod la ’dzur rtsis mdzad pas | der shing gel ba gcig gi rtsa bar bzhugs nas brtan par gzigs pa na | sku mdun du byung nas phyag byed pa la | khyod su yin gsungs pas | bdag grong khyer ’di bdag mo ha ra siddhiḥ zhes bya ba yin zer | ci’i slad du ’dir ’ongs gsungs pas | khyed grong khyer ’dir bzhugs pa la kho mo shin tu dga’ bas zhabs la phyag mtshal du mchis te | da ni bdag gis ’phrin las thams cad sgrub | gnas ’dir cis kyang bzhugs dgos zer | da gang du ’gro gsung pas | grong khyer ’di lho phyogs na bdag gi gnas yod pas der ’gro zer nas sog ngo | nang bar gnas ’di na ha ra siddhiḥ zhes bya ba’i lha mo yod dam zhes dri rtog gngang bas | cis kyang yod de sthā na pa ti yin | nan tar rdzu ’phrul che | grong khyer ’di’i lho phyogs ja lā na gnas pa yin.

¹¹³ See Slusser 1985 for an image and close study of this important, and now unfortunately lost, painting from Medieval Kathmandu.

¹¹⁴ Regmi 1965, vol. 2: 595-6; Lienhard 1988: 106-7.

¹¹⁵ Regmi 1965, vol.2: 885

¹¹⁶ Slusser 1982, vol.1: 348

D. R. Regmi argued that Harasiddhi only became popular in the seventeenth century, with the caveat, “Surely the worship of the goddess was begun earlier, but there is no record to show how far back it started.”¹¹⁷ With Vanaratna’s encounter with the cult of Harasiddhi described in the SG, we can push the *terminus post quem* of her temple and cult back to the fifteenth century, and given the fact that it was already vital at that time, we can also be confident that Harasiddhi had been worshipped in the Valley well before Vanaratna met her to the south of Patan.

The only other reference to popular local cults found in Vanaratna’s biography concerns the cult of nāgas, and is unfortunately concise to the point of yielding very little information on the practices of the cult. It does, however, indicate that Vanaratna took a personal interest in the cult, and it is possible that we can align his religious work with his participation in the popular worship of nāgas in the Valley. bSod nams rgya mtsho writes:

I asked [Vanaratna] how he benefits non-human beings, and he said, “For beings who live in this city, such as Maṇikumāra,¹¹⁸ the king of nāgas, I give whatever teachings seem appropriate.” After establishing them in the precepts of the five Arhats, [Vanaratna] was renowned working on behalf of the local protectors of Nepal.¹¹⁹

There are no other available sources on a *nāgarāja* named Maṇikumāra or a specific site or cult attached to him, but the cult of nāgas is widely popular in the Kathmandu Valley, in no small part due to the fact that the origin myths of the Valley describe it as a vast nāga-filled lake that was drained and made habitable by the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Nāgās become an annual object of veneration during the Nāg Pañcamī festival, which is held in the summer monsoon season. Given its popularity, it is of little surprise then that Vanaratna would participate in the rites and festivals associated with nāga worship in the Valley, and one could perhaps presume that his transmission of Abhayākara Gupta’s *Varṣāpaṇavidhi* was connected to his ongoing engagement with nāga worship there.

Conclusions

Taken individually, much of the evidence for Vanaratna’s religious work in the Newar Buddhist community, and for the community’s influence on his work, is circumstantial and conjectural; considered together, however, it makes a viable claim for the meaningful, productive, and mutually constitutive relationship between Vanaratna and his host community in the Kathmandu Valley. It is possible to view his extant corpus as a testament to that relationship, seeing in it a symbiosis between the learned Indian *paṇḍita* and the thriving, vibrant Buddhist community in Nepal. Vanaratna first reached the Valley after forty years of study, practice, and travel in eastern, southern, and northern India, as well as Sri Lanka, and only came to the Valley with aspirations to push onwards to Tibet where prophesied renown awaited him. But this did not prove to be the case; he was simply not ready to be the kind of teacher and scholar that Tibet required of him. Instead, it was in the Kathmandu Valley that his career was truly forged, as can be seen in the predominance of Newar Buddhism’s most essential scriptures, ritual systems, and deities in

¹¹⁷ Regmi 1965, vol. 2: 558.

¹¹⁸ See Witzel “Agnihotra Rituals in Nepal,” p. 19+

¹¹⁹ SG 52v.5-53r.1: mi ma yin pa’i ’gro ba pa nams kyi don ji ltar mdzad zhus pas | grong khyer ’di na gnas pa’i klu’i rgyal po ma ṅi ku mā ra sogs la chos ston pa ci rigs su byed pa yin gsung | ’di ni dgra bcom lnga sde bslab pa’i gnas la bkod nas bal yul gyi gzhi bdag byed par grags ’dug.

Vanaratna's oeuvre. With the veneration, support, and guidance of Newar masters, he expanded his repertoire, honed his skills as a teacher and ritualist, and composed many of his most renowned works. Nearly all of the local Buddhist figures who studied under Vanaratna, worked alongside him, supported him, and trained with him remain invisible to us at our historical remove. In the preceding section a first, tentative step has been made to recover their identities and fill the gaps in our knowledge by looking beyond the biographical sources to the broader literary and archival record. There is much work that remains to be done, as there are likely more resources available in the rich historical record of the Kathmandu Valley. Despite the fact that Vanaratna's legacy is preserved, transmitted, and celebrated within the Tibetan tradition, his legacy was shaped and defined in the Kathmandu Valley, where there are surely more traces of it to be found with sustained and careful attention.

A Buddhist *Paṇḍita* in a Hindu Kingdom: Vanaratna and the Malla Court

Somewhat surprisingly, the account of Vanaratna's political relationships and activities in the Kathmandu Valley are told in much richer detail than the narrative of his religious life, and for that reason alone bSod nams rgya mtsho's *rnam thar* of Vanaratna and Chos grags ye shes's biography of bSod nams rgya mtsho are exceptional historical resources documenting the political and social realities of fifteenth-century Nepal. Vanaratna's political life in the Valley only began upon his return around 1438; prior to that Vanaratna seemed more oriented towards his Tibetan ambitions and less inclined to build relationships in Nepal, which in turn did little to elevate him to the attention of the politically powerful. It was only after his struggles with Koka Sāhu and the intervention of Patan's *mahāpātras* that Vanaratna seems to have registered in awareness of the Nepal's political nobility. From that point onwards, however, Vanaratna's status among the Valley's political class slowly evolved, bringing him into the orbit of the Bhaktapur court, and eventually into the personal circle of the reigning monarch, Jayayakṣamalla, with whom he formed a close professional and personal relationship. Vanaratna's arrival in the elite political circles of the Kathmandu Valley did not begin immediately, and required a series of introductions and interventions that eventually paved his way to the Bhaktapur court.

Though Vanaratna was provided with political protection by the *mahāpātras* in Patan, and found security from government harassment at Gopicandra Vihara, their patronage did not translate into a favorable reputation at the Bhaktapur court. Vanaratna noted that while he was well-received by the general population, his standing at the court remained poor, which he blamed specifically on Koka Sāhu's slander, but also more generally on the fact that he was a Buddhist *paṇḍita* and the king and his court were predominantly Hindu:

All the citizens treated me with respect, but because the royal family was not Buddhist, and specifically because of Koka Sāhu's deceptions, they did not have much faith [in me].¹²⁰

Vanaratna eventually found an advocate at court in the unlikely form of an Indian grammarian who was tutor Jayayakṣa's sons. Though this scholar is not named, he hailed from an Indian

¹²⁰ SG 36r.1: grong khyer ba thams cad gus par byed mod | 'on kyang kho pon (em. kho bo na) rgyal po rigs chos kyiis phyi rol pa tin dang | khyad par ko ka sā hu'i gya gyu'i dbang gis dad ches pa med pa.

region called *jaṅghama/jadghama* in the SG,¹²¹ which was located to the south of Nepal in India. It appears that he was invited to the Kathmandu Valley to serve as the princes' grammar instructor, and shortly after his arrival learned that another Vanaratna was living nearby at Gopicandra Vihāra. Though he first sought Vanaratna out as a potential competitor or adversary, he came away so impressed after their meeting that he extolled the Buddhist *paṇḍita*'s qualities to the king and court:¹²²

An extremely erudite non-Buddhist scholar from Jadghama in the south was invited to serve as an *ācārya* for the prince (*sras pa*) of Bhaktapur. Prideful about his learning, he came to visit [Vanaratna] with the thought of debating him. He put many questions to [Vanaratna], and was slowly stripped of his confidence. He returned to Bhaktapur and proclaimed before the court: "Why did you ignorantly summon me when you have such a scholar in your own country? Such a scholar is rare even in India. You should be ashamed that you didn't know you this scholar is living in your country. You should revere him greatly!" He developed great faith himself, and would go to visit [Vanaratna] regularly to discuss many difficult points of grammar, and take notes. He also said that he was delighted [with Vanaranta], and because of that [Vanaratna] was regarded highly and treated respectfully in Bhaktapur. [The king] even had his own sons memorize the *Aryāvalokiteśvararatnamālāstotra* and recite it in front of the *buṅgayāje*.^{123 124}

It would appear, then, that the praise rendered by this Indian grammarian cracked open the door for Vanaratna at court, bringing to Jayayakṣa's attention the fact that he had a highly trained, albeit Buddhist *paṇḍita* in his kingdom. Jayayakṣa would not have to take this man's word for it; soon Vanaratna had an opportunity to prove his expertise in person.

A Timely Intervention

Vanaratna finally came to the attention of the Bhaktapur court through a timely intervention in a matter of great importance for the royal family. bSod nams rgya mthso describes the scene:

There was one Newari festival during which [the royal family] would themselves

¹²¹ Tib. *jadgha ma* or *jaṅgha ma*. This location remains unidentified. A search using the online *India Place Finder* (<http://india.csis.u-tokyo.ac.jp>) yielded multiple approximations of this name across India, but none that could be confidently pinpointed as the region referenced here.

¹²² This scene is described much later in the SG than many of the events that will follow here, but it would appear from the context that Vanaratna's meeting with the grammarian occurred earlier in than narrative than it was reported in the *rnam thar*.

¹²³ The precise meaning of the term *buṅgayāje* (Tib. *bhu ṅga ya je*) is uncertain, but the reference is clearly to the *buṅgadyo*, the Red Lokeśvara housed at Bungamati.

¹²⁴ SG 51r.1-5: nam zhiḡ lho phyogs jadgha ma'i yul nas sgra shin tu mkhas pa shes pa'i phyi rol pa gcig kho pon gyi sras po'i slob dpon la bos | des rang nyid mkhas pa'i nga rgyal gyis rtsod par bsams nas sku mdun du 'ongs | dri ba mang po zhus 'dug pa | rim gyis spobs pa dang bral bar mdzad pa las | des kho pon la | khyed rang gi yul na 'di lta bu'i mkhas pa 'dug pa la mi slob par nga 'bod pa ci byed | rgya gar na'ang 'di lta bu'i mkhas pa dkon | rang gi yul gyi mkhas pa mi shes pa khyed rang ngo tsha | da ni bkur sti che po rigs zer ba tshogs par smras 'dug | kho rang kyang shin tu dad nas sku mdun du yang yang 'ongs | sgra'i dka' gnas mang po zhus nas zin bris byas | zhal snga nas kyang dgyes po byung 'dug ste | de'i stobs kyis kho pon shin tu mthong che ba dang gus su song | kho rang gi sras rnam 'phags pa'i bstod pa rin pi che'i phreng ba 'dzin bcig nas | bhu ṅga ya je la 'don pa sogs byed.

perform. The songs used to perform this drama, which was based on the *Ramāyāna* and other tales, were in a mixture of six different major languages. With the exception the basic structure of the songs,¹²⁵ they did not understand most of its meaning. The brahmins were asked but didn't know either. It was suggested that the *paṇḍita* of Gopicandra might know if asked, which convinced [the king] to invite him. [Vanaratna] arrived, identified the different languages, made clarifications, and distilled the meaning in the local language. They then understood that he was a great scholar, and developed some respect for him.¹²⁶

This intriguing scene is insightful for both Vanaratna's career and the historical moment in which he first rose to prominence as a *paṇḍita* in the Bhaktapur court. It is initially curious that Jayayakṣamalla and his court were to put on a performance in a festival setting using a text that neither they nor the court brahmins could read nor fully understand. Perhaps in this we witness something of what Todd Lewis and Naresh Man Bajracharya describe as an increasing adoption of "Hindu" (read: Indic) culture among Kathmandu Valley courts in the fifteenth century, which included the performance of *Ramāyāna*-themed dramas.¹²⁷ The scene of Vanaratna's intervention clearly suggests that the drama in question could not have been a local composition, nor could it have been circulating long in the Kathmandu Valley. One would assume that in either case the text would be comprehensible to the court and its resident *paṇḍitas*. Tuladhar-Douglas takes the scene of Vanaratna's intervention as evidence to suggest that by the fifteenth century in Nepal, "Sanskrit was no longer really an option for public performance, even among court scholars..."¹²⁸ Thus if bSod nams rgya mtsho's account is accurate, it would seem that Jayayakṣa had utilized a festival or celebratory context to stage a prestige Sanskrit drama the further cemented his family's status as Hindu monarchs, even if the drama in question was initially unintelligible to them.

Not knowing the precise title of the text or the festival on which it was performed it is difficult to contextualize the moment Vanaratna finally gained the recognition of the Jayayakṣa and his court. bSod nams rgya mtsho informs us only that the text in question was based on the *Ramāyāna* and other stories (*rā ma ṇa'i gtam rgyud sogs*), and that it was staged as part of a "Newari festival" (*nā vya ri'i dus ston*). Looking to the broader historical record, there is one event that may align with this rather generic description, and with other details of Vanaratna's narrative. In their extensive studies of the manuscript archive of the Kathmandu Valley, both D.R. Regmi and Luciano Petech have noted a major celebration that took place in Jayayakṣa's court. We know of this event and the circumstances of its production through the colophon from a manuscript of the specific drama performed on that occasion: the *Caturāṅkamahābhāratanaṭaka*.¹²⁹ As the title of the drama suggests, the text appears to be based on the *Mahābhārata* and not the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but bSod nams rgya mtsho was vague in his

¹²⁵ Conj.; srol brda (?) glur byed pa. The syllables are partly illegible here.

¹²⁶ 36r.2-5: nā vya ri dus ston la kho rang kyang gar byed | de la rā ma ṇa'i gtam rgyud sogs zlos gar du byed pa'i glu'i rgyud so so skad rigs chen po drug 'dras mar yod pas | srol brda (?) glur byed pa tsam ma gtogs phal che ba'i don ma shes | bram ze rnams la dris pas kyang ma shes pas | go bi candra'i paṇḍi ta la dris na shes sam zer ba byung bas | kho yid g.yos te spyen 'dren byung bas thegs | der skad so so dbye ba phye nas dag par mdzad cing | don rnams kyang yul skad du bkol nas gsungs pas | mkhas pa chen por rig cing cung zad gus pa yang byed pa yin.

¹²⁷ Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 104-7.

¹²⁸ Tuladhar-Douglas 2002: 106.

¹²⁹ Regmi 1965: 436-7, 447-8; Petech 1984: 192. I was unable to access this manuscript to verify the content reported in those sources.

description, and could perhaps be forgiven if he was confused about which of South Asia’s major epic traditions the play was drawn from. The colophon states that it was performed to commemorate prince Jayarāyamalla’s ritual offering of a man’s weight in gold (*kanakatulāpuruṣamahādāna*). Also relevant to Vanaratna’s narrative is the fact that this event was directed by three of Patan’s *mahāpātras*, led by the *mahāmahāpātra* Udayasiṃha Mallavarman, who we also know from the Ibā Bahī inscription of 1427 to have been among the leading *mahāpātras* of the time. As we learn from bSod nam rgya mtsho’s account, an unnamed member of the court suggested that the “*paṇḍita* from Gopicandra” be consulted, and who would have been better positioned to recommend a Buddhist *paṇḍita* who could come to the court’s (and the *mahāpātra*’s) aid than the very men who granted Gopicandra to Vanaratna? Though bSod nam rgya mtsho provides neither an approximate date nor enough detail to confirm Jayarāyamalla’s *tūlapuruṣamahādāna* ceremony as the event recorded in the SG, or that the *Caturāṅkamahābhāratānāṭaka* is the text in question, his account and the event described do align well, and given the role of the *mahāpātras*, also align well with the general conditions in which Vanaratna operated.

Vanaratna’s assistance to the court was indeed remarkable; upon being summoned to court, Vanaratna duly identified the “six major languages” in which it was written—presumably Sanskrit and an assortment of dramatic Prākṛits—explained the meaning to the assembled court, and even prepared a summary in a local language (*yul skad*). This latter point indicates that by the time of this event Vanaratna was fluent enough in Newari that he could translate into it from Sanskrit and other Indic languages. Thus despite his Buddhist background, Vanaratna’s extensive training in grammar and poetics made him uniquely suited to assist the Brahmanical court, earning him esteem from the king and his brahman *paṇḍitas* and initiating a relationship that would endure for the remainder of his life.

Buddhism on Trial: the Harihariharivāhana Lokeśvara Scandal

Vanaratna’s growing stature in Bhaktapur had, in Vanaratna’s estimation, a positive effect for the Buddhist community as a whole. Likely channeling Vanaratna’s own views, bSod nam rgya mtsho observes:

The local people were generous and had no real allegiance to either Buddhist or non-Buddhist traditions. The kings and the brahmins, however, seemed quite prejudiced about the Buddhist and non-Buddhist systems. Through the power of the king, the brahmins had a significant degree of influence, but the influence of those who considered themselves Buddhists gradually increased through the presence of His Eminence. The king of Bhaktapur also developed more faith in Buddhism than he had before.¹³⁰

Buddhist-Brahmanical relations were not entirely free of acrimony, however, as is witnessed in a dispute that Vanaratna was again summoned to court to mediate. The dispute itself is a fascinating one, and important for our understanding of Brahmanical-Buddhist relations at the time and the increasing trust Jayayakṣamalla and his court placed in Vanaratna.

¹³⁰ SG 38r.4-5: yul mi byin la’ang phyi nang gi phyogs ris tsam med | ’on kyang ’ju ’ju dang bram ze zer nas nang pa dang phyi pa’i ris bcad ’dra cig ’dug pa la’ang | rgyal po stobs kyis bram ze ngos shed che ba tsam ’dug pa la dang pa ’di bzhugs pa’i stobs kyis nang par gtogs pa rnam rim gyis shed skyes | kho pon rgyal po’ang nang pa la sngar bas dad du song bar snang.

The dispute centered on a local Buddhist man who, in a clear provocation of his brahmin neighbors, erected a statue of the controversial Hariharivāhana form of Avalokiteśvara (image 22). In this form, clearly intended to demonstrate the spiritual primacy of the Buddhist faith, and which David Gellner’s Newari informants told him is “guaranteed to annoy Hindus,”¹³¹ Avalokiteśvara sits atop a nāga, lion, garuḍa, and then Viṣṇu himself.¹³² This provocative form of Avalokiteśvara and its mythology could in fact be regarded as a strategic counter-narrative expressing resistance to the growing Hinduization of the royal court and its governing policies in the fifteenth century. Like the *Guṇakaraṇḍavyūha* which was composed in the same period, the Hariharivāhana form of Avalokiteśvara blatantly asserts the primacy of the Buddhist faith by recasting Viṣṇu, the focus of the Malla courts devotions, and his mounts as emanations of Avalokiteśvara, subordinating them to the most popular Buddhist deity in the Valley.¹³³ The overt challenge Buddhists made to the Brahmanical community is clearly evident in the scene from Vanaratna’s narrative, which describes a dispute between neighbors that quickly spiraled out of control, engulfed the kingdom, and landed in Jayayakṣa’s court:

In one Buddhist household there was an image of Hariharivāhana Lokeśvara. When a brahmin saw this he was horrified and said, “Now that you’ve made a statue of your god using my three supreme gods as its seat, I’m going to make a statue of my god using your god as a seat!” Their argument spread everywhere, and became a dispute that reached all the way to the Bhaktapur [court]. [Jayayakṣamalla] said, “The two sides must debate. The tradition of the victor will thus be proven correct.” With the debate set to begin, the elder brahmins grew afraid, [thinking], “there is that famous *paṇḍita* in Patan,” and so on. The nobles were powerless, and being uncertain what to do, said “offer the *paṇḍita* an invitation.” Thus a request was sent by all asking him to come. At first, Vanaratna thought this was a bit like a lion and foxes,¹³⁴ and so declined. But they were persistent in their requests, and so thinking that it was, at the very least, inappropriate to denigrate an image of the Teacher, he verbally accepted. When word reached the king, a formal invitation to court arrived. When he ascended the throne arranged for the Buddhist faction, some of the brahmins protested, saying, “The *paṇḍita* is a god for all of us,” and would not join [the debate].¹³⁵

When the communal disagreement reached the Bhaktapur court, Jayayakṣa elected to make it a

¹³¹ Gellner’s 1992: 96.

¹³² A synopsis of this myth is given in Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 110-11.

¹³³ Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 110.

¹³⁴ This analogy is unclear. It would appear to mean something to the effect of “a fox entering a lion’s den,” but it could alternatively be understood to refer to Vanaratna [the lion] competing against foxes [the brahmins].

¹³⁵ SG 38r.5-38v.4: de yang nang pa gcig khyim na | ha ri ha ri ha ri la bzhugs pa’i ’phags pa ’jig rten dbang phyug gi sku cig yod pa de | bram za gcig gis mthong nas | khyad nged kyi lha chen po gsum gdan du byas pa’i khyed rang gi lha bzhengs ’di las na | nged kyang khyed rang gi lha gdan du byas pa’i nged rang gi lha bzhengs zer nas mchog tu ma rangs | de thams cad du mched pas rtsod par song ste kho pon la gtugs pas | kyed rang phyogs gnyi gar rtsod pa gyis | gang rgyal ba de’i lugs de rigs pa yin zer ba byung | der rtsod pa byed par brtsams pas bram ze rnams kyi rgan pa ye rang paṇḍi tar grags pa gcig ’dug pa sogs la zhed nas | ’ju ’ju rnams kyi ma nus | der ci bya gtol med nas paṇḍi ta la zhu ba ’dbul zer nas | thams cad kyi phebs dgos pa’i zhu ba phul ’dug pa | thog mar seng ge dang wa skeyes kyi tshul ltar dgongs pas ma gnang | slar nan gyis zhu ba phul ’dug pa la | bstan pa’i gzugs brnyan tsam ’di’ang nyams dma’ na mi rung dgongs nas zhal gyis bzhes | de rgyal po la bsnyad pas | rgyal pos spyen ’dren byung | der nang par gtigs pa rnams khrid de thegs pas | bram ze rnams na re paṇḍi ta ni thams cad kyi lha yin zer nas ’’ong ma nus pa snang ste.

referendum on the validity of the two religious traditions prominent in the Valley. Perhaps he was overconfident in his court brahmins, or he was truly interested in the claims to authority made by representatives of the two main religious traditions practiced among his subjects. Whatever his motivation, the representatives of the Hindu faith seemed once again not to be up to the task of representing their tradition. In bSod nams rgya mtsho perhaps biased telling, the brahmins at court expected victory against their Buddhist rivals, as long as it was not Vanaratna that they were to debate. In framing the scene in this way bSod nams rgya mtsho was likely trying to valorize Vanaratna while discrediting his Brahmanical adversaries, but implicit in this account is the recognition that Vanaratna was the only Buddhist *paṇḍita* in the Kathmandu Valley whom the brahmins at court feared. Unfortunately for them, the court could not be persuaded to bar Vanaratna from the proceedings, forcing the brahmins to evade the debate entirely by claiming they could not contend with a master from whom they had previously sought advice. How could they possibly debate the man who they had recognized as their guru in another context? Even though we are never told how the original dispute was resolved, Vanaratna's clout at court allowed both religious traditions to emerge with their reputations intact, which was perhaps the most ideal solution for all involved.

A Life-long Relationship is Born

Rather than take offense when a Buddhist *paṇḍita* so swiftly disarmed his court scholars, Jayayakṣa's respect (*dad pa*) and affection (*zhen pa*) for Vanaratna grew after the debate and soon he was a frequent presence at court and brought into the king's close circle.¹³⁶ Jayayakṣa began to invite Vanaratna to celebrations held at court, including the observance of the *ekādaśī*, or eleventh-day worship of Viṣṇu. Whether this refers to the monthly occurrence of this rite or one of its particularly auspicious dates—those during the summer months when Viṣṇu begins his annual slumber, turns in his sleep, and awakens—is not specified in the SG.¹³⁷ Whatever the case, Vanaratna demurred, saying that it would not be appropriate for a Buddhist *paṇḍita* to make an offering as part of the a non-Buddhist rite, but did take the occasion to gently point out the superiority of Buddhism.¹³⁸ He even composed a series of verses as part of his persuasions:

Because [the king] knew a little Sanskrit, [Vanaratna] put his advice into verse:

Just as anyone trying to make butter
Wastes their efforts churning water,
A person who does not follow the path of the Sugata
Will never reach liberation.¹³⁹

When Jayayakṣa stated firmly that he was not able to abandon the tradition of his family (*rigs kyi chos lugs 'dor bar ma nus pa*),¹⁴⁰ Vanaratna increased the intensity of his rhetoric:

¹³⁶ SG 38v.4-5.

¹³⁷ Slusser 1985, vol.1: 253-4.

¹³⁸ SG 38v.5-6.

¹³⁹ SG 38v.6-39r.1: khong gis saṃskṛi ta cung zad dgos bas | tshig su bcaḍ pas kyang gdams pa | ji ltar su yang rung ba'i skyes bu mar don gnyer ba yis / chu ni mngon par bsrubs kyang mar (*em. ma ms.*) rnyed 'gyur ba ma yin pa / de bzhin bde bar gshegs pa'i lam 'di la yang mi brten pa'i / mi yis mam par grol ba rnyed par 'gyur ba ma yin nyid //

¹⁴⁰ SG 39r.2.

One who cannot investigate family traditions that formed over time
Should be forsaken quickly by those who are wise.
Topics from traditions that really should be renounced,
Are precisely what eminent people should never teach.

Like an inept merchant on a jeweled island who ignores the jewels they find,
And ignorant of their value, pick up sea glass thinking it a precious gem,
So do the dimwitted of Jambudvīpa ignore the Buddhist tradition,
And with their utterly dull minds follow heretics, thinking they'll reach liberation.¹⁴¹

But it was still to no avail, as the king resisted his attempts at conversion. Despite Vanaratna's seeming harshness, Jayayakṣa remained impressed with the *paṇḍita*, regarded him as a worthy ambassador of his faith, and commanded him to remain in Nepal:

“I, the king of this realm, hold both traditions to be good. Sthavira! You must always remain here in this kingdom.”¹⁴²

However stylized bSod nams rgya mtsho's depiction may be, this exchange illustrates the type of connection that formed between Vanaratna and Jayayakṣa, a relationship that was evident in their interactions throughout Vanaratna's life. As we have seen, Jayayakṣa's sons learned Vanaratna's *Avalokiteśvararatnāmālāstotra* by heart and recited it before the Avalokiteśvara image at Buṅgamati, an indication both of Jayayakṣa's fondness for the *paṇḍita* and an expression of the commitment he made to value both Buddhism and Hindu within his kingdom. bSod nams rgya mtsho also makes a passing reference that suggests Jayayakṣa entrusted Vanaratna with the supervision of rites at the major Buddhist sites across the Valley, including at Svayambhū.¹⁴³

Beyond the spiritual, Jayayakṣa and his court also relied on Vanaratna, in his capacity as a ritual master, when the Valley was under immanent military threat. bSod nams rgya mtsho describes a moment of unknown date when the southern kingdoms of Tirhut and Champarān, were about to stage a raid on the Valley. Jayayakṣa called upon Vanaratna, who duly used his ritual power to send a great hail storm down upon the enemies and thwart their advance.¹⁴⁴ Though we have no further evidence that can tie Vanaratna's interventions to a specific attack on the Valley, local historical sources do record aggressions from the king of Champarān Madanasimhadeva in the 1450s. The seventeenth-century *Narapatijayacaryāṭīkā* notes that Jayayakṣa led a campaign against Champarān and Tirhut during his reign, possibly alluding to simmering hostilities between Nepal and its southern neighbors into which Vanaratna may have

¹⁴¹ SG 39r.3-5: rigs kyi rim par byung ba'i lugs dag dpyad par mi nus pa / rnam par mkhas pa rnam kyis myur du dor bar bya ba ste / ci nas spang bar 'os pa rigs las byung ba yi yang gnad (*em. nad ms.*) / bdag nyid chen po rnam kyis bsten par 'os pa min pa nyid // ji ltar rin chen gling song tshong pa ngan pas nor bu rin chen yongs dor nas / nor la mi mkhas rmongs pas bzhu shel nzung ste nor bu rin chen yin snyam byed / de bzhin 'jam gling gnas pa'i blo gros ngan pas sangs rgyas pa yi lugs dor nas / rnam par mi mkhas rmongs pa pa'i blo yis mu stegs lugs bzung rnam par grol snyam bgyid //

¹⁴² SG 39r.5-6: bdag yul 'di'i rā ja yin pas lugs gnyis ga la bzang po byed | sthā vi ra khyed yul 'dir gtan du bzhugs dgos zer.

¹⁴³ SG 51r.5-6: shing kun gyis gtsos pa'i nang pa'i rten rnam kyis pū ja sogs la do dam chen po rang du song ba yin.

¹⁴⁴ SG 54v.4-5

been briefly drawn.¹⁴⁵

It was not only Jayayakṣa who had come to rely on Vanaratna and develop an enduring fondness for the *paṇḍita*, a fact that is particularly evident when invitations began to arrive from Tibet in late 1440s and early 1450s. When the new Phag mo grus monarch Kun dga' legs pa first sent an invitation to Nepal, Vanaratna initially showed reluctance, sending a reply that stated:

“I am touched by your pious intention, but I have been shown great favor by lord of Lalitpur. Please check to see if the road has been repaired well,¹⁴⁶ and then we'll decide.”¹⁴⁷

When the Tibetan delegation, organized by gZhon nu dpal, arrived in Patan in 1452 bearing a formal letter of invitation, Vanaratna again deferred to his decision to Jayayakṣa and the other “kings” of Nepal, telling the Tibetans:

“The Mahādhipati [Kun dga' legs pa] has a great deal of faith, and summons me often. It wouldn't be acceptable to undermine that devotion. And *ācārya* Kumāraśrī is very determined and has already come most of the way,¹⁴⁸ so I should by all means go [to Tibet]. You need to go and discuss this skillfully with the king of Bhaktapur. The conditions need to be good.”¹⁴⁹

Jayayakṣa and the leaders of Patan were not easily persuaded to permit Vanaratna to leave Nepal, and could only be convinced once the Tibetans offered them a sizable amount of gold. But it was not purely greed that motivated them, as their permission to release Vanaratna was contingent on the promise that Vanaratna would return to Nepal within two years:

With great joy [the Tibetan delegation] set out for the Bhaktapur court to discuss [Vanaratna's] departure, but [the court] refused to listen. The three kings of Bhaktapur and Patan¹⁵⁰ forcefully countered that he had to stay, creating an awkward impasse. It was only after the skillful payment of a tribute of twelve *zho* of gold to the king that they assented. [The king said,] “We give permission with the condition that [Vanaratna] returns within two years. Be careful with this permission. This is the time for you Tibetans to accept these terms.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ Petech 1984, 176-78.

¹⁴⁶ Vanaratna seemed particularly concerned about the road conditions, as he again sent word to Tibet that he would be happy to accept Kun dga' legs pa's invitation provided a messenger traveled to Nepal to confirm the state of the road (SG 40r.4).

¹⁴⁷ SG 40r.2: khyed kyi chen dad pa'i bsam pa khong du chud | 'on kyang nged la li ta'i gring khyer gyi bdag pos yang dag par bde bar byed pa yin | lam bzang po 'chos pa lta na slad kyis blta'o.

¹⁴⁸ Kumāraśrī is the Sanskrit translation of gZhon nu dpal. gZhon nu dpal had lead the delegation as far as La stod in southern Tibet, where he waited for Vanaratna's arrival.

¹⁴⁹ SG 41r.1-2: ma hā a dhi pa ti de dad pa chen po chen po yin | nged rang shog shog mang po byung | mos pa bzlog pa yang mi rigs pa yin | ā carya ku mā ra śrī nged rang gcig su sems pas nye mo nye mo na sleb pa tshar | da ni nged rang cis kyang 'gro ba yin | khyed rang rnam kho pon rā ja la lan lob mkhas po gyis | lam bzang po bzang po dgos pa yin.

¹⁵⁰ The possible identity of these “three kings” is discussed above on p. 108.

¹⁵¹ SG 41r.2-4: der kho rnam dga' ches pas kho dpon sogs la phebs bzhud kyi gtam byas pa na | de mi nyan zer nas | kho pon dang ye rang gi rgyal po gsum gyis bzhugs dgos pa'i zhu ba drag po phul bas dka' gnas che tsam byung ba la | thabs mkhas kyis kho pon la gser zho bcu gnyis rngan par byin | slar lo gnyis kyi khong su phyr phebs pa'i zhal

Vanaratna, for his part, took this directive seriously, and refused to extend his stay in Tibet despite the pleas of his devoted disciples and the Tibetan king. When Vanaratna began to receive messages from Nepal that it was time to return, his Tibetan students were disconsolate, and begged him to remain. Instead, he told them:

“I made a promise to the Bhaktapur king and the others to return after a little more than year. It would not be right to fail in that.”¹⁵²

Such was Vanaratna’s status in Nepal by this time that Jayayakṣa sent a reception party to meet him en route at the Nepal-Tibet border, from where they escorted him back to Patan:

The reception party sent by the king of Bhaktapur arrived at the border and said, “You are invited to Bhaktapur. You are a god for all of Tibet, and the guru to all kings. It is most excellent that you have returned to our land, not forsaking your promise.” They then attended to him well. Around the same time his disciples from Patan also received him and took him to the glorious Gopicandra [Vihāra], where he pleased everyone in both spiritual and materials ways.¹⁵³

Vanaratna then spent the remainder of his life—thirteen years in total—in the Kathmandu Valley, never again traveling beyond the rim of the valley. This does not Vanaratna did not receive further invitations; such was his fame by this stage in his life that two invitations arrived from outside Nepal. The first came in 1461, when the king of Kashmir (*kha che gyi khri bstan gyi rgyal po*) sent an emissary via Mustang (*glo bo*) bearing gifts and an invitation.¹⁵⁴ If we accept that the Tibetan term *kha che* refers specifically to Kashmir and not generically to an unnamed Islamic kingdom, then this is surely a reference to Zain-ul-Abidin, the liberal polymath who ruled over Kashmir from 1420 to 1470.¹⁵⁵ A second, and more puzzling invitation arrived in 1467 from the king of Pandua in eastern India (*rgya gar shar phyogs paṇḍu ba ’i yul*).¹⁵⁶ It is difficult to determine which “king” this would have referred to. Rukn al-Dīn Barbak Shāh (1459-75) of the later Ilyās Shāhi Dynasty ruled over the region, and though he was known to be non-sectarian in his patronage of religious literature in his kingdom, there is no evidence to suggest that he would have been interested in inviting a Buddhist *paṇḍita* to his realm.¹⁵⁷ Whomever this refers to, he was so keen on acquiring Vanaratna from Jayayakṣa that he was ready to offer the king of Bhaktapur whatever he desired.

Vanaratna would not leave Nepal again, not even for Tibet. When a fourth and final invitation reached him from Tibet in 1465, he declined after an outpouring of grief from his

bzhes kyang gnang bas | zhal bzhes tig tig dgos | da lan khyed rang bod rnam len pa gyis zer |

¹⁵² SG 45r.4: kho pon rgyal po sogs la lo gcig lhag tsam la sleb pa ’i dam bca’ yod pa las ’gal ba mir rigs pa yin gsung.

¹⁵³ SG 49r.5-6: de nas kho pon rā ja’i sryan ’dren pa rnam kyi sa mtshams su sleb | kho pon du sryan drangs | khyed rang bod thams cad kyi lha yin | ra ja thams cad kyi gu ru yin | nged rang gi yul du dam bcas pa las mi g.yo bar byon pa nan tar bzang po yin zer nas | zhabs tog bzang po byas | de rang ye rang gi slob ma rnam kyi bsus te | dpal go pi candra phebs | tams cad kyang chos dang zang zing gis tshim par mdzad.

¹⁵⁴ SG 51r.6-51v.1.

¹⁵⁵ On Zain-ul-Abidin, see Mohammed 1997.

¹⁵⁶ SG 54v.3-4.

¹⁵⁷ On Barbak Shāh, see Faris and Miles 1940: 145-6, and Eaton 1993: 66.

students and patrons in Patan. bSod nams rgya mtsho, who was with Vanaratna in Nepal when the invitation arrived, writes:

While we were in [Vanaratna’s] presence an invitation from an official (*nang so*) at sNe’u gdong arrived. Wondering if he should go to Tibet, he asked his Nepalese students and the king of Lalitpur, who objected saying, “If the Gosai¹⁵⁸ doesn’t stay in this kingdom, it will be like the sun is setting, and the city will be left without its protector and refuge.”¹⁵⁹

So intense was their faith in the Indian *paṇḍita* that they believed it was his presence in their city that prevented Patan from being damaged in an undated earthquake and protected from the ensuing epidemic.¹⁶⁰ Such was the reverence and affection Vanaratna had earned from his students in Buddhist Patan and his patrons in Hindu Bhaktapur that the allure of other kingdoms and the opportunities they presented paled in comparison to what he had already found in Nepal. But it was not only his disciples and patrons who benefited from his life and work in the Kathmandu Valley, but citizens from all walks of life who became the beneficiaries of his philanthropic activities.

An *Avadhūta*’s Obligations: Vanaratna’s Social Work

Recall that when Vanaratna first returned to the Kathmandu Valley around 1438 and was gifted Gopicandra Vihāra, he was adamant that he accepted no responsibility for the institution, and by extension, intended no lasting engagement with the local community. He said, emphatically:

“I am an *avadhūta*; I take no personal responsibility. I will only stay here as long as it makes sense to.”

Recall also that Vanaratna’s original intent was to use the wealth he accumulated during his second trip to Tibet to fund his return to India and commission a large statue of his Indian teacher Buddhaghōṣa. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Vanaratna soon realized such a journey was impossible, and so remained in Nepal and settled in at Gopicandra. In the years that followed we notice a perceptible shift in his attitude towards Nepal, the local community, and his own career in the Kathmandu Valley. As presented in the preceding sections, Vanaratna established what became a long and mutually profitable engagement with the Buddhist community from his seat at Gopicandra; he took on students, gave public and private teachings, composed new works to augment local practices, and lead rituals onsite and across the Valley. The gold he once planned to carry off to India he used instead to commission statues to adorn the shrine at Gopicandra, images that became focal points for the devotions of the local community. We have also seen that Vanaratna made his services available to the king and court, and became a favorite of Jayayakṣamalla. All of this brought him not only fame and recognition, but endeared

¹⁵⁸ Skt. *gōsvāmin*, literally “lord of cows.” This honorific title for a religious mendicant can be applied to religious figures generally, but is most frequently used in Vaiṣṇava circles.

¹⁵⁹ SG 54v.6-55r.1: nged nams zhabs drung na yod dus | sne’u gdong nang so’i gden dran zhig kyang sleb pa dang bstun | bod du phebs pa cig ’ong dam snyam nas zhu ba phul ba na bal po’i slob ma dang ye rang rgyal po sogs na re | yul ’dir go sai mi bzhugs na nyi ma nub pa lta bu yin / lhag par grong khyer’di mgon skyabs dang bral.

¹⁶⁰ SG 54r.6-54v.1. There is no indication of a major earthquake elsewhere in the historical record from this period, but that should not preclude the possibility of a significant tremor during Vanaratna’s lifetime.

him to prominent and influential members of Nepalese society in both religious and political circles to the point that they would only let him leave the Valley with great reluctance. Thus by the time of his departure for his final trip to Tibet in 1453, he had come a long way from the hesitant *avadhūta* who settled in Patan fifteen years earlier.

When Vanaratna returned to Nepal in 1455, it was, perhaps for the first time in his long career in South Asia, a return home. Upon reaching the Valley, his eyes were no longer on a farther horizon, but remained steadily focused on the community he served in Nepal. In particular, Vanaratna seems to have displayed a new sense of concern and responsibility for the welfare of ordinary citizens of the Valley, especially the poor, destitute, and hungry. Prior to his departure for Tibet in 1453, we find no record of Vanaratna's philanthropic or social welfare activities in Nepal; upon his return, however, Vanaratna immediately used the large amounts of gold he had accumulated in Tibet to establish a foodbank at Gopicandra, and began a daily disbursement of food to religious mendicants, beggars, and anyone else in need. Vanaratna's philanthropic act is described in detail in the SG, and remarkably, is depicted in a Nepalese *paubhā* dating to 1469 that bears an inscription that corroborates bSod nams rgya mtsho's account. First, in bSod nams rgya mtsho's words:

Vanaratna gradually exchanged the gold he had been offered by the Tibetans for grain, and established a perpetual supply to provide for all the beggars in the kingdom. It continues to this day. Beginning with musicians in the early morning, [grain] would be given to the large gathering of people [at Gopicandra], continuing until the sun set.¹⁶¹

The Nepalese *paubhā*, painted in 1469 to commemorate Vanaratna's death (image 1) describes this same event using remarkably similar language. The inscription states that Vanaratna distributed alms at Gopicandra Vihāra in 1456 (N.S. 576), giving one measure of grain each to the assembled supplicants, who queued from sunrise to sunset. According to both the inscription from the painting and the details of the image, Vanaratna's generosity extended to people of all religious and social backgrounds, including a diverse cast of ascetics, Śaiva mendicants (*jaṅgama*), local householders, and beggars.¹⁶² Vanaratna's egalitarianism seems to have caused some consternation among his Buddhist followers, who wondered aloud if it would perhaps be better for the Buddhist teachings if he only gave to the more righteous Buddhist beggars, and not just to any random non-Buddhist yogi who showed up. Vanaratna laughed the question off, reminding his students that anyone who perceives the true nature of reality will never be biased in their generosity.¹⁶³ Vanaratna would undertake another act of public alms-giving as part of a *dāna* rite that he sponsored just before his death.¹⁶⁴ Apart from this we are not given any further information on other social welfare he activities he may have performed during

¹⁶¹ SG 49v.1-3: der bod pa nmam kyis phul ba'i gser nams rim gyis 'bras su bsgyur nas yul de'i slongs mo ba thams cad kyi nar ma'i 'tsho ba sbyor ba'i tshul bzang po btsugs / da lta'i bar du ma chad par mdzad cing / de yang snga dro rol mo ba sogs phal che ba tshogs pa la gngang / de nas ñi ma ma nub bar du su la yang gngang gi 'dug ste.

¹⁶² This inscription has been transcribed and summarized in Pal 1985 (236) and was discussed by Dina Bangdel (Huntington, *et al.* 2003: 143). The interpretation of the inscription presented here is indebted to Yogesh Raj and Punya Parajuli, who offered key insights into the inscription and important correctives to Pal's interpretation in a series of personal conversations and emails (Kathmandu: Feb.-Dec. 2019).

¹⁶³ SG 49v.3-4: nang pa'i nmams kyis rang re'i sprang tshul bzang po 'di | phyi rol pa'i jo ki sogs su yin la gngang ba 'di bas | nang par gtogs pa nmams 'ba' shig la gngang na bstan pa la phan zhus pas | ha mi skye 'gro thams cad he ru kar shes pa'i rnal 'byor pa spyin yul la ris 'byed pa ma yin gsung.

¹⁶⁴ This event will be discussed in the Conclusion.

his many decades living in the Kathmandu Valley. The scene described can nonetheless be taken as illustrative of Vanaratna's shifting attitude towards his adopted home and its community.

Across Nepal and Around the Valley: Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho's Travels in Nepal

For all of the wealth of information bSod nams rgya mtsho's biography of Vanaratna provides on the religious, political, and social climate of fifteenth-century Nepal, his account is largely limited to Vanaratna's activities in the cities of Patan and Bhaktapur, and so offers comparatively little insight into other sites around the Kathmandu Valley and elsewhere in Nepal. We can, however, look to other contemporary biographical sources to augment the limited information we find in the SG, and make a preliminary assessment about the broader context in which Vanaratna worked, both in the Kathmandu Valley and beyond. Of specific value in this regard is Chos grags yes she's biography of bSod nams rgya mtsho, the NTSG, which treats at length and in detail the year bSod nams rgya mtsho spent in Nepal. During this time bSod nams rgya mtsho explored the Valley on his own, and traveled to a number of places that do not feature in Vanaratna's narrative. Also of value for the insights it brings to Vanaratna's narrative is 'Jam dpal ye she's NTCZ, which briefly but productively chronicles Vanaratna's overland journey from Mang yul Gung thang to the Kathmandu Valley around 1438, a trip noted, but not described in the SG. By coordinating these sources we are able to highlight some of the key moments in Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho's travels across Nepal and around the Kathmandu Valley, and explore their implications for our knowledge of the broader terrain of fifteenth-century Nepal.

Across Nepal: Vanaratna's Travels between Nepal and Tibet

The accounts provided by gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho may leave us with the impression that Vanaratna did not travel that widely while in residence in the Kathmandu Valley. Though we know that he spent considerable time at Svayambhū early in his stay, neither of the *rnam thars* have much to tell us about his travels to other sites around the Valley or the work he may have engaged in there. Intriguing but slim evidence from his collected writings and the archival record suggests that he had students around the Valley, particularly in Kathmandu, but the biographies do not include them or Vanaratna's travels to meet and work with them. Similarly, we can be reasonably confident that Vanaratna visited other places of significance throughout the Valley, especially if we accept bSod nams rgya mtsho's statement that Jayayakṣamalla had given Vanaratna authority over the ritual practices at Buddhist sites across the Valley.¹⁶⁵ We have also seen in his early biography that Vanaratna was an ardent pilgrim, routinely taking time to visit important Buddhist sites and monuments in Sri Lanka, southern and northern India, and Tibet. It would therefore be unimaginable that he did not visit the many sacred Buddhist sites that dot the Nepalese landscape. And yet, for whatever reason, neither his formal activities nor his pilgrimages merited inclusion in bSod nams rgya mtsho's writings. Slightly more, though still limited data is available on Vanaratna's overland travels between Nepal and Tibet. None of the six legs of his journeys are described in detail, but there is enough

¹⁶⁵ SG 51r.5-6.

tangential information on the places he visited and the relationships he formed to allow us to make some provisional observations about his travels around Nepal.

Vanaratna's made three journeys to Tibet, and so traversed the distance between the Kathmandu Valley and the Tibetan border six times. Three of those legs fall within the timeframe of the *ŽP*, and three within the scope of the *SG*. Generally speaking, there are two primary routes Vanaratna could have traveled between Nepal and Tibet, the western road to sKyid rong via Nuwakot, and the eastern road to Chubar via Dolakhā. Unfortunately, *gZhon nu dpal* does not describe any of the three Himalayan traverses Vanaratna made within the timeline of the *ŽP*, but we can be reasonably confident he took the eastern road on all three occasions. This was certainly the case in his first travel north over the Himalaya, as *gZhon nu dpal* states this his first stop in Tibet was Tsha mda', a town located between Chubar and Ding ri.¹⁶⁶ This was the likely route he followed for his return journey in 1427, and then again around 1432, as in both cases the Tibetan terminus for his travel was La stod and Nyang. And, as we will discuss below, Vanaratna made his single recorded journey along the western road to fulfill a long-standing invitation from the ruler of Mang yul Gung thang in mNga' ris, marking it as a special departure from his usual route. Both *Chos grags ye shes* in the *NTŽP* and *bSod nams rgya mtsho* are explicit about the fact that Vanaratna passed through Dolakhā and Chubar en route to La stod on both legs of third visit to Tibet, even if they offer little in the way of a description of his journey.¹⁶⁷

Thus out of the six legs of Vanaratna's three journeys to Tibet only one—his return travel around 1438 at the end of his second trip—followed the western road to the Kathmandu Valley via sKyid rong and Nuwakot. This is the first of Vanaratna's trans-Himalayan journeys to be treated in the *SG*, but *bSod nams rgya mtsho* chose only to highlight the threat posed by Koka Sāhu and Vanaratna's evasions of it, rather than provide any details or description of the journey itself. For an account of this journey we instead must turn to 'Jam dpal ye shes's *NTCZ*, which provides a more detailed, if still exceedingly brief description. When Vanaratna came out of his retreat at the Śāntipur temple, there were two invitations awaiting him: one from rGyal rtse and another from Mang yul Gung thang. Vanaratna elected to accept the first, but did not forget about the request of Khri Lha dbang rgyal mtshan (1404-64), a request he made good on when he returned to Nepal at the end of his eight years in Tibet. His journey through western Tibet also afforded him the opportunity to fulfill his aspiration to pay homage to the famed sandalwood image of Avalokiteśvara at sKyid rong. Vanaratna spent some time at the palace at Gung thang and then at sKyid rong, and when he was ready to depart was met at the Tibet-Nepal border by a contingent of Sher pa religious officials to escort him back to the Kathmandu Valley.¹⁶⁸ They were led by a man identified only as Sher pa mkhan po, who had not previously appeared in Vanaratna's narrative but would subsequently be involved in inviting him to Tibet for the third time.¹⁶⁹ Thus it would appear that Sher pa mkhan po lived in Tibet, but was able to arrange for an escort from among his people in Nepal. There are no further references to the Sher pa people in Vanaratna's biographies, so it is unclear what, if any relationship he sustained with them during his years in Nepal.

Vanaratna's trip down from sKyid rong took him along the well-traveled trade route between Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley, and passed through Nuwakot, presently the site of an imposing fortified palace on a ridge above the Trishuli River. During the earlier Malla period,

¹⁶⁶ *ŽP* 14r.4-5.

¹⁶⁷ *SG* 41r.6-41v.6, 48v.6-49r.6; *NTŽP* 35v.4-36r.1.

¹⁶⁸ *NTCZ* 33r.1-3.

¹⁶⁹ *SG* 39v.1.

particularly during the reign of Jayasthitimalla,¹⁷⁰ Nuwakot and the surrounding region were restive, but there are no indications of rebellion, and it would appear Vanaratna had little trouble passing through the area. Nuwakot has long associations with Nepalese Buddhism, specifically as a site of a famous Vajrayāna shrine; it is thus curious, and unfortunate, that 'Jam dpal ye shes elected not to report on Vanaratna's travels in the area despite accompanying him all the way to the Kathmandu Valley. The fort at Nuwakot is home to renowned shrine of Bhairava-Bhairavī located there, which is managed by Newar *vajrāvcāryas* and is the site of a famous annual chariot procession of the deity.¹⁷¹ Thus one could imagine that Vanaratna would have visited this shrine, but 'Jam dpal ye shes declined to report it if he did.

Vanaratna elected to take the western road between the Kathmandu Valley and the Tibetan border only once, limiting his contact with the villages and peoples who lived along that route. He traveled the eastern route far more frequently, making it unsurprising that the people who live along that route and the merchants who regularly plied that road play a greater role in his narrative. Among the peoples with whom Vanaratna came into regular contact are the residents of the Temal and Dolakhā regions, as well as the Nyishang people who traveled the road in merchant caravans. The Nyishang (Tib. sNyi shang), who hail from the modern Manang District of the Gandaki Zone in central Nepal, are mentioned twice in the SG, both times as Vanaratna's escorts between the Kathmandu Valley and the Tibet border.¹⁷² They first appear in his biography as his escorts for his trip from the Valley to Tibet in 1453, and then met him at the border for his return in 1455. This sequence suggests that Vanaratna first became acquainted with the Nyishang people in the Kathmandu Valley, perhaps as visitors or students at Gopicandra Vihāra. We can assume that Vanaratna made formal arrangements to be escorted by their merchant caravan while in the Kathmandu Valley, a kindness he repaid by offering them Buddhist teachings along the way. Whatever their arrangement, the people of Nyishang were waiting to escort him on his return to the Valley; given that over a year had elapsed since they parted ways with him in 1453, they either could be reached by messenger to arrive at the appointed time, or plied the route frequently enough to have been fortuitously present at the border when Vanaratna returned in 1455.

Far more important in Vanaratna's narrative, and bSod nams rgya mtsho's as well, are the people of Temal, whose home region lies in Kavrepalanchowk District, a short distance due east of the Kathmandu Valley. This area, which is still an active Buddhist pilgrimage site, has many caves associated with historical and mythic Buddhist masters, particularly Padmasambhava. Like the Nyishang, the people of Temal first appear in the context of Vanaratna's third journey to Tibet, but their role in Vanaratna's narrative suggests a longer, closer relationship. That Vanaratna's connection to the Temal people was a strong and close one is clearly evident from the fact that they were specifically invited to attend the *dāna* rite Vanaratna sponsored in the final years of his life, and were appointed by Jayayakṣamalla to be the custodians of Vanaratna's ashes after his death. bSod nam rgya mtsho also developed close ties with the people of Temal, a relationship likely built on their shared connection with Vanaratna. According to the NTSG, bSod nams rgya mtsho stopped in the Temal region en route to the Kathmandu Valley, and participated in a *ganacakra* with the Temal headman, whom Chos grags ye shes identifies as a man named or titled dPon phyug.¹⁷³ Such was the warm reception bSod nams rgya mtsho

¹⁷⁰ Regmi 1965, vol.1: 366

¹⁷¹ Locke 1985: 277; Chalier-Visuvalingam 1996: 285-94.

¹⁷² SG 41v.1-2, 49r.4.

¹⁷³ NTSG^b 352.5-8.

received there and the connection that formed between them that he considered staying in Temal in the summer of 1466, in hopes that he could again return to the Kathmandu Valley the following winter to continue his studies with Vanaratna. Vanaratna instead instructed him to return straight to Tibet, so his aspirations to reside in Temal went unfulfilled.¹⁷⁴

The eastern region of Dolakhā, and its headquarters at Charikot are also recurring locations in both Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho's travels. Dolakhā, which lies above the Tamakosi River in the modern Bagmati Zone, has been a perennially important eastern outpost of the kingdom of Nepal, a key market town located on the east-west trade route, and a key trade hub with Tibet. As such it was a regular transit point for Vanaratna, and though it never receives more than a passing mention in his biographies, it was surely a place with which he was intimately familiar. He may even have taken a specific interest in a famous image of Avalokiteśvara housed there that was closely associated with the Buṅgamati Avalokiteśvara,¹⁷⁵ but no mention is made of this site in the *rnam thars*.

The NTSG is far more descriptive of bSod nams rgya mtsho's experiences in Dolakhā, and through it we can surmise the conditions Vanaratna likely encountered there as well. When bSod nams rgya mtsho reached Charikot, the headquarters of the Dolakhā region, he met a man he names Jate (*ja te*) and identifies as the “king and host” (*rgyal po dang gnas po*) of Dolakhā. We are already familiar with the title *gnas po*, as this is the same given to Koka Sāhu by both bSod nams rgya mtsho and Chos grags ye shes, and like Koka Sāhu, Jate performed the duties of a tax collector, “taking whatever goods he could from Tibetans,” (*gzhan bod thams cad las dngos po ci nus kyis 'bral bar rtsom*).¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, Jate is also referred to as the “king” of Dolakhā, and it is this capacity that we may be able to identify him in the historical record as the feudal governor Kīrtisimḥa Rāma Thākura, who contemporary sources indicate was in power in the region from at least 1454 until his death in 1474. A manuscript dated to 1454 (N.S. 574) states that Kīrtisimḥa of Dolakhā pledged his fealty to Jayayakṣamalla at a time when Champarān was agitating at the borders,¹⁷⁷ strongly suggesting that he was in power well before this time. Whatever the case, Kīrtisimḥa would have been in power for at least one of Vanaratna's stops in Dolakhā, and both of bSod nams rgya mtsho's visits, and if he was indeed the primary tax collector for the region, it seems likely he would have had direct encounters with both of them, who would have passed through with a large amount of gold and goods ripe for taxation. Also noteworthy is a stunning fifteenth-century *paubhā* that features one of Kīrtisimḥa's generals, a man named Gaganasiṃ Bhara (image 23).¹⁷⁸ The inscription that accompanies the painting announces that it was commissioned in Dolakhā during the reign of Kīrtisimḥa,¹⁷⁹ and it is here that we learn of his death in 1474. Because of the strong stylistic similarities between this image of Gaganasiṃ and the *paubhā* commissioned by the community at Gopicandra Vihāra to commemorate Vanaratna's death, there is every likelihood that they were the products of the same atelier.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ NTSG^b 359.10-13.

¹⁷⁵ Locke 1980: 394.

¹⁷⁶ NTSG^b 349.13-15.

¹⁷⁷ The *Hiranyasaptaka*, cited in Regmi 1965: 429 and Petech 1984: 173. See also Petech 1984: 177.

¹⁷⁸ On this large, exquisite painting, see Pal 2003: 68, 280-81 and Vajracharya 2004.

¹⁷⁹ Pal 2003: 280-81.

¹⁸⁰ More will be said about his correspondence in the Conclusion.

In the year spanning 1465-66, bSod nams rgya mtsho traveled to Nepal to reunite with Vanaratna and continue his training. His journey, which he narrated to his disciple and biographer, the fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos grags ye shes, is recounted in the NTSG in considerable detail. In fact, the NTSG offers us a wider view of the Kathmandu Valley than is available in the *ŽP* and *SG*, and thus augments, and in some ways surpasses, the view of fifteenth-century Nepal provided in Vanaratna's biographies. Thus, for both its capacity to provide additional nuance to our understanding of Vanaratna's career in Nepal and for the broader perspective it gives on the social, religious, and spatial terrain of the Valley, Chos grags ye shes's account of bSod nams rgya mtsho's year in Nepal is worthy of close examination.

bSod nams rgya mtsho arrived in the Kathmandu Valley after a harrowing journey from the Tibetan border to the outskirts of the Valley, which is described in a passage of the NTSG that is at once viscerally evocative of his hardships and highly entertaining.¹⁸¹ Proceeding from Chubar, the site of a recent forest fire, bSod nams rgya mtsho had a choice of roads: one that passed through Listikot, which sits above the Bhotekosi in Sindhupulchowk District, and another that passed through Dolakhā. Choosing the latter, bSod nams rgya mtsho and his party took their lives in their hands, literally, as they scaled sheer cliff faces hanging only from ropes and tree roots,¹⁸² crossed high mountain passes in freezing temperatures, and sweltered in low-land jungles. Hungry, drenched with sweat that left rivulets of dirt on their faces, and covered in bug bites,¹⁸³ they eventually reached Dolakhā where they enjoyed the hospitality of the man Chos grags ye shes identifies as Jate but who possibly was the local *rāja* Kīrtisīmha, described above. From there he passed peaceably through Temal, where he lingered to perform a *gaṇacakra* with the Temal headman, before proceeding to the eastern end of the Kathmandu Valley and entering the city of Bhaktapur.

For reasons that are not expressly stated in the NTSG, bSod nams rgya mtsho did not go directly to Gopicandra Vihāra, but instead went to a public bathing pool in Bhaktapur, perhaps because stopping at Bhaktapur, the seat of government, was required of all new arrivals to the Valley. The arrival of the Tibetan Buddhist dignitary, dressed in his religious finery, created something of a spectacle in the royal city:

They then reached the center of Nepal, and went to the bathing pool at the royal palace in Bhaktapur. Previously, all the Tibetans that arrived there were equipped with whatever rough gear was required to navigate the rugged road. Because they came primarily to engage in business, everyone thought of them as loathsome, like a shoe. The townsfolk gathered and stared with wide eyes at the unblemished monastic regalia of His Eminence [bSod nams rgya mtsho]. They said, "We've never been impressed with anyone else from Tibet. He must be a truly great Tibetan." When the king's son saw that [bSod nams rgya mtsho's] attendants had let a bolt of saffron cloth fall to the ground, he asked if it was for sale. It was likely that the king would not permit it, as it was deemed shameful to

¹⁸¹ NTSG^b 349.9-352.8

¹⁸² Chos grags ye shes reports that members of bSod nams rgya mtsho's party thought of these ropes and roots as emanations of buddhas and bodhisattvas for the security they offered as they scrambled and crawled across cliff faces that were "like the surface of a mirror" (NTSG^b 350.23-5).

¹⁸³ More specifically, bSod nams rgya mtsho and his party were attacked by cave-dwelling honey bees identified in Tibetan as *mar ko*, bees that are common across Nepal and whose honey remains an important trade item in the Himalayan foothills (NTSG^b 350.17-18).

purchase mendicant's clothes since he became king of the realm. But if the king did assent, they would have to figure out a price. [To avoid this situation] they told [the prince] they would give it to him, at which point he was embarrassed and did not say anything further.¹⁸⁴

The reaction of the citizens of Bhaktapur and the crown prince is potentially revealing of the status of religious exchange between the Buddhist cultures of Tibet and Nepal in the late-fifteenth century. In prior centuries, when Buddhism in India was more robust, and the Kathmandu Valley was well-positioned as a destination for both Buddhist seekers from Tibet and a transit point for Tibetan religious pilgrims heading south and Indian masters heading north, Tibetan monks, *bla mas*, and other religious travelers would have been a regular sight in the Valley. The contraction of Buddhism in its Indic homeland, the concomitant flourishing of a distinctly Tibetan tradition of Buddhism, and the emergence of a uniquely Newari mode of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism in Nepal may have contributed to a reduction in the religious exchange between Buddhists of the Tibetan plateau and the Kathmandu Valley. The decline in religious travel between the two Buddhist cultures would have done little to affect mercantile activity between Tibet, Nepal, and India. Thus, merchants, traders, and other economic migrants from Tibet would have become the more common sight plying the roadways of the Kathmandu Valley. The novelty of a Tibetan dignitary in the royal capital is further underscored by the fact that the crown prince was attracted to the spectacle of the arrival of a Tibetan religious official of bSod nams rgya mtsho's stature and comportment. As discussed above, the awkward exchange that ensued between them has implications for our knowledge of the protections and exemptions afforded to religious practitioners and their goods, as this scene points to the possibility that religious articles carried a special status as mercantile and taxable items. Finally, this scene also hints at a pervasive Nepalese prejudice against Tibetans, who appear to be the object of regular contempt from the general population.

It is not clear from the NTSG why bSod nams rgya mtsho first went to Bhaktapur,¹⁸⁵ but it does appear that Vanaratna expected this to be his destination. He had sent a representative named Abhaya to greet bSod nams rgya mtsho in Bhaktapur and provide assistance to him upon his arrival, telling him, "Puṇyasāgara and his party may arrive today, so please watch for him."¹⁸⁶ Though the precise kind of assistance he offered bSod nams rgya mtsho is not stated, nor do we hear of Abhaya again, we can assume that he helped the *bla ma* navigate the local bureaucracy and eventually reach Gopicandra safely. As we have seen above, shortly after his arrival in Bhaktapur bSod nams rgya mtsho was whisked away to the home of Koka Sāhu, where his goods were inspected, tariffs were levied, and where he spent his first night in the

¹⁸⁴ NTSG^b 352.8-17: de nas bal po mthil gyi kho pon rā dza'i pho brang gi khru kyi rdzing bu khar phebs na | sngon bod pa der byung ngo cog rong lam la 'grims pa'i cha byad ngan po ci rung rung byas pa la | tshong 'ba' zhig don du gnyer ba kho na 'ong bas | thams cad kyis mchil lham ltar skyug bro'i gnas su blta ba la | dam pa 'di'i sku'i cha byad rab byung gi rgyal mtshan ma nyams pa la | grong khyer ba rnams 'tshogs nas dang ba'i mig gis blta zhing | 'di bas dang ba 'dren pa bod nas gzhan su yang ma byung | khong rang bod kyi mi che ba rang yin pa dug zer ba dang | zhabs 'bring ba dag la phrug dur kha'i stod ma sar babs shig yod pa rgyal po'i bus mthong nas 'tshongs dgos shes zer ba la | de 'dra rgyal po'i zhal ta min la che | khong rang yul 'di'i rgyal po byas nas bya bral ba'i gos nyo ba ngo tsha ba yin pa | de kha rgyal po zhal ta yin na | 'di 'dra la rin 'dod pa ga na 'ong | khong rang la byin pa chog gsung pas | khong skyengs te physis lab ma byung gsung.

¹⁸⁵ Perhaps there is no more significant a reason than the fact that Bhaktapur was the first large town one reached upon arriving in the Valley from the east.

¹⁸⁶ NTSG^b 352.17-18: der pañ chen gyi bka' las | de ring pu nya sā ga ra dpon slob lebs pa tsam yin | ltos shog gsung ba byung ba yin zer a bha ya grogs mched gnang byung.

Kathmandu Valley. It was only after Koka Sāhu was satisfied with the taxes paid, the details of bSod nams rgya mtsho's stay, and the goods that he would require in that time, that bSod nams rgya mtsho was released from Koka Sāhu's custody and allowed to proceed to Gopicandra.

bSod nams rgya mtsho's primary purpose in visiting Nepal was to sit at the feet of his guru, receive further instructions, and continue his translation work. In this regard his year in the Kathmandu Valley was highly productive. Unlike in Tibet, however, where Vanaratna's attention was focused on his Tibetan disciples, the *paṇḍita* had significant obligations to the local Buddhist community and so was not available to bSod nams rgya mtsho at all times. bSod nams rgya mtsho used his time away from Vanaratna to tour the Valley, visit some of its most sacred sites, engage in periods of private meditation retreat, and form his own relationships with members of the royal family, much of which is recounted in the NTSG.

Unsurprisingly, the Svayambhū *mahācaitya* and the Śāntipur temple feature prominently in bSod nams rgya mtsho's pilgrimage itinerary. He was inspired to visit the Svayambhū hillock in large part because it was the site of Vanaratna's breakthrough realization, but he was first sent there by Vanaratna to perform a Cakrasaṃvara *gaṇacakra* on his behalf while he remained behind at Gopicandra. One gets a sense of the wildness and remoteness of Svayambhū in the fifteenth century from Chos grags ye shes's description of bSod nams rgya mtsho's approach to the *mahācaitya*, which involved the negotiation of dense forest teeming with wild animals. bSod nams rgya mtsho even reported spotting a tiger on the flanks of the hill, a tiger that Vanaratna later identified as an emanation of Vāgīśvarakīrti, the immortal *siddha* performing the timeless *gaṇacakra* inside the Śāntipur temple. Like his guru, bSod nams rgya mtsho had a powerful meditative experience at Śāntipur, one that inspired him to compose one of his most famous songs of realization, the "Song of Śāntipur." Perhaps because of the powerful experience he had there, bSod nams rgya mtsho would revisit Svayambhū and spend considerable time there. Svayambhū, became something of a temporary local seat for bSod nams rgya mtsho, a place where he received visitors, gave teachings, and engaged in personal practice. The NTSG also notes that bSod nams rgya mtsho made offerings to a statue of Śabaripā at Svayambhū that was purportedly erected by Vanaratna. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Vanaratna told gZhon nu dpal about a black-stone statue of Śabaripā inside the Śāntipur temple, but neither gZhon nu dpal nor bSod nams rgya mtsho indicated that Vanaratna had it installed himself.¹⁸⁷

bSod nams rgya mtsho traveled to many other Buddhist sites around the Valley to perform rituals and make offerings. In Kathmandu he visited the shrine of Mahākāla at present-day Tundikhel (Tib. *bod thang mgon po*; image 24), which houses one of the most venerated images of the deity in the Kathmandu Valley, and the Ramadoli cremation ground (image 25), making lavish offerings at both. At one of these two sites—the syntax and context is less than clear—Vanaratna directed bSod nams rgya mtsho to perform a *bali* offering because the site was considered specifically sacred to Vajravārāhī by the Nepalese. Following his guru's instructions he performed a *pūjā* on the tenth day of the month, and placed his *bali* on what he described as a large stone lotus used as a platform specifically for that purpose.¹⁸⁸ During his stay in the Valley bSod nams rgya mtsho also took time to visit Vanaratna's short-lived residence in Kathmandu, Tham Bahī, as well as the Bauddha *mahācaitya*, the nearby Dharmadeva *caitya* at Chabahil, and the most sacred Śaiva site in Nepal, Paśupatinātha. Unfortunately the NTSG does not provide any additional details on bSod nams rgya mtsho's activities at these places.¹⁸⁹ We have slightly

¹⁸⁷ NTSG^b 355.4-357.12.

¹⁸⁸ NTSG^b 354.24-355.4.

¹⁸⁹ NTSG^b 357.14-15.

more detail on bSod nams rgya mtsho's travels in the southern part of the Kathmandu Valley, where he is known to have visited the Avalokiteśvara images at Chobar and Bungamati, as well as the Buddhist sacred sites far to the south in Pharping. He performed *gaṇacakras* at Asura Cave in Pharping and at the Avalokiteśvara temple in Chobar, where he was overcome by a meditation experience in which magically emanated beings covered the ground in great numbers and could only be dispelled with a *bali* offering.

Personal relationships

In addition to working closely with Vanaratna and touring the sacred sites of the Kathmandu Valley, bSod nams rgya mtsho also forged his own relationships with local figures and left a favorable impression on those he came into contact with. As Chos grags ye shes tells it:

Generally speaking, during the time [bSod nams rgya mtsho] stayed in Nepal the local people were astounded by the way the Lord comported himself. They would gather around him out of devotion and watch him. Even two of [Jayayakṣamalla's] sons would visit him. After bowing to him, they would hold onto him and in a joyful mood speak with him at length.¹⁹⁰

Of all the nobles in the Kathmandu Valley, bSod nams rgya mtsho appears to have formed the strongest relationship with Koka Sāhu. Despite the sustained hostility he showed to Vanaratna, and despite the disparaging rhetoric both bSod nams rgya mtsho and Chos grags ye shes used to describe Koka Sāhu's character, it is evident from the NTSG that Koka Sāhu looked much more favorably on the Tibetan *bla ma* than the Indian *paṇḍita*. Chos grags ye shes cites Koka Sāhu as saying:

“You are the guru to many prominent Tibetans. I am extremely delighted that you came to this country for the Dharma, with your mind focused on the *paṇḍita*. This is why it gives me such pleasure to serve you.” He then invited the master and disciples to his estate, put on a *gaṇacakra*, and offered him a great deal of reverence.¹⁹¹

Perhaps because he truly possessed the deviousness both bSod nams rgya mtsho and Chos grags ye shes ascribed to him, Koka Sāhu may have sensed a lucrative opportunity in befriending such a high *bla ma* who arrived in their country laden with fine quality goods. When bSod nams rgya mtsho was about to depart Nepal and was paying his final respects to Vanaratna, Koka Sāhu's son approached him and said:

“*bLa ma*, you are the guru to many Tibetan kings. I'm in need of a great deal of satin (*kha thi*). Please take these precious gems to Tibet and procure satin.” He then tried to give [bSod nams rgya mtsho] pearls and many other goods, but [bSod nams rgya mtsho] said,

¹⁹⁰ NTSG 357.21-5: spyir bal por bzhugs ring yul gyi skye bo rnams kyi rjes 'di'i sku'i spyod lam mthong bas yid phrogs te| gus pas drung du 'khod nas blta zhing | khyad par kho pon rā dza'i sras gnyis yod pa drung du 'ongs te | phyag nas'ju zhing dga' na' rnam 'gyur dang smreng mang po zhu.

¹⁹¹ NTSG 357.25-358.3: gnas po ko ka sva hus kyang khyed rang bod kyi mi che ba mang po'i gu ru yin | yul 'dir byon pa'ang paṇḍi ta kho na sems pas chos kyi ched du byon par 'dug pas nga rang sems dga' ba dga' ba byung | de don gyis nga rang zhabs tog byed pa spro bayin yin zhes rang gi sdum par dpon slob rnams spyang drangs te | tshogs kyi 'khor lo bshams| bkur sti'i khyad par mang po phul.

“I’m an ordained monk, I can’t be your middleman. But if it will please you, I can send you [some goods] from Tibet.” Later he did give [Koka Sāhu’s son] some desirable goods that pleased him greatly, so that he said “That *bla ma*, really is a good man,” and venerated him.¹⁹²

bSod nams rgya mtsho also had personal interactions with the king, Jayayakṣamalla, though it does not seem like they formed a particularly close relationship. The only scene in the NTSG that describes their interaction is also one that is potentially revealing of local legal practices. In what was a quite confusing scene, bSod nams rgya mtsho found himself embroiled in local politics when he intervened to save the life of a Tibetan man who slandered him in the presence of Jayayakṣa and Koka Sāhu. The details of the sequence of events are not entirely clear, but the man’s defamation of bSod nams rgya mtsho stemmed from the death of one of bSod nams rgya mtsho’s disciples, a Tibetan man named rDor ’dzin who had been sent to Nepal along with a small party by the Tibetan king Kun dga’ legs pa. Kun dga’ legs pa had grown angry with bSod nams rgya mtsho’s continued absence at court, and dispatched a party to Nepal seeking news. Somewhere along the difficult road (*rong lam*) through Nepal, rDor ’dzin contracted a virulent disease believed to have been caused by a local spirit who was displeased with their lack of proper offerings. The rest of the party blamed bSod nams rgya mtsho for rDor ’dzin’s death, and when they reached the Kathmandu Valley, slandered bSod nams rgya mtsho before the king and his taxman. Both Jayayakṣa and Koka Sāhu recognized this as unfounded slander, and based on the laws of the kingdom of Nepal, ordered the man to be executed. Moved to compassion by the death of his friend rDor ’dzin, bSod nams rgya mtsho tried to prevent the execution, but Jayayakṣa was adamant that it move forward because the man had been sent with hostile intent by the Tibetan king and had broken Nepalese law. Though he was inclined to agree that the circumstances were complicated, he asserted his authority as king to uphold Nepalese law, flawed though it may be, because to do otherwise would undermine his authority in the eyes of the people. bSod nams rgya mtsho continued to plead the man’s case, saying he was merely the instrument of the Kun dga’s legs pa, and was no more responsible for rDor ’dzin’s death than a stick is at fault for beating a dog. He even tried to take the blame himself, likening himself to a man who has lead a goat to slaughter. The king, Koka Sāhu, and Koka Sāhu’s son all argued with bSod nams rgya mtsho that nothing could be done, and planned to move forward with the execution. But as is often the case, gold speaks louder than words, and bSod nams rgya mtsho was able to ransom the man’s life with a substantial bribe.

Conclusion: Transitioning from Nepal to Tibet

Vanaratna’s legacy is very much in the hands of his Tibetan disciples, who chronicled his life in their *rnam thars* and preserved his teachings in their translations. But as is evident in this chapter, Vanaratna’s legacy was very much forged in the Kathmandu Valley, a fact not immediately apparent from the Tibetan *rnam thars* alone. The influence of Newar Buddhism on

¹⁹² NTSG 360.14-19: gnas po ko ka sā hu’i bu des | bla ma khyed bod kyo rā dza mang po’i gu ru yin par ’dug pa | nga rang la kha thi mang po dgos pa yin | rin chas ’di rnam bod du bsnams nas kha thi brsgrubs te gnang dgos zhes mu tig la sogs pa’i zong mang po phul byung ba na | nged rab ti byung ba yin pas khyod kyi tshong byed pa ga na ’ong | khyod rag cis kyang dga’ ba yin nangas bod nas bskur bas chog gsung ba stsal te phyis ’dod pa’i gngos po rnam gnang bas kho shin tu dga’ ste | bla ma khong rang bzang ba rang yin zhes ’dud par byed do.

Vanaratna's personal practice and public persona are not immediately evident to modern scholars precisely because his legacy is communicated in a Tibetan medium by authors who emphasize the priorities of his Tibetan disciples, patrons, and colleagues and treat his life and career in Nepal as secondary. This priority is especially apparent in the writings of gZhon nu dpal, who largely glossed over Vanaratna's years in Nepal without acknowledging, and perhaps even concealing, Vanaratna's profound debt to his host community. In his far more sensitive and descriptive treatment of Vanaratna's later career in the Valley, bSod nams rgya mtsho opened the door to a more complete reckoning of the influence of Newar Buddhism and Vanaratna's political patrons in shaping his career, but still omitted key details—especially regarding Vanaratna's spiritual training and religious activities—that obscured the full force of that influence. When, however, we coordinate the data Vanaratna's Tibetan biographers provide with details from his collected writings and the archival record, it quickly becomes apparent that it was Vanaratna's experiences in the Kathmandu Valley that were primary in the evolution of his oeuvre, and that his career in Tibet is largely derivative of his work for his Nepalese students and patrons. For all the renown Vanaratna achieved in Tibet, which is celebrated most directly in his Tibetan *rnam thars*, it was in the Kathmandu Valley that he achieved his most enduring success, and it was there, above all other places in his narrative, that he found his physical and spiritual home.

Part I of this study followed a linear narrative structure in presenting Vanaratna's biography because it best suited the material covering his early life and training in South Asia, and was particularly conducive for understanding how the trajectory of his narrative in India and Sri Lanka set the stage for all he would accomplish on both sides of the Himalayan range. Parts II and III break with this linear structure because Vanaratna's work in Tibet cannot be properly understood without first considering all phases of Vanaratna's career in Nepal. Studying Vanaratna's Nepalese career in total, relying not only on biographical sources but Vanaratna's own writings and the broader historical record, frees us from viewing his Tibetan career solely through the lens of his Tibetan disciples and their religious priorities, and allows us to better trace the influences of Newar Buddhism in his work among his Tibetan students and colleagues. As we will see in the Part III, there are significant continuities between Vanaratna's Nepalese and Tibetan careers, but these continuities remain largely invisible without first probing the depths of Vanaratna's experiences in Nepal. It is not unreasonable to conclude that Vanaratna would not have become one of the leading lights in fifteenth-century Tibet without first establishing himself in Nepal, and evolving into a Vajrayāna master of renown with the support of his Nepalese teachers, students, and patrons.

As we transition now to a survey of Vanaratna's activities on the Tibetan plateau, the data provided by bSod nams rgya mtsho and Chos grags ye shes on his career in Nepal becomes intrinsic to our understanding of the nearly fifteen years he spent on the northern side of the Himalayan range. It is important to recall that Vanaratna's clients in Tibet included some of the most illustrious and formidable figures in the religious, literary, and political spheres, masters of a confident indigenous brand of Buddhism that was becoming increasingly independent of its origins in Indian Buddhism. As Vanaratna quickly discovered, simply being a credentialed *paṇḍita* from India was no longer sufficient for achieving success and renown in Tibet. His early training in India in fact proved quite insufficient, and it was primarily his training in Nepal that created the conditions for his eventual successes in Tibet. In the foregoing chapter we have attempted to trace the arc of his training in Nepal to the degree our sources will allow; looking forward we will continue to chart the influences of Vanaratna's career in the Kathmandu Valley

on his activities on the Tibet plateau, first by presenting a chronological survey of his first two visits to Tibet, and then through an in-depth look at his third and final journey and the weaving together of Nepalese and Tibetan influences as represented in one of his most exemplary literary achievements, the compilation of the Vanaratna Codex. We have set aside, for now, Vanaratna's final in Nepal, a year in which he was conscious of his mortality and intentionally brought his life-long work to its denouement. We will return with him to Nepal, and consider his full legacy after we follow him over the Himalaya and across southern and central Tibet.

Part III

Three Journeys to Tibet

1426 – 1427 • 1432 – 1438 • 1453 – 1455

Introduction

Part III of this study focuses on Vanaratna's three journeys to Tibet, which took place in the years 1426-27, ca. 1432-38, and 1453-55. Altogether, Vanaratna spent roughly a decade of his life on the Tibetan plateau, a relatively small fraction of the eighty-four years he traversed the Buddhist landscapes of South Asia and the Himalayas. Naturally, because his biographers were Tibetans writing for a Tibetan audience, Vanaratna's activities in Tibet take center stage in his *rnam thars*, and are treated with a level of detail and attention disproportionate to the amount of time he spent in Tibet. This study has taken the opposite approach in focusing on Vanaratna's South Asian narrative, using the *rnam thars* in coordination with other historical materials to glean insights about the state of Buddhism in South Asia in the fifteenth century. As we turn now to Vanaratna's years in Tibet, we will approach the material more narrowly, not because it is less compelling, but precisely because the opposite is true: the data the *rnam thars* provide on Vanaratna's career in Tibet and the historical context in which he worked is so extensively and richly detailed that it merits a full-length study of its own. Since that is far beyond the scope of this already broad study, Part III we be limited to a general synopsis of Vanaratna's first two visits to Tibet (Chapter Six), before turning attention to his third and final journey and the creation of the Vanaratna Codex (Chapter Seven), a document that can be regarded as summation of Vanaratna's craft and the culmination of a life spent traversing multiple Buddhist ecumenes across South Asia and the Himalaya.

Historical Considerations

As was the case with Vanaratna's South Asian narrative, the *rnam thars* composed by gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho are at once compelling biographies of an individual life and insightful historical witnesses for fifteenth-century central Tibet. The historical forces that shaped this pivotal period also shaped Vanaratna's experiences in Tibet and impacted his activities there. In the century or so before Vanaratna's arrival, Tibet had enjoyed a long period of relative political stability during which its Buddhist culture had reached a high degree of self-sufficiency and Tibetans had become architects of their own interpretations of Buddhist doctrine, practice, exegesis, and aesthetics. This rapidly growing body of indigenous Buddhist knowledge and literature, in combination with the acceleration of Buddhism's decline in India, propelled Tibetan Buddhism out from the shadow of its Indian forebearers to become a primary expression of the religion in the central and east Asian Buddhist ecumenes, all while maintaining a valorization of the Indian Buddhist font from which it sprang. This burgeoning indigenous religious confidence and dynamism was sustained into the fifteenth century, fostering the kind of eclectic, prodigious religious culture that is on clear display in Vanaratna's Tibetan narrative. The political situation was a different matter; Vanaratna was active in Tibet during a period of acute political instability, a period of fracturing that, while not overtly evident in Vanaratna's biography, clearly affected his experience there. Central Tibet was still relatively stable and peaceful during his first journey, but from his second journey onwards the situation began to deteriorate, and Vanaratna found himself at the very center of religious and political life where he was a direct observer of, if not active player in, the religiously vital and politically tumultuous setting of fifteenth-century Tibet.

When Vanaratna first reached Tibet in 1426, central Tibet had passed through a century of

independent indigenous rule following the end of the Mongol-Sa skya alliance and the rise of the Phag mo gru dynasty. The Phag mo gru, with whom Vanaratna would build a close and productive relationship, usurped power from the Sa skya pas, their former political overlords, after their power waned following the withdrawal of the Mongols. The head of the rLang clan of the Phag mo gru at that time, Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302-64), had tossed off the yoke of his Sa skya pa political masters and harnessed the inspiration of Tibet's imperial past to elevate the Phag mo gru house from a state of disarray and corruption to become the dominant political force in dBus and gTsang. Under Byang chub rgyal mtshan and his successor, Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1385-1432), the Phag mo gru maintained relatively strong centralized power, governing southern and central Tibet from the ancient seat of Tibetan kings in the Yar klungs Valley. Their grip on power over the thirteen administrative zones previously established the Mongols was more tenuous, however, resulting in a complex political climate wherein multiple power centers engaged in a perpetual cycle of alliance, conflict, and realignment. Despite the political machinations of the prominent clans and dynasties, central Tibet witnessed a period of cultural renaissance in which indigenous cultural formations, hearkening back to the glories of the Imperial Period, were utilized to promote a wide array of religious, literary, and architectural advancements.¹

Vanaratna spent approximately ten years in total in Tibet during this period, years that were accumulated over three separate trips that spanned three decades of Tibetan history between 1426 and 1455. He was a regular visitor to, and active spiritual agent in, a number of the regions and polities prominent in this period: La stod, Nyang stod, Yar 'brog, Rin spungs, and above all, the Phag mo gru kingdom in the Yar klungs Valley.² In each of the these places Vanaratna cultivated relationships with prominent political and religious leaders who would become his patrons, students, teachers, clients, and colleagues. Among the most essential relationships Vanaratna formed were those with the political and spiritual leadership of the ruling Phag mo gru monarchy—among whom gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho should both be counted—as well as at rGyal rtse in Nyang stod, sNa dkar rtse in Yar 'brog, and to a lesser degree, Rin spungs. Each of these regions were vital to the thriving and eclectic religious environment of central Tibet, and each wielded significant clout in what was becoming a contested and volatile moment in Tibet's political history.

After more than a century as Tibet's dominant power, the Phag mo gru dynasty's fortunes were beginning to fade just as Vanaratna arrived in Tibet. The decline of the Phag mo gru began during the reign of Grags pa rgyal mtshan, whom Vanaratna met only briefly in the king's twilight years, and accelerated during the rule of his successor, and Vanaratna's main political patron in Tibet, Grags pa 'byung gnas (r. 1432-44). It was during Grags pa 'byung gnas's reign that internal divisions within the Phag mo gru house and external threats from rival powers hastened the Phag mo gru's decline. Internally, Grags pa 'byung gnas put down revolts by rivals within his own family, most notably a power grab from his own father, Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan (1389-1457). The revolt was quelled with the support of the Rin spungs house and its leader Nor bu bzang po (1403-66), an intervention that cemented the Rin spungs clan's dominant position at court and initiated their gradual political takeover. The Phag mo gru's decline picked up pace during the reign of Kun dga's legs pa (r. 1448-1482/3), who invited Vanaratna to Tibet for his

¹ Kapstein 2006: 117-23; Diemberger 2007: 32; Venturi 2017: 101, 110-11.

² To this list we can also add a few regions that Vanaratna visited, but where he seemed not to form the same kind of enduring political and spiritual relationships he formed elsewhere. Foremost among these secondary locations are Ding ri, Lha sa, Dwags po, and mNga ris.

third and final visit. Kun dga' legs pa's position on the throne was secured in large part through his marriage alliance with the Rin spungs clan, a move that created an opportunity for Nor bu bzang po and his family to annex large portions of Phag mo gru territory and rule central Tibet in all but name.³ Vanaratna was present at court during the political eruptions of Grags pa 'byung gnas's reign, and would surely have observed the clan's change in fortune when he returned during Kun dga' legs pa's rule, but we find very little overt reference to these intrigues in the *rnam thars*. The political vagaries of the time do not go entirely unnoticed by his biographers, however, and those occasions when the dynamics of the Tibetan political environment come through in Vanaratna's narrative will be noted below.

Beyond the Phag mo gru court, Vanaratna also formed strong relationships with the political and religious leadership of Nyang stod, and specifically with its ruling Shar kha clan. When Vanaratna first arrived in Tibet in 1426 he received his warmest welcome at rGyal rtse, and it was the connections he formed with the Shar kha clan that established the conditions for his far more productive visit that began in 1432. Vanaratna would return to Nyang stod many times during his career, and developed enduring relationships with the ruling brothers Tā'i si tu Rab brtan kun bzang 'phags pa (1403-66) and Rab 'byor bzang po (d.u.), as well as the abbot of rTse chen monastery, Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros (b. 1365). The Shar kha clan had moved into Nyang stod and established their seat there early in the thirteenth century, and since that time served as a proud vassal of the Sa skya 'Khon clan who had ruled central Tibetan as regents of the Mongol sovereigns. When Byang chub rgyal mtshan seized power for the Phag mo gru, the Shar kha clan was swift to ally themselves with the new power in the Yar klungs Valley, but they never went so far as to declare formal fealty to them, and instead maintained a strong, parallel alliance with the Sa skyas in gTsang. By the time of Vanaratna's first visit to Tibet, the Shar kha clan had parlayed Sa skya patronage and their tense alliance with the Phag mo gru to become a regional power with control of territory stretching from Lho brag in the east to Lha rtse in the west. The rulers of rGyal rtse generally maintained their uneasy accord with the Phag mo gru court during Vanaratna's time in Tibet, but they would occasionally skirmish with Phag mo gru forces, including once in 1434 when Vanaratna was in residence. The Shar khas were prolific builders who used the architectural idiom to express their confident religious and political power, and it was during Vanaratna's tenure in Tibet that Si tu Rab brtan either initiated or completed several of his major building projects, including dPal 'khor chos sde and the famed bKra shis sgo mang *stūpa*, which he invited Vanaratna to consecrate.⁴

The Yar 'brog region, which lies between Nyang to the west and the Yar klungs Valley to the northeast, also figures prominently in Vanaratna's narrative, though not to the same degree as the Yar klungs Valley and Nyang stod. In the fifteenth century, Yar 'brog was ruled from sNa skar rtse by Nam mkha' bzang po (d.u.) and his nephews, Khri dpon Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (ca. 1425-78) and Amoghasiddhi 'Jigs med 'bangs (d.u.). Yar 'brog had previously been among the thirteen administrative districts of Mongol-Sa skya government, but was granted to Nam mkha' bzang po's clan in the late fourteenth century by the Phag mo gru king Byang chub rgyal mtshan, an alliance the ruling family of Yar 'brog maintained henceforth.⁵ The three leaders of Yar 'brog were renowned patrons of Buddhist teachers and sponsors of large-scale religious projects. They

³ Czaja 2013: 18-20, 114-236; Venturi 2017: 99-101.

⁴ Ricco and Lo Bue 1993: 11-28.

⁵ Petech 1990: 58-9; Ehrhard 2004: 252. The Yar 'brog region and its key religious and political players have perhaps received their most extensive treatment in Hildegard Diemberger's monograph on bSam lding Chos kyi sgron ma (2007).

were first and foremost devotees of Bo dong Phyog las rnam rgyal (1376-1451), and under their watch and through their financial largesse Yar ’brog became renowned as a center of the Bo dong tradition.⁶ Nam mkha’ bzang po, Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan, and Amoghasiddhi were also major patrons of the female adept Chos kyi sgron ma of bSam lding, a significant figure in the religious life of the region whom Vanaratna first met at the end of his second journey and then again at the end of this third. Vanaratna initially established his connection with the ruling family of Yar ’brog early in his second visit to Tibet, and from that point onwards would routinely stop to receive their hospitality and offer teachings in the region. Most notable among his many visits to Yar ’brog was his extended teaching program at sNa dkar rtse in 1455, which will be explored in detail in the next chapter. That Vanaratna left a strong impression on the Yar ’brog clan is evident in their ongoing patronage of gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtho’s efforts to preserve the *paṇḍita*’s legacy; Nam mkha’ bzang po and Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan were the sponsors of both the ŽP and SG, while Amoghasiddhi is noted as a patron for some of bSod nams rgya mtsho’s translations of Vanaratna’s works.

The regions of La stod, Rin spungs, and Lhasa were also frequented by Vanaratna but receive much less attention in his biographies. Most of Vanaratna’s trips to the Lhasa area were for the sake of pilgrimage, and we are not given the impression that he had any encounters of note with the leading political or religious figures there. Apart from visits to the Jo khang temple, bSam yas, and the gSang phu sNe’u thog monastic college,⁷ Vanaratna seems not to have taken a deep interest in the region. Vanaratna did make frequent visits to Rin spungs, which should be expected given the long-standing ties and court intrigues between the ruling rLang clan of the Phag mo gru and the Ring spungs pas. Vanaratna’s first major patron in Tibet was the Phag mo gru monarch Grags pa ’byung gnas, who put down an internal revolt with Rin spungs support, an event known as the “great anarchy” that roiled the court from 1434 to 1437,⁸ years in which Vanaratna was in residence in the Yar klungs Valley. During the years between Vanaratna’s second and third journeys to Tibet, the Rin spungs steadily increased their influence at court, culminating in a marriage alliance between the Rin spungs house and the king Kun dga’s legs pa, which all but cemented Rin spungs control of central Tibet. Thus when Vanaratna returned to Tibet in 1453, the previously subordinate Rin spungs house was now governing Tibet under the titular rule of the Phag mo gru, a turn of events that was surely apparent to him even if it goes unmentioned in his biography. Throughout this tumultuous time Vanaratna was a regular visitor to Rin spungs territory, located at the confluence of the Rong chu and gTsang po rivers near the border of dBu and gTsang. Rin spungs served often served Vanaratna as a transit point in his travels around Tibet, and one could imagine that he stopped there as matter of diplomatic protocol. Vanaratna would give teachings whenever he passed through, but there is little indication his relationship with the leader of the Rin spungs house, Nor bu bzang po, and his clan was a critical one. Finally, the La stod region was also among Vanaratna’s frequent destinations, surely in no small part due to the fact that it lay directly on the route between the Nepal border and central Tibet. Vanaratna was regularly hosted by the governors of the northern (*byang*) and southern (*lho*) districts of La stod, Si tu rNam rgyal grags pa and Si tu Lha btsan skyabs, respectively. Both regions had been among the thirteen administrative units under the Mongols,

⁶ The Yar ’brog clan sponsored the printing of his collected works, and Amoghasiddhi himself wrote *Phyogs las rnam rgyal’s rnam thar* (Sharshon 2016: *passim*).

⁷ gSang phu Ne’u thog monastery is a famed center of scholastic learning located south of Lhasa. It was founded in 1073 by rNgog Legs pa’i shes rab. See van der Kuijp 1987 and Hugon 2016.

⁸ Czaja 2013: 220-21.

and owe much of their fortune and status to their alliance with the Sa skya 'Khon clan. Under Sa skya patronage the Lha stod region became an important religious center, with networks of monasteries branching from colleges at Ngam ring and Shel dkar. The officials of La stod managed to sustain their fortunes throughout much of the Phag mo gru period, but strife between the two regions of La stod, the eruption of hostilities with Rin spungs, and the strain of supporting large networks of tax-exempt monastic institutions eventually necessitated alliances with their rivals that effectively ended their independence.⁹ Vanaratna formed ties with the leaders of the two regions towards the end of his second journey, at which time he visited and taught at the administrative and ecclesiastical seats of southern and northern La stod, Shel dkar, and Ngam ring, respectively. The two regions were among his first destinations when he returned in 1453, when he again lingered in the area to give teachings to his patrons.

The invitation letter that brought Vanaratna back to Tibet in 1453—written and championed by gZhon nu dpal—is particularly illustrative of central Tibet's political landscape in the mid-fifteenth century.¹⁰ The letter was formally supported by the heads of three of Tibet's most politically important regions: the Phag mo gru king Kun dga' legs pa, the Rin spungs patriarch Nor bu bzang po, and the two administrators of La stod, Lha btsan skyabs and rNam rgyal grags pa. gZhon nu dpal states that he “showed the letter” to these four men and that they all sanctioned it and vowed to support the *paṇḍita*'s journey. This list is instructive both for who was included and who was not, and by extension of the alliances and political dynamics of time. Kun dga' legs pa was the titular king of Tibet, but power had all but been completely ceded to the ascendant Rin spungs clan led by Nor bu bzang po; the two leaders of northern and southern La stod, faced with territorial aggressions by the Rin spungs pas, had been drawn more firmly into their orbit and could now be counted on as allies despite their former affiliations with the Sa skya pas. Thus the formal signatories to the invitation letter were political allies who together controlled a vast swath of central Tibetan territory. Excluded from the letter despite their political clout and personal ties to Vanaratna were Si tu Rab brtan of rGyal rtse, whose alliance with the Phag mo gru and Rin spungs had always been tentative, and the leaders of Yar 'brog, Nam mkha' bzang po and Kun dga' rgyal mtshan. All of these figures can be counted among Vanaratna's most devoted patrons, and yet none were explicitly included among the sponsors of Vanaratna's final visit to Tibet, potentially marking them as political outliers or potential rivals to the central government and its clan allies. To be sure, there is much more to unpack in their omission from the invitation letter, but the document may mirror the political alignments that governed the Land of Snow by the time of Vanaratna's final visit.

A Final Transit of Ecumenes: The Religious Landscape of Fifteenth-century Tibet

When Vanaratna departed Bodh Gayā in 1423, he did so with the singular intention of crossing the Himalayan range into Tibet, stopping to acclimate in the Kathmandu Valley. Vanaratna's motivation to seek his fortunes in Tibet was almost certainly informed by the centuries-long relationship between the Buddhist communities of India and Tibet, and the historical paradigm of Indian Buddhist masters as the authoritative transmitters of Buddhist doctrine and culture to Tibet. Much had changed, however, in the centuries that followed the sacking of north India's Buddhist monasteries by Turkic marauders, which first reduced the flow of Buddhists between North India and the Himalaya, and the eventual contraction and decline of Buddhism in India.

⁹ Everding 1997: 269-74. Diemberger 2007: 37-8;

¹⁰ This letter was cited in full in the Introduction, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

Prior to Buddhism's diminishment in India, the Himalayan region—Nepal and Tibet both—was positioned as a northern branch of the Indian Buddhist ecumene centered in Magadha, with Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna culture flowing northwards, carried by Indian masters who made the long, arduous journey at the invitation of Tibet's nobility, and then recirculated by the Tibetan teachers, meditators, and translators who made their way south to draw from the wellspring of Indic Buddhism. The Himalayan region was an enthusiastic participant in the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna culture of North India, establishing a continuity of Buddhist culture across what the otherwise distinct societies of north India, Nepal, and Tibet. In this Buddhist cultural paradigm, India was valorized as the "noble land" (*'phags yul*), and Indian masters were esteemed at the head of all of Nepal and Tibet's major Buddhist lineages. Following the tumult of the Turkic invasion and the slow collapse of Buddhism it contributed to, the Himalayan Buddhist traditions became increasingly independent of the Indian tradition, and began to take on a markedly indigenous character. Like Nepal, whose adaptations to the changing geo-political environment were discussed in Part II, Tibet had established a distinctive Buddhist cultural identity, and with its close proximity to both the Buddhist cultures on the south slope of the Himalayan range and its long-standing religious, cultural, and political ties to central and east Asia, was specifically well-positioned to emerge as the center of a regional Buddhist ecumene.

Vanaratna's decision to leave India, his expectations in doing so, and the realities he faced during his first journey to Tibet demonstrate well the evolving relationship between the Buddhist communities of India and Tibet. Vanaratna decided to leave India after nearly forty years of wandering through the vestiges of Indian Buddhism that remained in the wake of paradigmatic shifts in the political, cultural, and religious environment of the subcontinent, shifts that confined Buddhism to a small number of locally-constrained communities with very little political or spiritual capital. Vanaratna's decision to leave India was rooted in his disappointment in the opportunities available to him there, but was also likely based on his knowledge that Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhist culture continued to flourish in the Himalaya, and specifically Tibet. He was perhaps also motivated by the historical conceit that an Indian *paṇḍita* would command significant authority there, authority that would translate into opportunities to teach and study, and into prestige and wealth as well. Vanaratna struggled at first to make a name for himself in Tibet, however, and was initially ignored, treated with polite indifference, and even greeted with open skepticism. His initial reception is indicative of the degree to which the Tibetan Buddhist tradition had staked its own culturally distinct course in the centuries following Buddhism's decline in India, and of the fact that India was no longer the touchstone it once was for Tibetan Buddhism. Instead, India maintained a largely symbolic status in relation to what was now a robust indigenous tradition, a tradition in which Vanaratna initially found himself poorly equipped to participate.

When Vanaratna reached the Tibetan plateau, Central Tibet was a century or so removed from the end of the Mongol-Sa skya political alliance and was still over two centuries away from the hegemonic rule of the dGe lugs pa under the leadership of the Tā lai bLa mas. During this time, and particularly in the late fourteenth century and throughout the fifteenth, central Tibet witnessed a period of religious eclecticism as a number of new sects emerged to share space with the more established Buddhist lineages. The well-established sects of ancient pedigree—the Sa skya, bKa' brgyud, bKa' gdams, and rNying ma—continued to dominate, but the religious terrain was now shared with a number of smaller lineages that were branching from their parent traditions to form their own sectarian identities.¹¹ These included the Jo nang, Zhwa lu, and Bo

¹¹ The late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries also witnessed the emergence of the nascent dGe lugs pa order, which

dong traditions, as well as number of new bKa' brgyud sects, particularly the Shangs pa. The emergence of these numerous lineages and sub-branches was facilitated by a non-sectarian, if still competitive spirit in each of central Tibet's polities. The Phag mo gru in the Yar klungs Valley, the Shar kha clan in Nyang stod, as well as the ruling families of Yar 'brog and northern and southern La stod fostered a religious environment that favored plurality and eclecticism over the hegemonic tendencies of the previous political regime. Thus, as Vanaratna moved through the religious landscape of Tibet, he encountered a great diversity of traditions, all of them rooted in the Indian tradition and the great Tibetan schools that were born from it, but many of which were newer lineages of a distinctively Tibetan pedigree. These newer schools were a driving force in the religious scene, steadily proliferating and attracting substantial attention from Tibet's religious elite.¹² In such an environment, Vanaratna's limited training in a highly-attenuated mode of Indian Buddhism left him ill-equipped to succeed.

That Vanaratna did eventually find the success he sought is a testament to his personal resilience and adaptability in the face of the changes brought about by the shifting status of Indian and Himalayan Buddhism. His transition into a distinctively Tibetan Buddhist sphere was by far the most challenging transition he made between Buddhist cultures; his previous transits within and between ecumenes—from the Bengal Delta and the borderlands of Southeast Asia to Sri Lanka, South India, Magadha, and finally Nepal—was made easier by the cultural and linguistic continuities between them. Tibet, on the other hand, was truly a foreign land, one with which Vanaratna had no prior experience, and where even basic communication, let alone sophisticated Buddhist instruction, presented a significant challenge. Vanaratna had likely hoped to draw on the religious continuities between the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhist communities of South Asia and Tibet, but he quickly realized that there was little familiar to him in Tibet and that he was unprepared—culturally, linguistically, and in his prior training—for a Tibetan mode of Buddhism that had become increasingly unyoked from the Indian tradition and was now articulating itself through distinctively Tibetan modes of doctrine, literature, and praxis. The success he eventually found was secured through his willingness to expand his training and repertoire by subordinating himself to the very Himalayan traditions he wished to serve, which included further study and training in Nepal and in Tibet. His success in Tibet was also due in large part to his collaboration with local translators and scholars, many of whom were as effective in opening the doors to Tibet's religious and political elites as they were in translating his words and promoting his legacy. By not taking his status as an Indian authority for granted, but instead maintaining an openness to learn from local traditions and rely on its most esteemed representatives, Vanaratna was eventually able to overcome the challenges he faced and to succeed in the Himalayan Buddhist environment.

The unique religious environment of Tibet and its distinctively Tibetan mode of Buddhist culture had a profound effect on Vanaratna, even if it is not immediately apparent in the biographical record. As was the case concerning Vanaratna's studies at Mahācaitya Vihāra, and again with his training in Nepal, the biographical account of Vanaratna's years in Tibet seems to deliberately obscure Vanaratna's study and practice of non-Indian Buddhist lineages and his training with local Buddhist masters. Both the ŽP and SG forefront Vanaratna's role as a teacher and transmitter of Buddhism in Tibet, while downplaying, ignoring, or effacing the ways

was given substantial support by the Phag mo gru dynasty. During Vanaratna's years in Tibet, however, the dGe lugs pa sect would not yet develop into the religious and political force it would eventually become. There is no trace of the dGe lugs pa tradition in Vanaratna's biography.

¹² Everding 1997: 274; Kapstein 2006: 118-9; Diemberger 2007: 44-8; Czaja 2013: 209-17; Vitali 2015: 569-70.

Vanaratna was personally enriched by the Tibetan tradition. In the two chapters that follow we will chart the course of Vanaratna's career in Tibet and the different ways he served his Tibetan disciples and patrons; but, we will also explore, to the extent the evidence allows, Vanaratna's engagement with the Tibetan tradition as student and holder of Tibetan lineages. Chapter Six will focus on the narrative of Vanaratna's first two journeys to Tibet as provided by the *ZP* and *NTZP*, which will be aligned with other biographical sources and historical chronicles to tell a more complex story than the official biographies convey. Chapter Seven will similarly draw from the biographies—with an emphasis on the *SG* and *NTSG*—to explore Vanaratna's third and final trip to Tibet and the creation of the Vanaratna Codex, a remarkable document created by Vanaratna's own hand that gives us a direct view into dynamism and eclecticism of fifteenth-century Tibet's Buddhist culture, and of the impression it left on Vanaratna's career and oeuvre.

Chapter 6

Vanaratna's First and Second Journeys to Tibet: 1426-27 and ca. 1432-38

Reaching Tibet, receiving the patronage of a Tibet king, and propagating Buddhism on Tibetan soil were among Vanaratna's primary goals when he departed India in 1423. It would take three more years in the Kathmandu Valley before those aspirations would finally come to fruition, and when they did, the outcome was surely not what Vanaratna expected when he set out from Bodh Gayā, buffeted by the winds of prophecy and driven by his own aspirations. His first journey to Tibet, which unfolded almost entirely within the year 1426, was by his own admission a failure, and it would not be until his second visit, spanning the years roughly from 1432 to 1438, that the successes that eluded him on his first visit would finally be realized. In the interim, Vanaratna returned to Nepal, engaged in further training, and, as discussed in the preceding chapters, transformed himself into the teacher and ritual master that his Tibetan audience required him to be. Following this transformation, Vanaratna's career in Tibet took off, and by the time he returned to Nepal in 1438 he had achieved the level of renown in Tibet he had aspired to fifteen years earlier. It was only after this trip that Vanaratna fully settled in the Kathmandu Valley, and became a master of equal fame in the religious and political circles of Nepal. During the next fifteen years, spent entirely in Nepal, Vanaratna continued to expand his repertoire of teachings and lineages, and honed his skills as Buddhist exegete and ritual master, which in turn positioned him to sustain his remarkable success in Tibet during his third and final visit to Tibet between the years 1453 and 1455. Thus all three of Vanaratna's journeys to Tibet were bracketed by periods of residence in Nepal, and as intimated in the foregoing chapters, his relationship with the Tibetan Buddhist community evolved in tandem with his relationship to the Newar Buddhist community of the Kathmandu Valley. The story of his post-India career is thus one of oscillation between two connected but nevertheless distinctive Buddhist cultures navigating their own way in the absence of the Indian tradition that once informed them. In the preceding section we explored Vanaratna's years in Nepal, and how they prepared him for and informed his successful career in Tibet. Here, we turn our attention to other end of the trans-Himalayan road to gain a closer perspective on Vanaratna's first two journeys to Tibet, and how he navigated the unique challenges that stood in the way of his ambitions to become a *paṇḍita* in the Land of Snow.

Vanaratna's first two journeys to Tibet are recounted by gZhon nu dpal in the *ŹP*, with corroborating data reported by Chos grags ye shes in the *NTŹP*. gZhon nu dpal did not meet Vanaratna until the *paṇḍita* arrived at rTses thang in 1432/3, and the fact that gZhon nu dpal did not meet Vanaratna until the beginning of his second visit has implications for our understanding of Vanaratna's experiences in Tibet. gZhon nu dpal's description of Vanaratna's first trip to Tibet is relatively brief, consisting of roughly three and a half folio sides. He does not identify his sources, but it is likely he relied on Vanaratna's oral accounts combined with reports of Tibetans who met Vanaratna during this period and who moved in the same circles as gZhon nu dpal. It is possible that there were literary sources available to him by the time he put his pen to paper, but determining what, if any textual materials were available would require philological investigation that is beyond the scope of this study. gZhon nu dpal was, however, Vanaratna's close companion for nearly all of the *paṇḍita*'s second visit to Tibet, and his first-person perspective is palpable in the biographical narrative of Vanaratna from this period. Thus gZhon

nu dpal's account of Vanaratna's second journey differs starkly from the first in the degree of detail and confidence with which gZhon nu dpal writes, a difference that makes this section, the final section of the *ŽP*, important as a witness to the socio-cultural and religious forces active in the background of Vanaratna's Tibetan narrative unfolds.

The First Journey: 1426-27

When Vanaratna departed India in 1423, he did so with a mandate—personal or prophetic—to seek his fortunes on the Tibetan plateau; correspondingly, gZhon nu dpal offers us no reason to believe that the *paṇḍita*'s first stay in the Kathmandu Valley was intended to be anything more than an acclimatization point for his onward journey over the Himalaya. In making a multi-year stop in Nepal, Vanaratna was following in the footsteps of many Indian masters before him who used the Valley as a staging ground to learn the languages, adjust to the environment, and otherwise provision themselves for what was surely an arduous journey north. Prior to his departure, Vanaratna surveyed local yogis about their experiences in Tibet in hopes of gaining clarity on what he could expect. As we recall, their report was discouraging:

They told him that the terrain was rough, which made travel difficult, and that it was so cold that food was difficult to digest. Calling [Tibetans] *atsaras*,¹ they did nothing but disparage them.²

According to gZhon nu dpal, their advice was so discouraging that Vanaratna temporarily abandoned his plans and returned to India, but he could not shake the feeling that he was missing an important opportunity, and so again made his way northwards and crossed over the mountains to the high, arid terrain of Tibet.

gZhon nu dpal is precise about the year of Vanaratna's arrival, noting that he reached Tibet in 1426, at the age of forty-three.³ gZhon nu dpal is less explicit about the route Vanaratna took to reach Tibet, but Vanaratna's first destination of note was the village of Tsha mda', which is located a short distance from Ding ri blang 'khor and a few day's travel from Chubar (*chu bar*), the border town at the end of eastern road out of the Kathmandu Valley.⁴ Vanaratna's first impression of the Tibetan people, which he formed in the small villages that dotted the road between Chubar and Tsha mda', left him initially apprehensive about what lay in store for him, but his fears were soothed by the local people:

When he arrived at the border between Nepal and Tibet, the people he found there were not very clean, had customs like sleeping with their oxen, and lived in shoddy houses. When he said that the people of Tibet were unpleasant and unclean, a local man (*'di pa*), told him that although this is how it is on the border, central Tibet is altogether pleasant.

¹ *a tsa ra*. Likely meant as a pejorative corruption of *ācārya*, thereby declaring them caricatures of religious practitioners.

² *ŽP* 13v.5-6.

³ *ŽP* 14r.1. As discussed above, the *ŽP* reports that Vanaratna arrived in the Year of the Earth Horse (*sa rta'i lo*), which would correspond to 1438/9, but this date is impossible given the other dates gZhon nu dpal provides, and is likely the result of scribal error. The *DN* (21v.6) records the correct year, the Year of the Fire Horse (*me rta'i lo*), that is, 1426.

⁴ Stearns (2007: 543, note 741). See also Army Corps of Engineers Army Map Service L-500 series: no. 45-14.

There the monastic community is large and the teachings of the Buddha widespread.⁵

The situation improved as Vanaratna proceed towards central Tibet, but the journey proved difficult and the assistance he received was meager. After passing through Tsha mda' and Ding ri, Vanaratna and his party reached Sa skya, and it is here that we get our first glimpse of how the Indian *paṇḍita* was received by Tibet's elite. Upon arriving in Sa skya, the seat of arguably the most widespread and influential religious sect in Tibet at the time and the center of Tibetan political power until a century before his arrival, Vanaratna naturally sought an audience with one of the luminaries of the Sa skya order, Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po (1382-1456). If Vanaratna was hoping to be afforded the reception worthy of a credentialed ambassador of Indian Buddhism, Kun dga' bzang po showed little inclination to provide it. Vanaratna was given half a *zho* of gold, no small gift, but was then sent on his way without further consideration.⁶

In comparison to his other early experiences, Vanaratna's reception at Sa skya must have seemed lavishly generous. In another anecdote, gZhon nu dpal describes how Vanaratna faced a far greater threat than being snubbed by the Sa skya patriarch:

On one specific occasion near the lDan dkar palace,⁷ [Vanaratna] searched for somewhere to rest for the night, but there was no one who would give them a place to stay. It rained heavily during the night, and they were threatened by flood waters. For a while the survival of his attendants was at risk, but His Eminence, no matter if the conditions were favorable or fraught, had no fear of suffering or disturbing emotions and so remained unwavering in body, speech, and mind.⁸

It is difficult to believe that Vanaratna imagined that, instead of being feted by students and patrons in the teaching halls and royals courts of Tibet, he would find himself stranded outside in a storm, his life and the life of his attendants threatened by rising floodwaters, but such were the realities of his early travels in Tibet.

Nyang stod: First Impressions

A bright ray of light in the stormy skies of Vanaratna's first journey to Tibet was his visit to Nyang stod and its capital at rGyal rtse. Though at first he was treated with the same level of reverential indifference he received at Sa skya, his arrival there was a key event in his early Tibetan narrative, one in which many of the seeds of his future success were planted. When Vanaratna arrived in Nyang, rGyal rtse was ruled by the skilled administrator and prolific builder Tā'i si tu Rab brtan kun bzang 'phags pa, together with his brother Rab 'byor bzang po. Both were scions of the founding family of rGyal rtse, which rose to prominence under Sa skya

⁵ ŽP 14r.3-5: de yang bal bod kyi sa mtshams su phebs dus | mi rnams gtsangs sbra med par ba lang dang lhan cig nyal ba la sogs pa'i kun tu spyod pa dang | gnas khang rnams kyang ngan ne las med pas bod kyi mi rnams ma skyid ma bzang gsungs pa na | 'di pa bod kyi mtha' lags mod | bod yul mthil de nan tar skyid | dge 'dun mang zhing sang rgyas kyi bstan pa yang dar zhes.

⁶ 14r.5-6: chos rje (ŽP^b; bla ma ŽP^a) kun dga' bzang po bas gser zho phyed phul | de tsam ma gtog zhabs tog dang ngos ye ma byung 'dug.

⁷ An ancient palace from the Imperial period located in the Yar klungs Valley.

⁸ 14r.6-14v.2: khyad par ldan dkar (ŽP^a; ldang dkar ŽP^b) rdzong gi nye logs su zhag sa mdzad pa na gnas khang gtong mi ma byung bas | mtshan rangs par stengs nas char chen po dang | 'og nas og chus nyen par gyur | 'phral phyag phyir yod pa rnams kyi 'tsho ba'ang dka' bar byung 'dug ste | dam pa 'di ni 'byor pa'i dus dang rgud pa'i dus na'ng 'di nyon mongs sdug bsngal dag gis 'jigs pa med pas sku gsung thugs kyi nmam pa gzhan du 'gyur pa med pa.

patronage and was unique among the powers in central Tibet in maintaining a significant degree of autonomy from the reigning Phag mo gru.⁹ Nyang stod was as important a religious center as it was a political one, and was home to an eclectic and largely non-sectarian spiritual community, with the Sa skya, bKa' brgyud, and Jo nang sects being particularly well-represented.¹⁰

According to gZhon nu dpal, upon arriving in Nyang stod Vanaratna first met Si tu bSod nams dpal (b. 1366), the uncle of Si tu Rab brtan, who was then based at rTse chen, a site near rGyal rtse that would prove to be of great significance for Vanaratna. At this time, however, we are told only that Si tu bSod nams dpal escorted Vanaratna onwards to rGyal rtse, where he was granted an audience with Si tu Rab brtan. Si tu Rab brtan did not request teachings or otherwise offer Vanaratna patronage on that occasion, but he did seem to recognize the hardships the foreign *paṇḍita* was facing, and so offered him a horse, provisions, and a colloquial translator who could better facilitate his journey as he continued onwards towards Lhasa.¹¹ From the account given in the *ŽP*, it does not appear that Vanaratna left much of an impression on Si tu Rab brtan or the other religious and political leaders of Nyang stod, but Vanaratna would return to rGyal rtse on his way back to Nepal from Lhasa, and it was then that the course of his future career in Tibet would be set.

Pilgrimage to Central Tibet and an Audience with the King

Equipped with a horse and an oral interpreter, Vanaratna continued onwards to the heart of the dBus region, first to Lhasa and then on to the Yar klungs Valley, the seat of the Phag mo gru.¹² He passed through Rin spungs on the way, but the lack of detail provided in the *rnam thar* suggests that nothing of significance transpired. As he did throughout his travels across South Asia, Vanaratna took time out from his search for a patron to visit important pilgrimage sites in central Tibet, which included stops at the so-called “three sacred sites of the Wheel of Dharma” (*chos 'khor gnas gsum*):¹³ bSam yas, Khra 'brug, and the Jo khang temple. At the Jo khang, the only one among these sites to receive more than cursory treatment from gZhon nu dpal, Vanaratna performed a large number of circumambulations of the temple and composed “ten verses of praise in the *toṭaka* meter” in the presence of the famed Jo bo Śākyamuni image.¹⁴ As discussed above, these verses are very likely those preserved in the Tibetan translation of Vanaratna's *Buddhastavadaśa* (Tōh. 1154), which bSod nams rgya mtsho specifically noted was composed using the *toṭaka* meter of Sanskrit verse.

While visiting Khra 'brug and gDan sa mthil in the Yar klungs Valley, Vanaratna made his first attempt to establish what he hoped would be a lasting connection with a Tibetan king. The reigning monarch of Tibet at the time was Grags pa rgyal mtshan, under whose watch the Phag mo gru arguably reached the height of their political and cultural power.¹⁵ By the time Vanaratna met him, however, Grags pa rgyal mtshan was nearing the end of his reign, was in poor health, and like the eminent Tibetans before him, showed only a passing interest in the arrival of an Indian *paṇḍita*:

⁹ Ricco and Lo Bue 1993: 11-26; Venturi 2017: 99.

¹⁰ Vitali 2015: 569-70.

¹¹ *ŽP* 14v.2-3.

¹² *ŽP* 14v.3.

¹³ Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 4

¹⁴ *ŽP* 14v.3-4.

¹⁵ Czaja 2013: 18-19, 114-95, 202-13; Venturi 2017: 100-1.

[Vanaratna] wondered if the monarch Grags pa rgyal mtshan was the Tibetan king he was to rely on as stated [in the prophecy], and so decided to remain at Yar klungs rnam rgyal for a few days.¹⁶ Even though the monarch heard that a *paṇḍita* had arrived, he did not arrange for any king of audience. After an official from the monastery invited him, [Vanaratna and Grags pa rgyal mtshan] did engage in some small talk. But, because the king was ill, and because there was no one to translate the Dharma, the opportunity passed with nothing more than the acknowledgement of the auspicious connection. [The king] was impressed with [Vanaratna's] comportment, and so gave him support and made excellent offerings. About that occasion His Eminence said, "Because the king would not live much longer, all we could do was meet; I could not explore [the relationship] further."¹⁷

Nyang stod Revisited

After his unproductive, and ultimately demoralizing audience with the Tibetan king, Vanaratna acknowledged that the conditions for success in Tibet were simply not present, and decided to cut his losses and return to Nepal.¹⁸ His route took him back through Nyang stod and rGyal rtse, where his fortunes took a notable turn for the better. When he returned rGyal rtse he was received respectfully, and noted that unlike on previous occasions, he was now openly acknowledged as a *paṇḍita* and otherwise treated kindly. He even began to entertain simple questions about the Dharma, at least to the degree that his colloquial translator could manage.¹⁹ The first fortuitous change in Vanaratna's circumstances concerned precisely his inability to communicate at more than a transactional level: the arrival of Chos 'khor Lotsāwa 'Jam dpal ye shes, the man who would become Vanaratna's personal oral interpreter, translation colleague, attendant, and friend. 'Jam dpal ye shes was offered to Vanaratna by the *lotsāwa*'s own teacher Seng ge rgyal mtshan (d.u.), under whom 'Jam dpal ye shes had been studying at the Sa skya monastery of sTag tshang Chos 'khor sgang in gSing gshongs. For reasons that are not entirely made explicit, Seng ge rgyal mtshan dispatched 'Jam dpal ye shes to rGyal rtse specifically to study with and serve Vanaratna, telling him, "Because you know grammar well, go see the exceptionally eminent *paṇḍita* who is currently staying in Nyang stod, serve him, and learn from him."²⁰ 'Jam dpal ye shes describes their initial period of study together and the nature of their long-term relationship in his NTCZ:²¹

¹⁶ Yar klungs rnam rgyal is a Jo gdong monastery located near the Kra 'brug temple in the Yar klung Valley (Heimbal 2013: 207-8).

¹⁷ ŽP 14v.4-15r.1: bod kyi rgyal po gcig la brten nas bstan pa la bya ba byas par 'gyur gsung ba de gong ma chen po grags pa rgyal mtshan e yin dgongs nas yar klungs rnam rgyal du zhag 'ga' bzhugs | paṇḍi ta phebs 'dug gsung ba (ŽP^b; zer ba ŽP^a) gsan na'ang gong ma chen pos ni mjal 'phrad sogs ma mdzad | dgon par du (ŽP^b; dgon gсар du ŽP^a) che pos gdan drangs nas 'phral gyi gsung gleng du ma re mdzad na'ang | gnad 'phrod pa dang khyad par de dus chos 'gyur ba'i lo tsa ba med pas rten 'brel tsam mkhyen ma gsung ba tsam las skabs ma byung (ŽP^a; rten 'brel 'dra mkhyen nam gsung ba tsam las skabs ma byung ŽP^b) | sku'i spyod lam la thugs dgyes pas zhabs tog dang 'bul ba ni legs po mdzad | de dus bdag po chen po'i zhal snga nas kyang sku na 'phra ba'i stobs kyis mjal ba tsam ma gtogs dpyod pa cher ma zhugs.

¹⁸ ŽP 15r.1-2.

¹⁹ ŽP 15r.2-3.

²⁰ ŽP 15v.1: khyed kyis sgra legs po shes pas myang stod na paṇ chen khyad par 'phags pa gcig bzhugs yod 'dug pa'i drung du song la zhabs tog dang slob gnyer gyis gsung.

²¹ Despite his use of the third person in this passage, 'Jam dpal ye shes is in fact describing his own experiences.

Once [’Jam dpal ye shes] began his study of translation terms under the Dharma lord, the great *paṇḍita*, he mastered them in about three months. The Dharma Lord was delighted, and said “Finally, my translator has arrived.” After that, whenever the Dharma Lord, the great *paṇḍita* would turn the wheel of Dharma in dBus and gTsang or engage in any religious activities, [’Jam dpal ye shes] acted as his translator.²²

Aside from the significance of ’Jam dpal ye shes’s entry into Vanaratna service, this scene is also useful for gauging Vanaratna’s evolving reputation in Tibet. As we have seen, Vanaratna was received politely when he first passed through rGyal rtse, but failed to make a significant impression on Si tu Rab brtan or the other secular and ecclesiastic leaders of Nyang. By the time he returned to rGyal rtse, however, Vanaratna’s reputation had grown to the point that that he was openly and respectfully acknowledged a *paṇḍita*, which gZhon nu dpal suggests was novel at this point. News of his stay at rGyal rtse also inspired the abbot of a distant monastery to send one of his students there to study with and serve “the exceptionally eminent *paṇḍita*.” If these changes in the tone of gZhon nu dpal’s narrative are not clearly indicative of Vanaratna’s growing esteem in Tibet, there was another change in Vanaratna’s fortunes that clearly indicates that he was gaining the attention of Tibet’s religious elites, a change that, like his meeting with ’Jam dpal ye shes, has significant implications for his future success.

While Vanaratna was in residence at rGyal rtse he was visited by one of the most influential and renowned figures in dBus and gTsang, the Sa skya pa master Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367-1449). Rong ston was primarily based in dBus, and had a long-standing affiliation with the Phag mo gru court,²³ but it was at rGyal rtse in Nyang stod that he and Vanaratna had their fortuitous encounter. If we take gZhon nu dpal’s account at face value, Rong ston and a large party heard that Vanaratna was staying at rGyal rtse and came there specifically to meet him. We know from other sources, however, that Rong ston was on a tour of gTsang at the time,²⁴ and that Si tu Rab brtan and Si tu Seng ge rgyal mtshan were among Rong ston’s major patrons. Thus, it seems just as likely, if not more so, that Rong ston was visiting his patrons as part of a larger teaching tour of gTsang, and that his meeting with Vanaratna was perhaps more serendipitous than gZhon nu dpal suggests. Whatever the circumstances of their meeting, the two got on well and established a connection that would bear fruit for years to come:

At that time there was a lion of speech (*smra ba’i sen ge*) who befuddled the mind of his opponents with his famed knowledge of the full tradition of Tibetan grammar.²⁵ Being a treasury of scripture, reasoning, and oral instructions, all the contemporary sharp-minded logicians would touch the dust of his feet and have the experience of obtaining the eye [of the Dharma]; none could rival him. The great Rong ston, whose qualities are difficult to express, came to Nyang stod with a group of around 150 disciples to meet His Eminence [Vanaratna]. As soon as they met him they began to see with the eye of Dharma, and because his infinite qualities were plain to see, developed deep faith. They heard many teachings from him, including those on the highest level of Acala practice. [Vanaratna]

²² NTCZ 31v.3-5: skad dod nams chos rje paṇ chen pa’i drung dang mjal nas bslabs pas | zla ba gsum tsam la legs par shes pa byung ba dang | chos rje gsung nas | da ’dis nged rang gi lo tsa ba yong pa ’dug gsung nas thugs dges tshor mdzad pa byung | de nas chos rjes paṇ chen pa dBus gtsang du chos kyi ’khor lo bskor ba phrin las skyong ba thans cad kyi lo tsa byas.

²³ Jackson 1989: 8.

²⁴ Jackson 2007: 350-51.

²⁵ That is, Rong ston Shes bya kun rig.

gave the Dharma Lord Rong ston a copy of the *Kalāpa Sūtra* scribed by his own hand.²⁶

And:

When the great lion of speech [Rong ston] returned to central Tibet, he would tell people about the formidable *paṇḍita*, and otherwise praised [Vanaratna] in various ways. His Eminence, the great Lion of Speech was himself a great man of the world, rich in power and qualities that none could surpass. Even though he could sap the confidence of those who were themselves venerated by many spiritual masters, when he met His Eminence [Vanaratna] he was awed by the force of his greatness.²⁷

Vanaratna's meeting with Rong ston Shes bya kun rig is the final scene from Vanaratna's first journey to be described in the *ŽP*, and as such sets the stage for Vanaratna's return to Tibet some six years later. The triad of political and religious figures he met in Nyang stod—the clan leader Si tu Rab brtan, the Buddhist master Rong ston Shes bya kun rig, and the translator 'Jam dpal ye shes—would be instrumental in his return to and eventual success in Tibet. Following his retreat at the Śāntipur temple it was Si tu Rab brtan's invitation that brought him back to Tibet; it was in the entourage of Rong ston that Vanaratna was formally introduced to the Tibetan king who would become his most important patron; and, it was 'Jam dpal ye shes who would resume his duties as Vanaratna's oral translator and thus make it possible for him to offer teachings, initiations, and guidance to his Tibetan patrons. There is, however, one other person from Nyang stod who would play a pivotal role in Vanaratna's Tibetan narrative, a man he also met during his initial travels in 1426/7, and who for unknown reasons was entirely effaced from gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho's biographies.

A Critical Lacuna

At some point while was residing in Nyang stod during his first visit to Tibet, Vanaratna met a Tibetan master he would come to venerate as his teacher, and whose instructions he would go to great lengths to collect and preserve: Kun dga' blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po (b. 1365). Kun dga' blo gros belonged to the ruling Shar kha clan, and was the son of Tā'i Si tu 'Phags pa dpal bzang (ca. 1318-1370), an illustrious personage in the history Nyang stod who founded both rGyal rtse and rTse chen, the latter of which Kun dga' blo gros served as abbot. Though Kun dga' blo gros received extensive training in the Sa skya pa tradition, he was an eclectic master who

²⁶ *ŽP* 15r.2-6: de tshe bod skad rigs gcig pa la mkhas pa'i grags pas phyogs (*ŽP*^b; tshogs *ŽP*^a) kyi rgol ba mtha' dag gi klad pa nram par (*ŽP*^b; nram par *om. ŽP*^a) myos par byed pa'i smra ba'i seng ge | lung dang rigs pa dang man gag mtha' dag gi mdzod du gyur pas dus ding sang ni rigs par smra ba ji snyed pa blo gros kyi dbang po dang ldan pa de thams cad kyang 'di nyid kyi zhabs kyi rdul la reg pa las mig thob pa snyam byed pa las 'gran pa'i zl dang bral ba rong ston chen po mtshan brjod par dka' ba des | myang stod du dpon slob phyed nyis rgya tsam phebs nas bdag nyid chen po 'di dang mjal ma thag tu cho kyi spyang gyis gzigs pa na | mtha' yas pa'i yon tan gyi phung po mngon du gyur nas | lhag par dad de mi g.yo ba bla na med pa la sogs pa'i chos kyang mang du gsan | ka lā pa'i mdo gcig nyid kyi phyag bris su mdzad nas chos rje rong ston chen po la gnan.

²⁷ *ŽP* 15v.2- : smra ba'i seng ge chen po physis dbus phyogs su phebs pa'i tshe'ang | paṇḍi ta de shin du 'jigs su rung ba zhig 'dug go zhes sgo du ma nas bsngags pa mdzad | bdag nyid chen po smra ba'i seng ge chen po (*ŽP*^b; chen po *om. ŽP*^a) 'di yang 'jig rten gyi mi chen po stobs dang bsod nams dang ldan pa sus kyang zil gyis mi non cing dge ba'i bshes gnyen gyi sbye bo mkhas pa du mas bkur ba nams kyang spobs pa 'phrog par nus pa yin na'ang | 'di' che na mthus zil gyis mnan te bzhugs par snang.

held diverse lineages and was considered a foremost authority on the Kālacakra system.²⁸ At the time of Vanaratna’s visit to Nyang, Kun dga’ blo gros was residing at rTse chen monastery, and it was there that he and Vanaratna had their first meeting.

Despite Kun dga’ blo gros’s fame and the significance of his meeting with Vanaratna, the scene is not recorded in the ZP, but is instead preserved in two separate accounts,²⁹ one in the *rnam thar* of Śākya mchog ldan,³⁰ the *Paṇ ḍi ta chen po śā kya mchog ldan gyi rnam par thar pa zhib mo rnam par ’byed pa* (NTŚC) composed by Kun dga’ grol mchog (1507-1565), and the other in the anonymous *Myang yul stod smad bar gsum gyi ngo mtshar gtam gyi legs bshad mkhas pa’i ’jug ngogs* (MCB),³¹ a historical chronicle of Nyang. In both versions of their meeting, it is plainly evident that Vanaratna received teachings from Kun dga’ blo gros, with a special emphasis on the six yogas of the Kālacakra system. The more substantive of the two accounts is found in the MCB:

One night while the *paṇḍita* Vanaratna was staying in rGod khung at Mid pa [dgon pa],³² he had a dream in which he arrived at Lhun grub bde chen monastery³³ where Kun dga’ blo gros was residing. He reached a small bridge, [and saw] the lord Grub chen presiding over the monastic assembly, which was arranged as the Kālacakra deities within a celestial palace. The great *paṇḍita* Vanaratna then received the Kālacakra initiation. Later, when they met in person [at] Lhun grub [bde] chen, [Vanaratna] asked Kun dga’ blo gros what he should do after receiving the initiation. This was, for example, like the *siddha* O rgyan pa receiving the initiation of Kālacakra in dream from the Dharma Lord rGod tshang pa. The great *paṇḍita* Vanaratna next received teachings on the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, *Sems nyid ngal gso*,³⁴ the *sNying po don grub*,³⁵ the *Tshe khrid*,³⁶ and many others from

²⁸ Franco and Lo Bue 1993: 14-16; Vitali 2015: 515-18.

²⁹ This scene is also surely recounted, perhaps in more detail, in the biography of Kun dga’ blo gros, the *dPal ldan bla ma dam pa’i rnam par thar pa dngos grub kyi rbya mtsho*, composed by Rin chen bzang po (d.u.). The single manuscript of this *rnam thar* known to survive is presently held by the China Nationalities Library in Beijing (van der Kuijp 1994b: 604, n. 21). I was unfortunately unable to access this critical document, but in his biography of Śākya mchog ldan, Kun dga’ grol mchog indicates that his account of the meeting between Kun dga’ blo gros and Vanaratna was based on an unnamed *rnam thar of* Kun dga’ blo gros, which may be a reference to this work (NTŚC 56v.6).

³⁰ The NTŚC contains additional passages concerning Vanaratna that are not recorded in Vanaratna’s *rnam thars*. These scenes will be discussed in the next section.

³¹ Their meeting is described twice in the MCB, and abridged telling that begins on folio 45v.4, and a longer account beginning on 86r.4.

³² A monastic residence at rGyal rtse (Vitali 2015: 514, n. 2). This line from the MCB (91.5-6) appears to be corrupt. It reads: “paṇ chen nags rin mig pa bya pa’i nang...” The manuscript on which the print edition is based is illegible here, making it impossible to confirm the reading. However, in an abridged telling of the same scene that appears earlier in the MCB (f. 45v.4 in the same manuscript), we read “paṇ chen nags kyi rin chen mid pa bya ba’i nang.” Vitali suggests that *mid pa* was meant to be part of Vanaratna’s name (2015: 517, n. 6), but this seems unlikely. More plausible is that this line contains a corruption of the name of the rGo khung residence, which as Vitali also notes, is alternatively named Mid pa dgon pa (2015: 514, n.2).

³³ The monastery’s name is given as rTse chen in the NTŚC, but identified by its alternative name, Lhun grub bde chen, in the MCB.

³⁴ This could refer to kLong chen rab ’byam Dri med ’o zer’s (1308-64) work of the same title.

³⁵ Unidentified.

³⁶ The text referenced here is unidentified, but it bears a title similar to the teachings Vanaratna is reported to have received from Padmasambhava in Bhutan, and then passed on to bSod nams rgya mtsho at Gopicandra in Nepal. See NTSG^b 353.

Kun dga' blo gros.³⁷

Beyond the visionary elements in this description of their meeting, the MCB is unambiguous that Vanaratna received teachings from Kun dga' blo gros, and that the teachings (and the aesthetics of the encounter) were grounded in the Kālacakra system. The MCB reports that Vanaratna had a vision of receiving the Kālacakra initiation from Kun dga' blo gros, but whether this obscures an actual initiation or is merely meant to set the stage for the latter's instructions on the *śaḍāṅgayoga* remains uncertain. That Vanaratna studied with Kun dga' blo gros for some time is evident from the list of teachings Vanaratna received from him, a varied list that highlights both Kun dga' blo gros' eclectic spiritual background and which foreshadows an equally diverse set of texts and practices attributed to Kun dga' blo gros that Vanaratna would collect in Tibet thirty years later.³⁸

The description of Vanaratna and Kun dga' blo gros's meeting found in the NTŚC is more succinct than that of the MCB, but nonetheless corroborates the account. It is unique for confirming the year of their meeting, 1426, but is particularly remarkable for acknowledging that Vanaratna's studies under Kun dga' blo gros were omitted from the official biographies, and for suggesting that the counter-narrative of Vanaratna's initiation at Śāntipur was contrived to conceal this fact:

The *paṇḍita* Vanaratna first came to Tibet in the Year of the Fire Horse (1426). At that time he received teachings on the six yogas from Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros at rTse chen, during which the *paṇḍita* Vanaratna saw the area where they were staying as the palace of Kālacakra. This is reported in the biography of the Lord Grub chen. Discerning spiritual masters consider it certain that the *paṇḍita* Vanaratna received the six yogas from our own lord Grub chen [Kun dga' blo gros], and that he clearly had meditation experiences [as a result]. This was subsequently kept secret; the fact that he received Dharma instruction was entirely omitted from [Vanaratna's] biography. Instead, [it records] the elegant contrivance that [Vanaratna] received these [instructions] from Śābaripā in Nepal, a deception that was widely repeated. When investigated soberly, however, the truth is obvious.³⁹

Of specific relevance is Kun dga' grol mchog's critique of the "elegant contrivance" (*mdzes bsgrigs pa*) of grounding Vanaratna's lineage of *śaḍāṅgayoga* practice in his vision of Śābaripā

³⁷ MCB 91.5-15 (ms. 86r.4-86v.3): paṇ chen nags rin mig pa'i bya ba'i nang rgo khung du bzhugs pa'i tshe mtshan mo rmi lam bzung nas grub chen blo dgon pa lhun grub bden chen gyi bzhugs gnas der phebs pas zam chung de tshun dgon pa'i skor nams dus 'khor gyi zhal yas khang dang | der gnas pa'i mi nams dus 'khor gyi lha tshpgs de dag gi dbus kyi gtso bo la chos rje grub chen bzhugs 'dug pa la | paṇ chen nags rin gyis dus 'khor gyi dbang zhus | slar ngos kyi mjal lhun (MCB ms.; bstun MCB print) grub chen kun blo la dbang thob par 'os 'gro 'am zhus pas | dper na grub chen o rgyan pas chos rje rgod tshang pa mnal lam du dus 'khor gyi dbang zhus pa bzhin no | slar paṇ chen nags rin pas grub chen kun blo la sbyor drug [] sem nyid ngal gso | snying po don grub | tshe khrid sogs chos bka' mang du gsan no.

³⁸ This will be among the main topics in the next chapter.

³⁹ NTŚC 56r.5-56v.3: paṇ chen nags rin gyis bod du lan nga ma byon dus me pho rta lo yin zhing | 'di skabs rtse chen du grub chen kun dga' blo gros pa'i drung du sbyor drug gsan dus | bzhugs gnas kyi sa khyon nams dus kyi 'khor lo'i gzhai yas khang du paṇ chen nags rin gyis gzigs zhes chos rje grub chen gyi nam thar du yang 'byung zhing | dge ba'i bshes gnyen dpyad pa che ba nams paṇ chen nags rin pas sbyor drug rang re'i rje grub chen la gsan | thugs dam yang mngon gyur 'khrungs pa yin nges kyang | phyis de'i tshul gsang | nam thar du bka' chos gsan pa tsam yang ma bris par bal yul du sha wa ra la gsan mdzes bsgrigs pa la thugs su mi 'bab pa'i nam pa ston pa mang du yang 'byung zhing | gzu bo'i blos brtags na don la yang gnas so.

at Śāntipur, an acknowledgement that gZhon nu dpal (or perhaps Vanaratna) crafted the visionary encounter specifically to occlude a very different reality. As argued in Chapter Five, gZhon nu dpal's description of Vanaratna's initiation into the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala at Śāntipur seems intended to obfuscate the identities of the Newar masters he was more likely to have received the initiation from. The practice of an unspecified *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* system is mentioned in passing in this scene,⁴⁰ but at no point does gZhon nu dpal suggest that Vanaratna received the practice from Sabaripā on that occasion, nor at any other time during Vanaratna's years in Nepal. As we have seen, the only explicit reference to Vanaratna's study of the Kālacakra system comes early in the *ŽP*, when gZhon nu dpal includes the Kālacakra among the teachings Vanaratna received from Buddhaghōṣa at Mahācaitya Vihāra. Apart from this reference, and a single mention that Vanaratna trained in the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* while in retreat in Magadha (though even there the practice is not explicitly tied to the Kālacakra cycle), the Kālacakra system is wholly absent from Vanaratna's South Asian narrative, and barely registers at all in his collected works. It is only in Tibet, and only from his second visit onwards, that the texts and practices of the Kālacakra system appear consistently in his teaching repertoire. Thus the Kālacakra only become prominent in Vanaratna's biography after he is known to have met with Kun dga' blo gros and received teachings on, and perhaps even initiation into, the Kālacakra from him. Given that we have no clear account in the *rnam thars* of Śabaripā teaching Vanaratna any Kālacakra practices, it would appear that the "contrivance" of Vanaratna receiving teachings on the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* from Śabaripā in Nepal was part of a body of oral lore in Tibet concerning Vanaratna's Kālacakra lineage. But as Kun dga' grol mchog aptly puts it, the truth that Vanaratna's Kālacakra lineage was in fact rooted in Tibetan soil was abundantly clear.

The omission of Vanaratna's relationship with Kun dga' blo gros once again points to the seeming willingness of Vanaratna's Tibetan biographers to obscure key sources of Vanaratna's Vajrayāna training. We have seen that gZhon nu dpal omitted the Pāli and Theravaṃsa influences that are palpable in Vanaratna's early narrative, that he perhaps embellished the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna education he received at Mahācaitya Vihāra, and that he ascribed much of Vanaratna's later Vajrayāna training to his visionary relationship with the timeless *siddha* Śabaripā. We might be inclined to see Vanaratna's hand in perpetuating these ambiguities, as perhaps he felt it necessary to conceal the details of his training in order to maintain the integrity of his Indian pedigree; when we consider, however, other evidence that Vanaratna felt admiration and veneration for Kun dga' blo gros,⁴¹ it appears less certain that he played a direct role in the omission of his relationship with Kun dga' blo gros from his *rnam thars*. As we will see in the next chapter, Vanaratna collected the teachings of Kun dga' blo gros and was careful to list his Tibetan teacher before himself in many of the *guruparamparās*, lineage histories, of the teachings he collected. This is hardly the behavior of a man hoping to conceal the fact of his tutelage to a Tibetan teacher. Additionally, while it would have been easy enough for Vanaratna to conceal his lack of early Vajrayāna education in India and distort the story of his subsequent training under Nepalese masters, it is far less likely that he could unilaterally hide his relationship with Kun dga' blo gros, a renowned master belonging to the ruling family of rGyal rtse which maintained a strong, influential presence at the Phag mo gru court. Word of Vanaratna's studies surely circulated widely in the region, as is suggested in Kun dga' grol mchog's critique. Thus the exclusion of Kun dga' blo gros from both the *ŽP* and *SG* was most plausibly a deliberate act on the part of their authors, and done with the relatively transparent

⁴⁰ *ŽP* 31r.3-4.

⁴¹ This will be explored in the following chapter.

motivation to secure Vanaratna’s Indian legacy for the generations of Tibetan lineage masters that followed. That Vanaratna’s relationship to Kun dga’ blo gros remained unknown to modern scholars until recently is testament to the efficacy of this intentional omission.

These two accounts of Vanaratna’s meeting with Kun dga’ blo gros in 1426 serve as the only extant explicit record of their relationship, but it is not the only evidence available to us. As we will see below and in the next chapter, there is every reason to believe that Vanaratna and Kun dga’ blo gros met repeatedly, perhaps whenever Vanaratna passed through Nyang stod, which he did regularly. Evidence suggests that Vanaratna received a large body of teachings from Kun dga’ blo gros, many of them oral instructions on subtle body yogas drawn from predominantly Tibetan sources. That Vanaratna valued these teachings and venerated Kun dga’ blo gros is apparent from the lengths Vanaratna went to in order to compile, translate, and preserve Kun dga’ blo gros’s teachings both for himself and for posterity. But this is a subject for the next chapter; keeping our focus on Vanaratna’s first visit to Tibet, we can add Kun dga’ blo gros to the list of key figures that Vanaratna met at the end of his year-long sojourn across central Tibet. Though Kun dga’ blo gros was erased from Vanaratna’s narrative by gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho, his influence is nonetheless felt in Vanaratna’s later emphasis on the Kālacakra system and his evolution into a renowned teacher of that cycle on Tibetan soil. At this moment in our narrative, however, Vanaratna remained dejected about his prospects in Tibet, and though he had just made a series of connections that would transform his relationship with his Tibetan students and patrons, he still departed rGyal rtse, Nyang stod, and Tibet feeling he had squandered an important opportunity. As recorded in the ŽP, Vanaratna thought to himself, “ ‘I haven’t really done much good in Tibet,’ and decided to return to Nepal and to remain in meditation.”⁴²

Interlude: Vanaratna’s Response to an Underwhelming Experience

It seems apparent that Vanaratna expected that, as an Indian Buddhist *paṇḍita* he would have received a more enthusiastic reception in Tibet, and regarded it as a personal failure that he did not. Perhaps he was correct. As argued in previous chapters, there is reason to believe that Vanaratna was not well-trained in Vajrayāna Buddhism in general, and particularly in the systems and cycles most relevant in fifteenth-century Tibet. Prior to his second residence in Nepal, there is little in his biography to suggest he had undergone extensive training in the doctrines, practices, and rituals of esoteric Buddhism, likely because such rigorous training was simply not available to him in India. The fact that he had not received a more extensive education in Vajrayāna practice reflects more directly on the state of Buddhism in India than it does on Vanaratna’s personal efforts. The preceding chapters have demonstrated that apart from his early training at Mahācaitya Vihāra—and even there somewhat dubiously—the opportunities to receive a thorough Vajrayāna education in India were few and far between. Such opportunities were more widely available in the Kathmandu Valley, but with his mind set on reaching Tibet, it appears that Vanaratna did not much avail himself of those opportunities during his first stay in the Valley. It is only during his second residence that Vanaratna received the kind of Vajrayāna training that would prepare him to be an effective teacher in Tibet. Approximately six years passed between the end of his first visit to Tibet and the beginning of his second, and though this

⁴² ŽP 15v.5: de nas bdag byid chen po ’di dgong pa la | da ni bod du don bya ba ci yang med dgongs nas slar bal por thegs nas phal cher thugs dam la bzhugs.

significant span of years is treated perfunctorily by *gZhon nu dpal* in the *ŽP*—it is only Vanaratna’s retreat and Śāntipur that is described in any detail—this was an ample amount of time for Vanaratna to enhance his training to align with the conditions he discovered in Tibet. We can also regard Vanaratna’s decision to receive teachings on, and perhaps even initiation into the Kālacakra from Kun dga’ blo gros in Tibet as a further indication that he recognized the need to expand his training and evolve as a spiritual master. That he succeeded in his efforts is evident in the sea-change in his experiences in Tibet between in first and second trips. This radical transformation in his fortunes can thus be attributed to his study under both Nepalese and Tibetan masters, and to the lengthy period of training he undertook in the Kathmandu Valley. When the moment finally came that Vanaratna felt ready to return to Tibet and fulfill the prophecy he was given nearly twenty years earlier, it was the connections that he formed in Nyang stod that paved the road to the Phag mo gru court, and the true beginning of his illustrious career in Tibet.

The Second Journey: ca. 1432-38

According to *gZhon nu dpal*, when Vanaratna emerged from his retreat at Śāntipur there were two invitations to Tibet waiting for him. Whether or not this precisely reflects the sequence of events is unknown; Vanaratna spent six, almost entirely undocumented years in Nepal, thus how and why he received invitations to Tibet at the end of such a long period away is not evident. *gZhon nu dpal* does write, without any detail or further explanation, that upon the completion of his Śāntipur retreat, he received a “new prophecy” (*lung bstan gsar pa*) informing him that the time had come to return to Tibet. Conveniently, two invitations had arrived: one from Si tu Rab brtan of rGyal rtse and the other from Lha dbang rgyal mtshan of Mang yul Gung thang in mNga’ ris. Given Vanaratna’s previous experiences in Nyang stod and the personal connections he had formed there, Vanaratna’s decision about which invitation to accept must have been an easy one. He duly sent Lha dbang rgyal mtshan a letter informing him that he would accept the invitation from Si tu Rab brtan and not visit Gung thang at this time, but acknowledged that a connection had been formed between them and would visit Gung thang at a future date, a promise he fulfilled at the end of this same journey to Tibet.⁴³

We do not know precisely what year Vanaratna left Nepal, but we can surmise that he departed sometime in the latter half of 1432 or the beginning of 1433, as *gZhon nu dpal* tells us that Vanaratna first entered the Phag mo gru court and met the king Grags pa ’byung gnas in the Year of the Water Ox, which corresponds approximately to 1433. Given the amount of time it would have taken Vanaratna to travel between the Kathmandu Valley and Nyang stod, and estimating that he spent some time there before proceeding to central Tibet, it seems most plausible to assume Vanaratna left Nepal in 1432, when he was forty-eight years of age. Vanaratna set out from Nepal with a party of eight, and appears to have had an uneventful trip over the Himalaya and across the Tibetan plateau. *gZhon nu dpal* provides a synopsis of his journey:

The master and disciples—a group of eight—immediately set out [from Nepal] for Nyang stod. While there, the *lotsāwa* Mañjuśrī came to meet His Eminence.⁴⁴ The *lotsāwa* regarded His Eminence as an actual buddha, and so had strong faith in him. He

⁴³ *ŽP* 15v.6-16r.3.

⁴⁴ That is, the *lotsāwa* ’Jam dpal ye shes, who frequently went by the Skt. name, Mañjuśrī.

immediately began to serve as both a conversational translator as the need arose, and as a translator of scripture. His Eminence, for his part, was very fond of [Mañjuśrī]. After staying [in Nyang stod] for a while, they journeyed on to Lhasa, stopping along the way to give Dharma teachings at the request of the Rin spungs brothers, who offered him exceptional service. They then continued to Lhasa, where [Vanaratna] visited the Jo bo and made extensive offerings.⁴⁵

Reading between the lines of this succinct passage, we can assume that Vanaratna made a number of stops during the first leg of his travel, and reunited with more of his former acquaintances than gZhon nu dpal mentions. He certainly spent more time in rGyal rtse than is accounted for here, where he would have received the hospitality of Si tu Rab brtan, and it would be equally likely that he met and possibly resumed his studies under Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros. If Vanaratna did devotedly venerate his Tibetan guru, and evidence suggests he did, he would have availed himself of every opportunity to meet with him. It would have been likely then that they would have met and trained together when Vanaratna first returned to Nyang stod after six years away. But like all matters concerning Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros, the *rnam thars* are utterly silent about any meeting they had at this time, leaving us to merely speculate about the possibility.

Vanaratna and the Phag mo gru

After leaving Lhasa, Vanaratna traveled to Srin po ri, a renowned pilgrimage site located at the confluence of the sKyid chu and gTsang po rivers, where he was reunited with Rong ston She bya kun rig. And it was while in Rong ston's company that the long-awaited opportunity to secure the patronage of a Tibetan king finally arrived:

Vanaratna next went to Srin po ri, where he stayed with the omniscient Rong ston and his disciples. At that time the Lord of the Earth, Grags pa 'byung gnas rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po, was staying at the illustrious monastic college of rTses thang,⁴⁶ meditating on Hevajra. He wrote a letter that included a praise to the omniscient Dharma lord [Rong ston] that was written in elegant verse, and [added] “Invite that *bla ma* of yours, the *paṇḍita* that is there with you now. Bring him here.”⁴⁷

Being invited to the Phag mo gru court in the addendum to a letter of praise to a Tibetan master was perhaps not the kind of invitation Vanaratna expected, but it was an invitation all the

⁴⁵ ŽP 16r.3-6: dpon slob brgyad lam bsrang nas myang stod du phebs | de'i tshhe lo tsā ba mañju śris kyang bdag nyid chen po'i sku mdun du phebs | lo tsa ba yang bdag nyid chen po sangs rgyas dngos kyi 'du shes dang ldan pa'i dad pa brtan zhing phral phan tshun skabs su bab pa'i gleng slangs pa dang | bstan bcos bsgyur ba gnyis ka la zhabs tog tu 'gyur ba zhig snang zhing | bdag nyid chen po yang shin tu thugs kyis 'dzin par 'dug | der thogs shig bzhugs nas lha sar 'byon par chas te lam du rin spungs pa sku mched kyis chos zhus nas zhabs tog kyang lhag par mdzad | de nas lha sar phebs nas jo bo'i drung du mjal nas | mchod pa rgya chenpo phul.

⁴⁶ Grags pa 'byung gnas was abbot of rTses thang, a highly influential position within the Phag mo gru hierarchy, from 1428 to 1432, just prior to being enthroned as king (Czaja 2013: 217).

⁴⁷ ŽP 16r.6-16v.2: de nas srin po rir phebs rong ston tmans cad mkhyen pa dang dpon slob lhan cig tu bzhugs pa'i tshhe | sa thams cad kyi dbang phyug grags pa 'byung gnas rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po dpal rtse thang gi chos gra chen po na kye'i rdo rje'i thugs dam la bzhugs pa'i thog nas chos rje thams chad mkhyen pa la syan ngag gi sbyor ba phul du byung ba'i bsnags pa mdzad nas | khyed kyi bla ma paṇ chen zhig de na phebs yod 'dug pa de sphyan drongs la 'dir spyon cig ces pa'i bka' yig spring nas...

same. That Vanaratna was known to be in the company of Rong ston, and that Grags pa 'byung gnas was curious enough about him to invite him to court (something his predecessor was not inclined to do) is again testament to Vanaratna's growing reputation in Tibet, which was perhaps in no small part due to the renown of the Tibetan master with which he kept company. Prior to Grags pa 'byung gnas's invitation, Vanaratna had spent considerable time in Nyang stod, and word may have reached the court about the return of the Indian *paṇḍita* at the Shar kha clan's invitation. More significant may have been the fact that Vanaratna passed through Rin spungs on his way to Lhasa; Grags pa 'byung gnas took his seat on the Phag mo gru throne a year or so earlier in alliance with the Rin spungs clan, so it may have been representatives of the Rin spungs house that first alerted Grags pa 'byung gnas to Vanaratna's presence. Rong ston was a favorite of the Phag mo gru court and a major recipient of their patronage, so Vanaratna's relationship with Rong ston was possibly also a significant factor in spurring Grags pa 'byung gnas to invite him to court. Thus in the Year of the Water Ox, 1433, Vanaratna set foot in the Phag mo gru court at the invitation of the Tibetan king, a moment that surely felt like the fulfillment of his aspirations, if not of prophecy.

According to Chos grags ye shes, Vanaratna came before the king with the attendants he brought with him from Nepal, his translator 'Jam dpal ye shes, and another *lotsāwa* named 'Bri khung Lotsāwa, who is otherwise unidentified.⁴⁸ If the nature of Grags pa 'byung gnas's invitation was an indication of the monarch's initial nonchalance regarding the *paṇḍita*, it was confirmed by the cordial but unflattering character of their first meeting:

In the second month of the Year of the [Water] Ox, His Eminence and his disciples went to rTses thang with the omniscient Dharma lord [Rong ston] and a few of his disciples. As soon as they met [Grags pa 'byung gnas] they were physically uplifted, spoke words free of aggrandizement or denigration, and were so at ease in their minds that they smiled joyfully. There was not a trace of hostility to be found. This pleased the Lord of Men [Grags pa 'byung gnas], but there had been many people, people incapable of assessing such a precious jewel, who had said that the *paṇḍita* was certainly of good conduct and character, but seemed to lack many of the qualities [associated with] the Buddhist teachings (*sde snod*). Thus while in [Vanaratna's] presence someone displayed a colored sand maṇḍala of the glorious Hevajra they had on hand and asked him what it was. "Hevajra," he replied. He was then shown the multi-deity maṇḍala of Amitāyus according to tradition of Siddharājñī, and was again asked which maṇḍala it was. He replied, "*Nāro bhaginyah*," which was then translated as, "He said it is from Nāropā's sister's tradition." Likewise he was asked, "Do you know *pramāṇa*? Do you know *prajñāparamitā*? Do you know Madhyamaka? "Do you know Kālacakra, Hevajra, and Cakrasaṃvara?" He replied "I studied them a little, but didn't understand them very well." When asked if he knew the Guhyasamāja, he said he hadn't studied it at all.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ NTŽP 26r.4-5.

⁴⁹ ŽP 16v.2-17r.2: glang lo zla ba gnyis pa la bdag nyid chen po dpon slob rnam dang | chos rje thams chad mkhyen pa dpon slob shas shig phebs nas rtse thang du mjal ma thag pa nas sku'i rnam 'gyur dang ba 'dren zhing gsung gi cha shas tsam la'ang bdag nyid sgrogs pa dang gzhan la smod pa la sogs pa med | thugs ni rtag tu bag phebs dgyes pa'i 'dzul mdangs ma gtogs khr pa'i dri tsam yang mi 'da ba des | mi'i dbang po thugs phrogs par gyur na'ang | sngar nor bu rin po che rtog pa la mi mkhas pa'i mi mang pos paṇḍi ta de sku btsun zhing thugs rgyud ni bzang po zhis yin par 'dug | sde snod kyi yon tan rang chen po med pa 'dra zer ba mdas pas sku mdun na bzhugs pa kha cig gis | dpal kye'i rdo rje'i rdul tshon gyi dkyil 'khor (ŽP^b; rdul tshon om. ŽP^a) yod pa bstan nas | 'di ci'i dkyil 'khor yin zhes zhush pa na | he vajra gsung ba dang | tshe dpag med grub rgyal ma lha mngas kyi dkyil 'khor bstan nas | 'di

This remarkable scene is illustrative not just of Vanaratna’s hesitant reception by Tibet’s political and religious elite, but also potentially of a dramatic shift in the status of Indian *paṇḍitas* working in the Land of Snow. The scene demonstrates that Vanaratna did have a reputation in Tibet prior to his arrival at the Phag mo gru court, and that his reputation was, at best, mixed. The fact that Vanaratna had formed relationships with the political and religious leadership of Nyang stod, and was specifically held in high regard by Rong ston Shes bya kun rig, afforded Vanaratna a certain cachet that opened doors for him with the Phag mo gru, but there was still a general reluctance to immediately accept him as a religious authority, a hesitation that gZhon nu dpal indicates was rooted in previously-formed opinions about his education and ability. How and why Vanaratna earned this reputation is unclear, and may have hypothetically been rooted in his lack of advanced Vajrayāna training, his inability to communicate effectively during his first visit, and perhaps even the knowledge that he trained with a Tibetan teacher. Suspicion of Vanaratna’s learning may also, again hypothetically, be rooted in a more widely-held suspicion of representatives of Indian Buddhism in general, one born from the centuries-long decline of Buddhism in India and the parallel ascent of Tibetan Buddhism as a rich, deep, and wholly independent Buddhist tradition. To be sure, there were still widely-revered Indian masters active in the Tibet in the fifteenth century—Vanaratna’s east-Indian compatriot Śāriputra being a prime example—but the numbers of Indian masters making the journey to Tibet had dwindled considerably since the thirteenth century, and those who did come to Tibet likely demonstrated, in the scope of their education and ability, the limited and deteriorating conditions of Indian Buddhism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

It is impossible to say if the doubt present in the Phag mo gru court regarding Vanaratna’s training was based in his own narrative, the narrative of Buddhism’s decline in India, or a combination of these factors, but the suspicion was sufficient to the point that it needed to be assuaged before Vanaratna could be accepted as a Buddhist authority. gZhon nu dpal, ever the faithful student and biographer, dismisses the “many” voices of suspicion as unqualified to assess Vanaratna’s training, but clearly the opinion was widespread enough, or those who held it prominent enough, that Vanaratna was put through a series of tests meant to assess his ability. The questions put to Vanaratna are noteworthy only insofar as they represent a standard list of the most essential systems of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, and thus seem to suggest that there was a very basic question regarding the scope and depth of Vanaratna’s training. The exoteric and esoteric Buddhist systems they question him about—*pramāṇa*, Madhyamaka, Prajñāpāramitā, Kālacakra, Hevajra, Cakrasaṃvara, and Guhyasamāja—represent a complement of the major Indian traditions that form the basis Tibetan Buddhist thought, and which stand atop most Tibetan doxographical hierarchies. Vanaratna is first asked to identify two maṇḍalas, one a sand maṇḍala of Hevajra, the other a maṇḍala of unknown media associated with a longevity practice attributed to the twelfth-century female Indian adept Siddharājñī (*grub rgyal ma*), which was passed down primarily through the bKa’ brgyud school.⁵⁰ Vanaratna successfully identifies the first maṇḍala as that of the Hevajra cycle, but he in fact misidentifies the second as belonging to the tradition of “Nāropā’s sister” (*nārobhāginyāḥ*), a mistake about which gZhon nu dpal, and

ci yin zhus pas | nā ro bha gī nī ya gsung | lo tsā na re | nā ro pa’i sring mo’i lugs yin gsung bar ’dug zer | de bzhin du tshad ma mkhyen nam | phar phyin mkhyen nam | dbu ma mkhyen nam | dus ’khor mkhyen nam | kye’i rdo rje mkhyen nam | ’khor lo bde mchog mkhyen nam zhus pa rnam la kiñcu kiñcu thos nged kyis legs po mi shes | gsang ba ’dus pa mkhyen nam zer ba na ma thos gsung.

⁵⁰ About this lineage and practice see Halkias 2016, especially pp. 227-29.

the Phag mo gru court for that matter, are silent. It does not appear that the Tibetan tradition routinely conflated Siddharājñī with Nāropa’s sister Niguma,⁵¹ thus Vanaratna was likely known to have been incorrect here, but there were apparently no serious ramifications to his mistake.

More interesting is Vanaratna’s response when asked about the extent of his education in the standard epistemological, philosophical, and esoteric ritual systems of Tibetan Buddhism. In what reads as a terse, if not gruff reply, Vanaratna answers, “I studied them a little, but didn’t understand them very well,” and further claimed to have no knowledge of the Guhyasamāja system at all. Was Vanaratna simply being honest about the extent of his training, or does this scene reveal something of his natural disposition, one in which he displays a feigned modesty paired with gruffness? It is challenging to read the qualities of a person’s personality through testimony written over five centuries earlier in work of high literature with hagiographical overtones that was composed by a devoted disciple, but consider the remainder of this interaction:

I asked him if he possessed *bodhicitta*, to which he replied “just a little.” He was then asked, “Generally, people from the southern border are irritable, and Indians especially so, but you are quite even in temperament. Have you been like this since childhood?” He would not even concede that much, and replied, “I don’t have a good disposition, either as a child or now.”⁵²

We get another brief glimpse into Vanaratna’s reticent nature a short time later, after he had been accepted at court. gZhon nu dpal writes:

It was clear to me that the depth of his learning was hard to fathom, and yet I wondered if perhaps he didn’t enjoy speaking to others. When I discretely asked him about this, he replied, “I’m an *avadhūta*,⁵³ why would I want to talk?”⁵⁴

Whether we regard Vanaratna’s answers to the questions posed to him as a sign of his humility, a fair representation of his prior training, or the gruff response of a confident *paṇḍita* impatient with the situation he found himself in, they did not immediately persuade the king. Grags pa ’byung gnas, we are told in both the ŽP and DÑ, took nearly a fortnight to demonstrate his acceptance of Vanaratna, which he did through the symbolically-charged act of openly prostrating to him as a religious teacher.⁵⁵ Once Grags pa ’byung gnas made his obeisance, however, Vanaratna’s career in Tibet began in earnest.

Vanaratna’s first major teaching program in the Phag mo gru kingdom is significant not only for marking the moment his career in Tibet truly took off, but also for the introduction it gave him to the rich repository of Indic, Sanskrit Buddhist literature available in Tibet, much of which may have been unavailable to him in South Asia. As a result of Tibet’s centuries-long

⁵¹ In the hagiographical tradition of the Bka’ brgyud school Siddharājñī is regarded as a teacher of Re chung pa (1084-1161), thus several generations removed from Nāropa.

⁵² ŽP 17r.2-4: kho bos nyid la byang chub kyi sems yod dam zhus pa na kiñcu acche gsung | spyir kho bal po pa ’di spro thung | khyad par rgya gar ba ’di spro thung ba yin pa la | khyed nan tar thugs rgyud ’jam par gda’ ba ’di byis pa’i dus nas lags sam zhus pas | byis pa’i dus dang da lta gnyis kar ngang tshul bzang po med gsung.

⁵³ The term *avadhūta* and the implications of it for Vanaratna’s career are discussed in Chapter One, p. 18.

⁵⁴ ŽP 18r.1-2: sems la ’di ni mkhas pa chen po gting dpag par dka’ ba zhis ’dug pa la gzhan la gsung ba la cher mi dgyes pa ci yin snyam nas zur gyis zhus pa na’ng | nged bya bral yin yod | lab pa la ga na dga’ gsung ngo.

⁵⁵ ŽP 17r.4; NTŽP 26r.5.

engagement with Indian Buddhism that began in the eighth century and was sustained well into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the libraries of Tibet's most important monasteries held collections of Sanskrit manuscripts, the very manuscripts that served as the basis of the extensive translation efforts undertaken in Tibet in both the early and later periods of Buddhism's spread in Tibet (the *snga dar* and *phyi dar*). The rLang clan of the Phag mo gru had governed the Yar klungs Valley since the mid-twelfth century, at which time the clan's founder, rDo rje rgyal po (1110-70) had first settled there and established a religious center. Under the stewardship of the rLang clan, the Phag mo gru territory became a key religious site in central Tibet, first by establishing gDan sa mthil monastery in the late twelfth century, and then rTses thang in the mid-fourteenth century. Throughout the centuries the Phag mo gru were great patrons of eminent Buddhist masters, masters who represented diverse lineages, thereby establishing the Yar klungs Valley as a center of thriving religious community.⁵⁶ It should therefore come as little surprise that, as a seat of both political and religious authority, the Phag mo gru kingdom was home to libraries that contained a veritable treasury of Tibetan Buddhist literature, and were repositories of Sanskrit manuscripts collected in Tibet over the centuries. But, we need not consider the Sanskrit holdings of the Phag mo gru libraries hypothetically; Vanaratna's biography makes the scope of their collection of Indic manuscripts quite clear.

Grag pa 'byung gnas's formal acceptance of Vanaratna authority initiated a six-year, highly productive period in Vanaratna's career, mostly spent in the Phag mo gru kingdom. His career began with a lengthy teaching program at rTses thang, over the course of which he was asked to teach on wide array of Buddhist texts, primarily esoteric in nature, but on core Mahāyāna treatises as well. gZhon nu dpal, who was present at the time, provides us with a comprehensive list of the texts he taught on during this period, and gives us an additional, essential piece of information: he taught on all of them *from Sanskrit manuscripts*.⁵⁷ Considering the potential folio count of such a wide range of texts, it seems extremely unlikely that Vanaratna carried a collection of these manuscripts with him from Nepal to Tibet. Far more plausible is that he was working out of the rTses thang library and perhaps other libraries in the Phag mo gru kingdom. A further implication of Vanaratna's access to the Sanskrit libraries of Tibet is his potential exposure to a number of Indian Buddhist treatises that had not been previously accessible to him. This point will be relevant to the discussion of the Vanaratna Codex in the following chapter, and so is flagged here for further consideration. The list of texts Vanaratna taught on at rTses thang from Sanskrit manuscripts is as follows:⁵⁸

- A treatise on the six yogas according to the Guhyasamāja system.⁵⁹
- The *Prajñāpāramitā in 8,000 Lines*.
- Abhayākaragupta's *Vajrāvalī*.
- The *Vajrapañjara Tantra*.
- Raviśrījñāna's *Amṛtakaṇikaṭippanī*.

⁵⁶ Czaja 71-222.

⁵⁷ ŽP 17v.2: rgya dpe bstan nas; 17v.4-5: rgya dpe 'dug pa rnams kyang bltas nas. Chos grags ye shes also confirms that Vanaratna taught on the list of texts based on Sanskrit manuscripts (NTŽP 26r.6-26v.2).

⁵⁸ This list has been compiled from ŽP 17r.5-17v.5 and NTŽP 26r.6-26v.2.

⁵⁹ This is possibly the *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga* translated by Vanaratna and 'Jam dpal ye shes at the request of Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (Öta. 4792). Vanaratna's instructions on this text seemed a bit controversial, and did not help him prove himself as a legitimate Buddhist authority in the eyes of the Tibetan scholars in the audience. gZhon nu dpal states that his instructions raised doubts in the minds of some about how much he really knew about the subject (ŽP 17r.5), a point that is perhaps clarified by Chos grags ye shes, who notes that Vanaratna did not follow the system of Candrakīrti's *Praddīpoddyotana*, which may have been the system most familiar to the audience (NTŽP 26v.6).

- Vibhūticandra’s *Amṛtakaṇikoddyotanibandha*.
- An unidentified commentary on the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti* by *Amoghadeva (*don yod lha*).
- Three commentaries on the *Sekkodeśa*, by Nāropā, Sādhuputra, and Bodhivajra.⁶⁰
- The *Vimalaprabhā*, presumably referring to the commentary on the *Kālacakra Tantra*.
- An unidentified *pūjāvidhi* from the Kālacakra cycle composed by Dharmākaraśānti.
- The *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* with Vimuktisena’s commentary.⁶¹
- The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*.
- The *Madhyāntavibhāga*.
- The *Pramāṇavarttika*.
- Candrakīrti’s *Prasannapadā*.
- Kṛṣṇācārya’s *Vasantatilaka*.
- Sujayaśrīgupta’s *Abhiṣekanirukti*.⁶²
- A collection of *dohās*.
- Advayavajra’s collected works on *amanasikara*.⁶³

This list of teachings, which is heretofore unprecedented in Vanaratna’s biography, raises two questions: 1) to what extent does this list represent a dramatic expansion Vanaratna’s repertoire; and, 2) would the Sanskrit manuscript collection Vanaratna accessed in the Phag mo gru kingdom have exposed him to a larger body of Indic Buddhist literature than had been previously available to him in South Asia? This list of teachings is by far the most extensive range of topics, texts, and systems thus far associated with Vanaratna’s teachings repertoire, and if we take Vanaratna’s and gZhon nu dpal’s previous record of his teachings at face value, would demonstrate that Vanaratna had incorporated a large body of material into his repertoire prior to his return to Tibet in 1432. We should be careful not to confuse an absence of evidence with evidence of absence, but it is not unreasonable to think that some of this impressive list of topics, if not the texts themselves, would have been mentioned in Vanaratna’s *rnam thars* had they been a consistent part of his repertoire. Even if, as will be suggested immediately below, Vanaratna encountered some of these texts for the first time in Tibet, teaching them—especially the more technical and esoteric Vajrayāna treatises—to a learned Tibetan audience would have required a substantial body of knowledge and training which it is not at all clear from his biography that he possessed in the earlier phases of his career. Given that these texts and the philosophical and ritual systems they are related to had not been previously referenced in Vanaratna’s biography, and given that Vanaratna had struggled to connect with a Tibetan audience during his prior visit, our attention is again drawn to the six years Vanaratna spent in Nepal between his first and second trips to Tibet as a pivotal time in his career. As we know, neither gZhon nu dpal nor any other source fills in the gap between the years 1426 and 1432. gZhon nu dpal’s account of Vanaratna’s retreat at Śāntipur offers us a tantalizing hint of the transformations that took place in those years, but we can only infer the impact Vanaratna’s training in Nepal had on his career through the dramatic expansion in his repertoire evident in his second visit to Tibet. We also

⁶⁰ The first two citations almost certainly refer to Nāropā’s *Paramārthasaṅgraha* and Sādhuputra’s *Sekkodeśaṭippanī*. Both Bodhivajra and the text upon which Vanaratna taught are unidentified.

⁶¹ Perhaps the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitopadeśaśāstrābhisamayālaṅkārikāvārttika*.

⁶² As is often the case in the Tibetan tradition, gZhon nu dpal and Chos grags ye shes both mistakenly attribute the work to Ratnākaraśānti. On the correct identification of the *Abhiṣekanirukti*’s authorship, see Isaacson 2010: 266-67, and note 19. As noted in the next chapter, it is likely that the manuscript Vanaratna read from was properly attributed to Sujayaśrīgupta.

⁶³ Very likely a reference to the set of approximately twenty-five works attributed to Advayavajra (ca. 1007-1085). contained in the *Advayavajrasaṅgraha*. A study, edition, and translation of this influential collection can be found in Mathes 2015.

potentially see a hint of the influence of Vanaratna’s Tibetan teacher Grub chen Kun dga’ blo gros, from whom he is known to have received teachings on the Kālacakra cycle. Only here, for the first time in Vanaratna’s narrative, does material from the Kālacakra corpus leave a tangible trace in his oeuvre.

Another potential reason these texts and topics do not make a prior appearance in Vanaratna’s biography is that they simply may not have been available to him in South Asia. Given the attenuated state of Buddhism in India in the fifteenth century, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the stock of Buddhist literature in circulation in India was equally attenuated. Nepal, of course, still maintained a vibrant Buddhist community at the time, and the manuscript archives of the Kathmandu Valley remain a rich repository of Buddhist literature to this day. It would take a study far beyond the scope of this paper to make a strong argument about the texts that were or were not available to Vanaratna in Nepal, but given Tibet’s long engagement with Indian Buddhism and the extensive translation efforts of Tibetan *lotsāwas* over those centuries, it is reasonable to suggest that Vanaratna accessed a number of Indic Buddhist manuscripts for the first time while in Tibet. This is perhaps evident in the following passage from the *ŽP*:

Reading just from the Sanskrit manuscripts on hand there, [Vanaratna] answered questions patiently and thoroughly. He would ask if we had specific [texts] in Tibet, and when we told him a translation was available, he would further inquire about how specific terms were translated. His questions exclusively pertained to difficult points that even the great translators of the past had not been able to resolve. When asked what would be correct he was careful in his conjectures, saying “I’m not really sure about this,” “it could be like that,” and so forth.⁶⁴

That Vanaratna asks if specific texts are available *in Tibet (bod na)*, not if they are available *in Tibetan (bod skad na)*, perhaps indicates that he was interested in what Buddhist literature was available to him there, with the further implication that he was seeking texts which he knew about, but which were not previously available to him.

Far clearer in this exchange is Vanaratna’s interest in linguistic matters, specifically the way certain terms and passages were translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan. From gZhon nu dpal’s account it appears that Vanaratna was curious if the Tibetan translations would shed light on difficult terms or enigmatic statements in the Sanskrit, yet was hesitant to make his own definitive statements about the meaning. Vanaratna’s interest in translation equivalents (*skad dod*) was first evident in his initial collaborations with ’Jam dpal ye shes described above, and according to Chos grags ye shes he became quite proficient in Tibetan Buddhist terminology, even though he was an admittedly poor student of the Tibetan language:

Early on [Vanaratna] was given a writing tablet,⁶⁵ but upon reflection thought it would not be of much benefit if he didn’t know translation equivalents, much like learning how to spell Tibetan words without knowing how to speak Tibetan. Thus he didn’t get much use

⁶⁴ *ŽP* 17v.4-18r.1: rgya dpe ’dug pa nams kyang bltas nas | dri ba zhus pa na’ang | shin tu dpyad bzod pa’i lan legs par gnang nas | ’di dang ’di khyed kyi bod na yod dam gsung ba na | ’gyur yod zhus dus | ’o na ’di la ci skad zer | ’di la ci skad zer gsung nas | dri ba gnang ba nams kyang sngon gyi lo tsa ba chen po nam kyis dpyod par ma nus pa’i dka’ ba’i gnas ’ba’ zhid gi steng du dri ba de ’ong | ’di ltar gda’ zhus pa na | ’o na en ma shes ’dug | ’di ni ’di lta bu yin gsungba la sogs brtag bzod pa ’ba’ zhid byung.

⁶⁵ Tib. *sgra’i sa ris*: a wooden board covered with ash or other fine dust in which letters or words could be drawn and erased.

out of the tablet. When I (?) met the precious *paṇḍita* later,⁶⁶ he knew translation equivalents well, and said it was extremely detrimental that he had given away the writing tablet.⁶⁷

Vanaratna would eventually learn the Tibetan language, at least well enough to translate from Tibetan to Sanskrit for his own purposes, as is evident from the translated passages of the Vanaratna Codex. We will turn our attention to that critical document shortly, and explore the direct connections between this, Vanaratna's first residence at the Phag mo gru kingdom and the creation of the codex. Before we do so, it is worthwhile to survey the remainder of Vanaratna's second journey to Tibet, the scope of his travels in the region, and the connections he established during that time.

An Indian Paṇḍita on the Roof of the World

Vanaratna spent approximately two continuous years with the Phag mo gru, and in that time earned the respect and devotion of the religious and political hierarchs of the kingdom, and of their allies and affiliates across central Tibet. gZhon nu dpal does not record any additional travels Vanaratna made during these two years, so it seems that much of his attention was focused on teaching to the king, his court, and the many Buddhist masters who passed through what was one of the key centers of religious life in Tibet. Though Vanaratna did not yet feel compelled to leave the Land of Snow, he was inspired to travel to Bhutan (Mon) in 1435 to search of a specific medicinal herb called *dīpaṅkaranava* (*dī paṅ ka ra na va'i sman*). Why Vanaratna was suddenly interested in medicinal herbs and what motivated him to make a long journey back over the Himalaya to search for them is a mystery; not only are we never told what he did with them (or even if he succeeded in finding them), there is not a single other instance in his biography or oeuvre that indicates he had an abiding interest in medicine or medical formulas. Grags pa 'byung gnas, now firmly committed to Vanaratna as a spiritual teacher, was despondent at the thought of his departure, and pleaded with the *paṇḍita* to return. Vanaratna agreed, and before he went acceded to the king's request to draw the grid lines, as a form of consecration, for a painting he was commissioning of the *Vajrāvalī*. The king then escorted Vanaratna as far as Gong dkar and Srin po ri, where they parted company, and Vanaratna continued southwards to Bhutan via Rin spungs and Nyang stod.⁶⁸

The unresolved mystery of Vanaratna's interest in medicinal herbs aside, his trip to Bhutan, lasted roughly a year between 1434 and 1435, and took him at least as far south as Pa gro. Vanaratna reports that he found the people of Pa gro pious, and that the city was reminiscent of the sacred places of India. He was looked after by a prominent woman titled or named Mi chen btsun mo, which has the clear ring of aristocracy, whose identity cannot be confirmed. gZhon nu dpal focuses only on Vanaratna's visionary encounters with the mythic Indian *siddha*

⁶⁶ The referent of this statement is ambiguous. The text was written by Chos grags ye shes, but he was born in 1453, and so would have been an infant at the time of Vanaratna's return to Tibet. It is perhaps possible that Chos grags ye shes traveled to Nepal with bSod nams rgya mtsho in 1465, but this too seems unlikely. Given that this passage is taken from the NTZP, perhaps this is meant to be understood as statement made by gZhon nu dpal.

⁶⁷ NTZP 27r.6-27v.2: dang po sgra'i sa ris btang nas bsams pas bod skad mi shes par bod kyi brda' dag bsilabs pa dang 'dra bar 'dug pas skad dod mi mkhyen na dgos pa chung bar dgongs nas sgra'i sa ris nmams la nan chags chen po ma gnang | phyis paṅ chen rin po che dang mjal nas skad dod nmams legs par dgongs pa'i tshes sgra'i sa ris bor ba de shin tu gnod par byung gsung.

⁶⁸ ZP 18r.3-18v.2.

Padmasambhava, with whom he reported performing a *ganacakra* in a cave that appeared to him more like a “well-appointed house” (*khang pa shin tu legs pa zhig*).⁶⁹ In the NTSG we learn that Vanaratna taught bSod nams rgya mtsho a practice entitled *Padma tshe dpag med kyi khrid*, which Chos grags ye shes says Vanaratna received directly from “the *vidyādhara* Padma.”⁷⁰ This title is suspiciously similar to the title of one of the teachings the MCB reports Vanaratna was given by Grub chen Kun dga’ blo gros, there called the *Tshe khrid*,⁷¹ thus it is not entirely implausible to regard the attribution of the *Padma tshe dpag med kyi khrid* to Padmasambhava, and Vanaratna’s reception of it in a vision of the legendary Indian *siddha*, as yet another means of concealing Vanaratna’s tutelage under his Tibetan teacher Kun dga’ blo gros. Beyond this we are told precious little about Vanaratna’s experiences in Bhutan, or of his relationship with the Bhutanese people. We can surmise that he left an enduring impression there from the fact that a statue said to be of Vanaratna is displayed in a shrine hall at Punakha Dzong, a large fort on the banks of the Mo Chu River a short distance from Thimpu (image 26).⁷²

Vanaratna returned to Central Tibet in the Year of the Wood Rabbit, 1435, and again stayed in Nyang stod.⁷³ No further details are on offer about his time there, but considering he stopped in Nyang stod both before and after his trip to Bhutan, we can surmise that he resumed his relationships with Si tu Rab brten and Kun dga’ blo gros. After leaving Nyang stod, Vanaratna passed through Rin spungs, where he lingered for a time at rDzong dkar and engaged in a meditation retreat on his personal deity, Vajrayoginī. His meditative experiences compelled him to compose a series of hymns in praise of Vajravārāhī,⁷⁴ which may be a reference to his own work, the *Kramadvayavajravārāhīstotra*. The colophon to the Tibetan translation of this work states it was first translated by Vanaratna and ’Jam dpal ye shes at ’Bras yul,⁷⁵ a site within the territory controlled by the Rin spungs house. From there Vanaratna returned to the Phag mo dru kingdom and resumed his teachings, focusing on the *ṣaḍaṅgyoga* practice as elucidated in the works of Anupamarakṣita and Raviśrījñāna. Based on gZhon nu dpal’s account in both the ŽP and particularly in the DÑ, Vanaratna gave these teachings to a large assembly of advanced scholars at rTses thang’s monastic college (*rtse thang gi chos gra chen po yongs kyi dge ba’i bshes gnyan sde snod ’dzin pa mang po*), which included bSod nams mchog grub of sNar thang (1399-1452), rNam rgyal grags pa of northern La stod, a master identified only as bLo gros rgyal mtshan who may be Vanaratna’s teacher Grub chen Kun dga’ blo gros rgyal mtshan, and Thel pa Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (d.1463), who will make another key appearance in Vanaratna’s narrative in 1454.⁷⁶

Vanaratna also found time to go on pilgrimage and engage in personal retreat—specifically at rGyal bzang in the ’On Valley and at bSam yas—but remained primarily rooted in the Phag

⁶⁹ ŽP 18v.2-5.

⁷⁰ NTSG^b 353.22-23.

⁷¹ MCB 86v.3.

⁷² Though I was unable to visit the site, the image included here was kindly provided to me by Hubert Decler, who confirmed this to be the statue of Vanaratna. This statue, which does not display any distinctive features to unambiguously identify it as a representation of Vanaratna, is discussed in Decler 2005 (87).

⁷³ ŽP 19r.1.

⁷⁴ ŽP 19r.1-2.

⁷⁵ Tōh 1603 128r.2: paṇḍi ta chen po de nyid dang | chos ’khor lo tsā ba ’jam dpal ye shes kyi ’bras yul nor bu’i gling du bsgyur ba. The extant version of the Tibetan translation is a revision of ’Jam dpal ye shes’s original effort by bSod nams rgya mtsho.

⁷⁶ SG 19r.2-5; DÑ 22r.1-2. Here the DÑ includes Vanaratna’s lineage for the transmission of Anupamarakṣita’s work: Avalokiteśvara, Anupamarakṣita, Śrīdhārānanda, Bhāskaradeva, Raviśrījñāna, Dharmarakṣita, Ratnarakṣita, Narendrabodhi, Muktipakṣa, Śākyarakṣita, Sujata[ratna?], Buddhaghoṣa, Vanaratna.

mo gru kingdom at least into 1436. It was in this year that gZhon nu dpal records Vanaratna offering an elaborate initiation into the full complement of esoteric maṇḍalas from Abhayākara Gupta's *Vajrāvalī* at the royal palace of sNe'u gdong. According to the DÑ, the set of initiations was first given to Grags pa 'byung gnas privately, and only then to a wider, but still elite audience.⁷⁷ David Jackson has proposed, quite plausibly, that a portrait of Vanaratna surrounded by the lineage masters of the *Vajrāvalī* (image 27) was commissioned to commemorate this event.⁷⁸ As Jackson carefully details, the inscriptions of the *Vajrāvalī* lineage in the *thang sku* align perfectly with Vanaratna's lineage as given in the DÑ,⁷⁹ and include a portrait of the event's patron, Grags pa 'byung gnas (image 27.1). His argument is further supported by the scene in the lower left corner of the painting—the area that would typically include the image's patron—which depicts a teaching or initiatory setting in which Vanaratna is surrounded by high-ranking members of the Buddhist clergy (image 27.2).

Less plausible is Jackson's contention, following Ehrhard, that the painting was commissioned by bSod nams rgya mtsho, and that it is based on a dream-vision he had of the *paṇḍita* in 1477.⁸⁰ As described in the NTSG, Vanaratna appeared to bSod nams rgya mtsho while the *lotsāwa* was staying at his private residence, bSam gtan gling, in the Yar klungs Valley, on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight in the ninth month of the Year of Female Fire Bird (1477). In his vision he beheld Vanaratna,

Wearing the attire of a *paṇḍita*, his clothes made of only fine brocade. His right hand was making the teaching gesture, while his left held the Sanskrit text of the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti*.⁸¹

Vanaratna's attire and gestures in bSod nams rgya mtsho's vision are indeed similar to his iconography of the painting, but beyond this it is difficult to make further connections between bSod nams rgya mtsho's dream and the image, as there is otherwise no specific reference to the lineage of the *Vajrāvalī* or of the initiation rite Vanaratna performed at sNe'u gdong in 1436.⁸² Jackson, again following Ehrhard, points to the fact that the NTSG notes that “an exquisite painting was made” (*ri mor bris na yang shin tu legs pa cid 'ong ba 'dug*) based on bSod nams rgya mtsho's vision of Vanaratna, but this citation is in reference to a different vision some months later in which Vanaratna's appearance is described in less detail.⁸³ Jackson further claims that bSod nams rgya mtsho is depicted in the panel in the lower-left corner of the painting, which

⁷⁷ DÑ 22v.2-5.

⁷⁸ Jackson 2011: 93-97; Jackson 2016: 11-13. Using distemper on cotton cloth, this 102 x 88 cm *thang sku* was painted by mKhyen brtse chen mo of Gong dkar (ca.1420-1510), a genre-defining artist of great renown in the latter half of the fifteenth century. The most thorough treatment of mKhyen brtse chen mo, his work, and his legacy can be found in Jackson 2016.

⁷⁹ That lineage is: Vajradhara, Vajrayoginī, Abhayākara Gupta, Nāyakāpāda, Daśabalaśrī, Vikhyātadeva, Śrībhadrā, Lalitavajra, Dharmagupta, Ratnākara[śānti?], Padmavajra, Ratnakīrti, Buddhaghōṣa, and Vanaratna.

⁸⁰ Jackson *ibid.* Ehrhard 2002: 89.

⁸¹ NTSG^b 429.10-13: lo de'i zla ba dgu pa'i dkar po'i tshes bcu gcig la bsam gtan gling gi gnas su zhag gsum bzhugss dus mnal lam du | rje paṇ chen de nyid paṇḍi ta'i cha byad la na bza' rnam bzang po gos bum (*em. bzang po gos la hum* NTSG^b) 'ba' zhis las bsgrubs pa bzhes shing | phyag g.yas chos 'chad dang | g.yon pas mtshan brjod kyi rgya dpe cig bsnams.

⁸² Jackson makes a specific point of connecting the stylized and unidentifiable Sanskrit manuscript in Vanaratna's hand in the painting to the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti* in bSod nams rgya mtsho's dream, but his association is based merely on the fact that the manuscript in the painting has Sanskrit lettering, which does not make for a definitive identification (Jackson 2016: 13)

⁸³ NTSG^b 429.24-430.3.

is where one would typically find the patron of the image. Not only is there no inscription on the painting to confirm this, it is almost certain that bSod nams rgya mtsho did not attend the initiation in 1436. He was only a young novice in the monastic college at rTses thang at the time,⁸⁴ and the language of both the *ŽP* and *DÑ* suggests that the initiation was granted only to the king and a limited group of high-ranking, advanced Buddhist masters.⁸⁵ Additionally, the *NTSG* strongly indicates that bSod nams rgya mtsho first met Vanaratna in 1453.⁸⁶ Thus while it is certainly not impossible that bSod nams rgya mtsho commissioned a painting of an event he did not attend, the totality of the textual evidence suggests that we look elsewhere, perhaps among the actual attendees of the *Vajrāvalī* initiation, for the patron of the this remarkable portrait of Vanaratna.

The Road Home

Following the *Vajrāvalī* initiation rite, which was by all accounts one of the major events of Vanaratna’s tenure in Tibet, the *paṇḍita* remained in the Phag mo gru kingdom for some time, granting additional initiations into the Cakrasaṃvara and Hevajra systems, and giving the reading transmission for Abhayākaragupta’s commentary on the *Samputa Tantra*, the *Āmnāyamañjarī*, to the king and five unnamed masters.⁸⁷ It was around this time that Vanaratna decided it was time to leave Tibet—he still harbored the wish to return to India—and so began the long, slow process of making farewells to his students, colleagues, and patrons. For his part, Grags pa ’byung gnas, who was once suspicious of Vanaratna to the point that he wouldn’t prostrate to him for a fortnight, now found it difficult to imagine parting from the *paṇḍita* and so implored him to remain in Tibet for the remainder of his life. gZhon nu dpal articulates the king’s sentiments in the *ŽP*:⁸⁸

“I have an excellent human life. I was born into a prominent family, have learned something about the Dharma, and because of that have undivided faith in those who have reached the state of buddhahood. From time to time I reflect on this great merit, and I concluded that the greatest merit of all was meeting this lord of the Dharma, this great *paṇḍita*. I have benefitted from [his] mastery of learning—such fleeting happiness is so difficult to find. He came to Tibet before for a short time, and even though others met him, they didn’t see him for what he was. This is my great merit, while everyone else is ashamed.”⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Ehrhard 2002: 37.

⁸⁵ In the *ŽP*, gZhon nu dpal states that the initiation was granted to the king and to “around nineteen spiritual masters with extensive learning in the systems of sūtra and mantra (*ŽP* 19r.6: dge ba’i bshes gnyen mdo sngags kyi gzhung lugs la blo’i snang ba rnam par rgyas pa bcu dgu tsam), while in the *DÑ* he writes that it was first given to the king alone, and only after that to “upholders of the *tripitaka* who has mastered the teachings” (*DÑ* 22v.4-5: sde snod ’dzin pa chen po gsung rab la dbang gyur pa).

⁸⁶ *NTSG*^b 305.1-2.

⁸⁷ *ŽP* 19v.3; *DÑ* 22v.5-6. In the *DÑ*, gZhon nu dpal provides Vanaratna’s lineage for the *Āmnāyamañjarī*: Abhayākaragupta, Nāyakapāda, Ratnabuddhi, Dharmagupta, Sahajakīrti, Dharmasrī, Śākyadhvaja, Vāgīśvarakīrti, Ratnakīrti, and Vanaratna.

⁸⁸ It should be recalled the king was a major sponsor of gZhon nu dpal as well, and that the two were quite close. Thus while we certainly should approach gZhon nu dpal’s citation as work of stylized literature, gZhon nu dpal would have had intimate access to the king’s thoughts and was present for this specific event. Thus we can take this, cautiously, as first-hand testimony.

⁸⁹ *ŽP* 19v.6-20r.4: nged rang mi’i lus phun sum tshogs pa dang lhyad par rigs mthon por skyes | chos kyang ’ga’ re

Like the king, the great masters assembled at sNe'u gdong, headed by Rong ston shes bya kun rig requested Vanaratna to remain for at least one more year, but he declined, stating that he had taught them all he could, and that now he wished to return to India and focus on his own spiritual practice, but he did leave the door open to a later return:

“I gave you an appropriate and valuable series of initiations and instructions. Now, to succeed in my own great purpose, I will travel through Nepal, a place of clean land and water, to Vajrāsana, where I will build a stone statue of my great guru, Buddhaghōṣa. Then I will go into seclusion and enhance my spiritual activity. It is possible that I return after that, if you wish.”⁹⁰

When the time came for Vanaratna to depart, Grags pa 'byung gnas escorted him out of the Yar glungs Valley. At their parting, gifts were exchanged and the king made his final prostrations to the *paṇḍita*. Vanaratna and Grags pa 'byung gnas expressed the hope they would meet again in this life, but it was not to be; though the king did invite Vanaratna back to Tibet in the early 1440s, Vanaratna, preferring to remain in Nepal, did not reply to the letter of invitation. Shortly thereafter he received word that the king had died in 1445. According to bSod nams rgya mtsho, Vanaratna responded to news of the king's death by sending a prophecy to Tibet regarding the king's rebirth. This is a unique passage for being a rare case wherein an Indian master identifies the reincarnation of a Tibetan figure. Reincarnation was not as popular or regular an occurrence in the Buddhist communities of India and Nepal where Vanaratna largely operated. Thus, in this scene we may be witnessing an instance in which the expectations of his Tibetan students were acknowledged and acted upon by Vanaratna, or where bSod nams rgya mtsho imposed them upon the narrative. In the SG, Vanaratna orally confirmed the content of the prophecy directly to bSod nams rgya mtsho:⁹¹

“To the east of Vajrāsana, in the kingdom of Uruvāsa, is a town named Akṣapūra. He has been born there, into the line of the Dharma king named Caṅgalarāja, a family of the solar lineage. His father's name is Lakṣmaṇasena, and his name is Rāghava. He has not taken monastic ordination, but oversees a large kingdom and performs great service for the teachings.” His Eminence [Vanaratna] was such a person that he never missed an opportunity, so he sent a letter and offerings to the prince when he had reached four or five years of age.⁹²

ga' re go | de'i don gyi sang rgyas nyid rnyed pa (ḌP^b; sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa ḌP^a) la'ang mi phyed pa'i dad pa yod | skabs 'ga' re nams bsod nams che snyams pa 'ong bar 'dug | de thams cad pas kyang chos rje paṇ chen 'di dang mjal ba nsod nams che ste | mkhas pa la grub pas khyad par du byas pa | 'phral du 'jug pabde ba 'di lta bu rnyed dka' | de snga bod 'dir yang yal yul de tsam zhig mdzad na'ang gzhan sus kyang ngo ma shes pa 'di nged rang bsod nams che ste | gzhan dag ngo tsha gsung ba lags.

⁹⁰ ḌP 20r.4-20v.1: rje btsun dam pa'i gsung gis dbang dang man ngag la sogs pa khyed la phan bdags par 'os pa'i rim po ni bgyis | da nged rang gi don chen po bsgrubs pa'i slad du bal po phal chad gnas dang chu bzang | rdo rje'i gdan du bla ma chen po sang rgyas dbyang kyi sku 'dra rdo las bsgrubs pa gcig kyang bzhengs | de nas dben par re shig 'dug pa lags | nged lo she cig rang dge sbyor 'phel (ḌP^a; rang dge sbyor 'phel ḌP^b) | 'dod pa grub na slad kyi 'ong ba'ang srid do gsung.

⁹¹ This same prophesy is given verbatim in *Kun gsel nor bu'i me long*, the biography of Thangtong Gyalpo. It is likely that the SG was the source for the citation. See Stearns 2007: 334.

⁹² SG 39v.3-5: rdo rje gdan gyi shar phyogs u ru vā sa zhes pa'i yul gyi akṣa pū ra zhes bya ba'i grong khyer du | caṅga la rā ja zhes pa'i chos rgyal zhig byung ba'i brgyud du 'khrung | rigs nyi ma'i rigs | yab kyi ming lakṣ ma se

After taking leave of the king and the students who escorted him, Vanaratna made a slow return to Nepal, visiting many students and patrons along the way. He stopped in at Rin spungs and passed through Yar 'brog, where we are told he received the hospitality of the Nam mkha' bzang po and Khri dpon Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, offering them a teachings in return. He then proceeded on to Nyang stod and rGyal rtse, where the ŽP reports he consecrated the *sku 'bum chen mo*, which was in the final stages of construction at that time.⁹³ He even offered a relic from his own personal collection to be enshrined in the *stūpa*.⁹⁴ This was, perhaps, the final occasion Vanaratna was able to meet with his teacher Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros, as the last known date we have for Kun dga' blo gros is 1439, when he would have been seventy-four.⁹⁵

gZhon nu dpal concludes the narrative portion of the ŽP here by noting that Vanaratna made additional visits to northern La stod and Mang yul gung thang, but offers few details of Vanaratna's activities there.⁹⁶ For more insight into the final stages of Vanaratna's return to Nepal we shift our attention to the SG, which begins its narrative with Vanaratna's visit to Ngam ring, and to the NTCZ, which includes 'Jam dpal ye shes's account of Vanaratna's visit to rDzong dkar and sKyid rong in Gung thang. Vanaratna visited northern La stod at the invitation of the governor rNam rgyal grags pa, and gave a series of teachings while there. As he did at rGyal rtse, Vanaratna placed a relic of the Buddha from his own collection within a large statue of Maitreya that was just beginning to be constructed during his visit.⁹⁷ bSod rnam rgya mtsho gives a lengthy back-story describing how Vanaratna came into possession of these relics, and his hesitation to part with his last one at Ngam ring. After some personal reflection, Vanaratna made the offering of the relic, which was ultimately integrated into the representation of the hair tuft between Maitreya's eyes.⁹⁸

From there Vanaratna set out for Mang yul gung thang, finally making good on his promise to honor the invitation of the king of Gung thang, Khri lHa dbang rgyal mtshan, who had invited Vanaratna to Gung thang just prior to the *paṇḍita*'s second journey to Tibet. Vanaratna was hosted at the royal palace, Khyung rdzong dkar po, more commonly known as rDzong dkar. While there, the head *bla ma* of Gung thang (and subject of the NTCZ) Chos dpal bzang po left his retreat and lead a group of local spiritual masters to meet the Indian *paṇḍita* at the palace. With 'Jam dpal ye shes (author of the NTCZ) at his side, Vanaratna offered the king, the royal family, the court, and the assembled religious dignitaries a lengthy series of teachings at the bKra bshis sgo mang temple, which was within the precincts of the royal compound. It was at this time that Vanaratna first met Chos kyi dgron ma, the daughter of Lha dbang rgyal mtshan and renowned as an emanation of Vajravārahī, whom he would meet again later in central Tibet at bSam lding. Chos kyi sgron ma was only fourteen at the time of their first meeting, but

naḥ khong rang gi ming rā ga vah zer bar 'dug | rab tuni mi 'byin | rgyal srid chen po yod pa skyong zhing bstan pa la zhabs tog chen po byed par 'dug gsung | dam pa 'di lta bus ni srid pa thams cad du rjes su btsa' ba dus las yol bar mi mdzad pas | rgyal bu de dgung lo bzhi lnga tsam 'gro ba la spring yig skyes dang bcas pa'ang gngang 'dug go |
⁹³ ŽP 20v.2-3. Ricco and Lo Bue (1993: 27-8) suggest that the *sku 'bum chen mo* was completed in 1439 or 1440, the latter being the year that Si tu Rab brtan composed an edict thanking his subjects for their efforts and granted them three years of tax-relief. It is difficult to know if Vanaratna visited the site after its completion, or, if as the chronology suggests, just prior to it.

⁹⁴ SG 33v.1.

⁹⁵ Vitali 2015: 518. The latest reference to Kun dga' blo gros records his consecration of an image painted by the artist bSod nams dpal 'byor in 1439.

⁹⁶ ŽP 20v.3-5.

⁹⁷ SG 33r.5-6. The statue was completed in 1466 (Stearns 2007: 546, note 763).

⁹⁸ SG 33r.6-33v.5.

Vanaratna would recall this encounter when they met in Rin spungs in 1454.⁹⁹

While in Gung thang, Vanaratna also took the opportunity to fulfill his long-held wish to visit the famed sandalwood image of Avalokiteśvara at sKyid rong, the Āryavatī.¹⁰⁰ Vanaratna shuttled back and forth between the temple at sKyid rong and rDzong dkar for a time, giving teachings as appropriate and enjoying the hospitality of his hosts. According to the NTCZ, Vanaratna taught on the *Vajravidāraṇa*, *Bodicyāvatāra*, *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgītī*, the *Sarvārthasādhakādhiṣṭhāna* rite for Vajravārāhī, and offered initiations into the practice of Cakrasaṃvara, Acala, and Bhūṭadāmara. After this long and profitable stay in western Tibet, Vanaratna left for the Kathmandu Valley accompanied by an entourage of Sherpa dignitaries, and his translator, attendant, and companion, 'Jam dpal ye shes.¹⁰¹ The next phase of his life, which unfolded entirely within the Kathmandu Valley, was examined in detail in the previous section. It would be another fifteen years before he would return to Tibet, and in that time much had changed, both for Vanaratna and for the Tibetan community he served.

⁹⁹ Diemberger 2007: 47, 226. The NTCZ notes that Vanaratna gave teachings to the entire royal family while in Gung thang, including to the king's three daughters (32v.2). Vanaratna's meeting Chos kyi sgron ma in 1454 will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁰ For more on this image, see Chapter Five, p. 102 and note 3.

¹⁰¹ NTCZ 30v.7-33r.5

Chapter 7:

Vanaratna's Final Journey to Tibet (1453-55) and the Creation of the Vanaratna Codex

One of the most exceptional pieces of evidence we have for Vanaratna's activities in Tibet is the Vanaratna Codex, a Sanskrit manuscript first brought to our attention by Harunaga Isaacson in 2008. Cataloged as RAS Hodgson 35 at the Royal Asiatic Society in London, the manuscript was collected by Brian Houghton Hodgson when he served as the British Resident in Kathmandu in the nineteenth century.¹ Previous cautious estimates have dated the codex's creation to sometime between Vanaratna's first journey to Tibet in 1426 and his death in the Kathmandu Valley in 1468.² If, however, we coordinate the data provided by the codex with Tibetan biographical and historical sources, it is possible to make a more specific argument about the circumstances under which the codex was produced. The evidence suggests that it was created in central and south-central Tibet between the years 1453 and 1455, during Vanaratna's third and final journey to Tibet. Our sources allow us to map the contents of the codex against Vanaratna's travels to establish the temporal, geographic, and religious contexts in which the codex was created. Thus it serves, in addition to the Vanaratna's biographies, as a key witness for Vanaratna's activities during his final visit to Tibet, and to the complex, vibrant, and eclectic religious culture in which he operated. Beyond its significance to Vanaratna's narrative, the Vanaratna Codex is of inestimable philological value for its preservation of Sanskrit and Tibetan works—many only known to us from the codex—and as a material representation of Vanaratna's craft as a *paṇḍita*, linguist, and scribe. To the extent that these philological matters concern our understanding of Vanaratna's final journey to Tibet, they have been included in the discussion below, but because the emphasis here is on a historical study of Vanaratna and his milieu, a full, text-critical analysis of the codex has not been attempted at this time. A handful of the Sanskrit texts preserved in the codex have been studied and edited elsewhere, but much work remains to be done, specifically on Vanaratna's Sanskrit translations of indigenous Tibetan texts. By establishing the context and conditions under which the codex was created, it is hoped that this study will serve as a basis for future work on this critically important document.

Structure of the Vanaratna Codex

The Vanaratna Codex³ is an incomplete manuscript of sixty-four palm leaves measuring 30cm x 5cm, written in a single hand using a distinctive Indian script. Pagination begins with folio 7, with 7 *recto* left blank and the text beginning on 7 *verso*. The fate of the first six leaves and the

¹ Cowell and Egging 1876: 1

² Isaacson 2008: 2-3.

³ The term "Vanaratna Codex" was first coined by Harunaga Isaacson in his 2008 article on the *Marmopadeśa*, one of the Tibetan works collected in the codex. The term *codex* is a fitting description, as the term generically refers to a hand-written manuscript bound together to form a single text or collection of texts. Though the Vanaratna Codex is a collection of palm leaf folios, it resembles in its function the Newari *thyāsaphū*, a folded paper document that was used by priests, administrators, and other officials as ledgers or to record and collect material they deemed personally important or otherwise to be used in the function of their professions.

reason 7 *recto* was left blank is unknown. There is, furthermore, substantial damage to the right edge of six palm leaves following folio 50. Because of this damage there is a loss of several *akṣaras* at the end or beginning of several lines per folio, including a loss of folio numbers for these pages. The pagination resumes with folio 61, but there are an insufficient number of intervening leaves to reach this number.⁴ There is, however, no clear break in the content of the codex across these pages, suggesting either that one or more complete texts have been lost, or that the leaves were simply mis-numbered at some point in the intervening pages.⁵ The codex is not comprised of a single text, but rather contains numerous discrete works by multiple authors. These include four apographs of known Sanskrit texts and, remarkably, a number of Sanskrit translations of indigenous Tibetan works:

Title	Author	Folios
<i>Amṛtakaṇīkatippanī</i>	Raviśrījñāna	7v.1 - 40r.3
<i>Abhiṣekanirukti</i>	Sujayaśrīgupta	40r.3 - 45r.3
<i>Hevajrasahasadyoga</i>	Ratnākaraśānti	40r.3 - 45r.10
<i>Pañcakramopadeśa</i>	Ghaṇṭāpā	46r.1 - 47r.8
<i>Sūryaprabhā</i>	Vīryasiṃha = brTson 'grus Seng ge	47r.8 - 50v.10

Potential Missing/Misnumbered folios: 51-60

<i>Amarasiddhiyantraka</i>	Prajñāsiṃha = Shes rab seng ge	61r.1 - 63r.3
<i>Mahad-amarasiddhiyantra</i>	attr. Virūpākṣa	63r.3 - 65v.7
<i>Marmopadeśa-1</i>	attr. Nāropa	65v.8 - 68r.4
<i>Śalākapañcaka</i>	n/a	68r.4 - 73v.6
<i>Haḥ Ālambanasamudra</i>	Ko brag pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan	73v.6 - 75v.10
<i>Marmopadeśa-2</i>	attr. Ḍombīheruka	76r.1 - 76v.1
<i>Rāgamārgopadeśa</i>	attr. Indrabhūti [the Younger]	76v.2 - 77r.5
<i>Cūṣaṇopadeśa</i>	attr. Ḍombīheruka	77r.5-7
<i>Vāyukarma</i>	attr. Goputra	77r.7-77v.7
<i>Sugatyupapatti Upadeśa</i>	attr. Mahāśikharadharmasvamin	77v.7-78r.2
<i>Kalpaśamanopadeśa</i>	attr. Vibhūticandra	78r.2-5
<i>Dhyānasya Upadeśa</i>	n/a	78r.6-7
<i>Śrīvajrayoginyāḥ Prāṇāyāmadhāraṇayor Upadeśa</i>	n/a	78r.9-80r.3

⁴ If the pagination continued from 50, the folio labeled 61 would instead be 57.

⁵ Folio 50v contains the final folio of the *Sūryaprabhā*, which ends two-thirds of the way through the last line of text on the page. The scribe left the remaining third of the line blank. The *Amarasiddhiyantraka* begins at the top of the next folio, which is the first of the damaged folios lacking pagination. The *Amarasiddhiyantraka* ends and the *Mahad-amarasiddhiyantra* begins on what would be 53r in continuous pagination, or 63r in reverse pagination. This is followed by *Marmopadeśa-1* on 55v/65v, which continues unbroken to 58r/68r, a fact suggested by consistency in internal verse numbering across the final damaged folio. Thus if there were to be a loss of pages, rather than a mislabeling of the leaves, the loss would have occurred between the end of the *Sūryaprabhā* on 50v and the beginning of the *Amarasiddhiyantraka* which begins on 61r, a potential loss of 5 folios.

There are two easily discernible, distinct collections of texts in the codex. The first is comprised of Sanskrit apographs of Indic manuscripts, and includes Raviśrījñāna's *Amṛtakaṇikaṭippaṇī*,⁶ a commentary on the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti*; Sujayaśrīgupta's *Abhiṣekanirukti*,⁷ a seminal work on tantric initiation; Ratnākaraśānti's *Hevajrasahasadyoga*, a short *utpannakrama sādhana* from the *Hevajra Tantra* corpus,⁸ and Ghaṇṭāpā's *Pañcakramopadeśa*, an instruction on the *utpannakrama* practices from the Cakrasaṃvara cycle also known by the title *Cakrasaṃvarapañcakrama*.⁹ The second unit is made up of Sanskrit translations of Tibetan texts, many of them entirely unknown beyond the witnesses in the codex. This collection appears to represent a mixture of oral and textual transmissions passed down from Indian masters through lineages of Tibetan teachers. Beyond these two obvious divisions, a closer structural analysis reveals what I believe are three discernible units of texts that, when compared with the Tibetan biographical sources, reveal three distinct contexts in which material was added to the codex. The sequence of the individual texts and their units can be read as a chronology of Vanaratna's travels; through it we follow Vanaratna's footsteps during his return to Nepal from the Phag mo gru kingdom via the gTsang po River Valley, Yar 'brog, and Nyang stod between the years 1453 and 1455.

The first cluster of texts comprises the three Sanskrit apographs at the beginning of the codex: the *Amṛtakaṇikaṭippaṇī*, *Abhiṣekanirukti*, and *Hevajrasahasadyoga*. These three texts are set apart from the remainder of the codex by a substantial colophon that seems to have been intended to be the original end of the codex. Evidence from the biographies suggests these Sanskrit works were copied in the Phag mo gru kingdom during Vanaratna's second residency there between 1453 and 1455. The second unit consists only of the Sanskrit apograph of Ghaṇṭāpā's *Pañcakramopadeśa*, the final Sanskrit apograph in the codex, which falls after the colophon to the previous apographs and has no colophon of its own. Tibetan sources suggest that it was copied during Vanaratna's stay at Byams pa gling Monastery and is connected to his translation work with the Jam gling *paṇ chen* bSod nams rnam par rgyal ba (1401-75) in 1455.

The third unit is comprised entirely of Sanskrit translations of Tibetan works, and can be further divided into two distinct collections. The first consists of three commentaries associated with the Indian *siddha* Virūpākṣa's *Amṛtasiddhi* corpus—the *Sūryaprabhā* composed by brTson 'grus seng ge, Shes rab seng ge's *Amarasiddhiyantraka*, and the *Mahad-amarasiddhiyantra* of unknown authorship. The second collection is comprised of a series of short instructional texts (*upadeśa*) attributed to diverse sources. Both of these sub-units contain colophons with detailed *guruparamparās* that yield important data about the context in which Vanaratna compiled and translated the Tibetan works. This third unit is especially remarkable for the fact that most, if not all of the texts are no longer extant in the original Tibetan. It will be argued that Vanaratna

⁶ A Sanskrit edition of the text, together with the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti* and Vibhūticandra's *Amṛtakaṇikodyotanibandha*, was published by the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in 1994. It does not acknowledge the codex witness among its sources.

⁷ The witness from the codex is the only extant complete recension of the *Abhiṣekanirukti*. It served as the basis, together with other Sanskrit fragments, for Harunaga Isaacson's edition published in Onians 2001.

⁸ A Sanskrit edition of this text, which includes the recension found in the codex, was published in Isaacson 2001.

⁹ Apart from the witness in the codex, the *Cakrasaṃvarapañcakrama* is available in a Sanskrit manuscript held by the National Archives in Kathmandu, Nepal (cat. no. A 936/11). A Sanskrit edition of this recension has been edited and published in *Dhīḥ*, vol. 39 (2005): 149-168. The Tibetan canonical translation exists in two versions (Öta. 2150 and Öta. 4624), both bearing the title *dPal 'khor lo sdom pa'i rim pa lnga*. The relationship between the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions will be examined below.

translated and copied this unit of texts in the Yar 'brog region, specifically at the monastery of sNa dkar rtse, or possibly in the neighboring region of Nyang stod.

Creation of the Codex

Before we consider the context for each of these units, the question of the codex's creator needs to be addressed. In his 2008 article, Isaacson dubbed this manuscript the "Vanaratna Codex" and argued that it is Vanaratna's autograph. About this he is almost certainly correct. Vanaratna's name appears frequently in the codex, identifying him as the agent of its creation, articulating his motivations for doing so, and locating him in the transmission lineages for many of its individual works. It is possible that the codex was either scribed at Vanaratna's behest, or that the extant manuscript is itself a copy, but all indications point to RAS Hodgson 35 as a product of Vanaratna's hand.

The primary evidence for Vanaratna's agency comes from the many colophons appended to his work. The first colophon in the codex is found at the end of the *Hevajrasahasadyoga*, the third of the four Sanskrit apographs. The most substantial colophon in the codex, it was likely intended to mark the original end of the collection. The colophon employs a stock dedicatory formula that begins with the *ye dharma* mantra, followed by a dedication of merit in which Vanaratna's influence is made explicit:

Ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ. This is a gift of the Dharma of the Śākya monk, the *mahāsthavira* and follower of the sublime Mahāyāna, Śrī Vanaratna. May the merit in this belong to all beings everywhere, and especially to our masters preceptors, mothers, and fathers.¹⁰

The structure of this dedication is highly formulaic and commonly used in donative inscriptions in Mahāyāna communities.¹¹ In the language of this stock dedication, Vanaratna's Sanskrit apographs are described as his *deyadharmā*, his "gift of the Dharma." Though this phrase typically refers to the benefactor of a religious gift, rather than its creator, it certainly does not preclude him from being the codex's creator, and the codex his own gift of the Dharma.

Vanaratna's name next appears in a context that more explicitly indicates his agency and reveals something of his motivations. In the colophon to the first of the translated Tibetan texts, the *Sūryaprabhā*, Vanaratna is referred to in the first person, and his intentions for preparing the Sanskrit translation are announced:

[This] skillful expression of the meaning of the [*Amara*]*siddhi* follows the authentic lineage of other [previous] authors. Motivated by the thought that "[A work] that is

¹⁰ VC 45v.9-10. *ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ | deyadharmo'yam pravaramahāyānayāyināṃ [†effaced akṣaras† ya] śākyabhikṣumahāsthaviraśrīvanaratnapādānāṃ yad atra puṇyaṃ tad bhavatu ācāryopādhyāyamatāpitṛprabhṛtisamastatvānām iti.* See also Isaacson 2008: 2-3, and note 6. In the final line (45v.10) approximately ten to twelve *akṣaras* have been deliberately effaced, and the space left blank. It would appear that the erasing hand left one additional *akṣara*, *ya*, that should have been removed as well. It is unclear what information was elided here, or what the motivation was to do so. We find another act of effacement later in the codex, in the colophon to the *Sūryaprabhā*. In that case the text was effaced and then emended by a later scribe using a different script, the implications of which will be discussed in note eleven.

¹¹ Schopen 1979: 4-15.

well-preserved [only] in its own land and through the local language brings no substantial benefit to anyone else. It should serve a great purpose for the entire world,” and with the desire to preserve the sacred Dharma, I, Śrī Vanaratna, set aside the local language and wrote this perfectly complete [composition in the Sanskrit language]. Forsaking attachment to the [original] words, may it be accepted this as an alternative version.¹²

A similar sentiment is expressed in the colophon to another of the translated texts, the *Śalākapañcaka*:

The resplendent king, the glorious five nails (*pañcaśalāka*) expressed [here] in the Tibetan language, was well-taught by the glorious Buddha, esteemed by the illustrious gurus, and is of benefit to others. Through the merit gained from writing it down in the supreme language for the fortunate masses of beings (*sattvarāsisubhagam?*), may the people of the world assuredly attain the unsurpassable three *kāyas*.¹³

These intentional statements, written in Vanaratna’s own Sanskrit and inserted among the Tibetan translations, reflect the circumstances in which he lived and worked, hinting at the status of South Asian Buddhism in his time and the motivations that guided his project. Through his statements we see Vanaratna’s recognition of the legitimacy of lineages of Indic origin now transmitted entirely by Tibetans in the Tibetan language, and his concern to make these texts and teachings available to a wider, presumably South Asian Buddhist audience. In his commitment to make these teachings accessible to those outside of Tibetan’s narrow linguistic sphere, there is an implicit recognition that these originally Indic teachings were unavailable in South Asia, and could be reclaimed when restored to their original, explicitly higher Sanskrit register. For Vanaratna, the move from Tibetan to Sanskrit was therefore not just an act of translation, but a conscious act of recovery. He dedicated his work to the preservation of the Dharma, perhaps echoing his experience of Buddhism’s decline in its traditional South Asian homeland. The inclusion of these personal aspirations deeply underscore Vanaratna’s agency in the creation of the codex.

Vanaratna’s name also appears as the last member in a series of *guruparamparās*, lineage lists, that are included in seven of the Tibetan translations. These lineage histories, which will be examined in detail below, begin with Indian masters and pass through a series Tibetan teachers before ending with Vanaratna. Though the Tibetan lineages are of diverse sectarian identity, there is substantial overlap between them, and in all but one Vanaratna is preceded by the same

¹² VC 50v.7-8: granthakārakasya aparasya tu pāramparyākṛtaṃ siddher nipuṇam (em. nipunam) arthavarṇanam | yat deśaviṣaye samyaksusthitaṃ deśabhāṣayā na sādhyati śeṣāṇāṃ sattvānāṃ hitasampadam | apy eva nāma sādhye tat sarvalokārthasampadam | ity eva ābhilāṣeṇa saddharmasthitikāṅkṣayā mayā śrīvanaratnena bhāṣāṃ samtyajya deśikāṃ granthitā likhitā samyaksiddhiḥ saṃskṛtabhāṣayā | śabdagraham parityajya gr̥hṇātv atra parāyaṇā itī. This passage is challenging to properly interpret for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that that some of the text was emended by a second hand in a different script. All three occurrences of the term *deśa* are written over *akṣaras* effaced from the original text. The emendations are made in a Newar hook script, and stand out perceptibly in comparison to the otherwise consistent north Indian script. At this time it is impossible to know what the original text read, but one could speculate that the later Nepalese scribe felt compelled to erase references to Tibet and the Tibetan language, and so effaced a term such as *sambhoṭa*, which is used elsewhere by Vanaratna to refer to Tibet, and replaced it with the generic *deśa*. I thank Harunaga Isaacson for suggesting this as a possibility.

¹³ VC 73.5-6: śrīmatpañcaśalākaraṅjaviśadam (em. °viśadam) śrīmatgurūṇāṃ matam śrībuddhena sudeśitam parahitam sambhoṭabhāṣānugam | yat puṇyam khalu sattvarāsisubhagam samlikhya bhāṣottamaṃ prāptam tena jagat prayātu niyatam kāyatrayānuttaram.

Tibetan master, whose name he translates into Sanskrit as Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā. The presence of Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā ties the disparate lineages of the Tibetan texts to a specific person, location, and temporal setting that aligns with the details of Vanaratna's biographical narrative.

Based on this evidence it can be confidently argued that Vanaratna played an active role in the compilation and production of the codex. In colophons found throughout the manuscript, he is identified as the benefactor of the Sanskrit apographs and translator of the Tibetan texts whose lineages he received from Tibetan masters. Nothing in the colophons, however, explicitly identify him as the scribe in whose hand it is written. The scribe of the codex wrote in an idiosyncratic north Indian script that shares stylistic features of Newari scripts, and so may have been influenced by it. The entire codex, its Sanskrit apographs and translations, was penned in the same script, and we do not find any additional colophons that would have been added by a later scribe explicitly announcing it as a copy. If the codex is not a later copy, then it is likely its contents were compiled and recorded as part of a single project by a single agent. If the argument that follows is correct, Vanaratna collected, translated, and copied the texts in Tibet, making him the most plausible candidate as the scribe, as it is likely only he would have had the requisite skills among his party in Tibet. It would otherwise be difficult to identify someone in his entourage who would have copied the content on his behalf during that journey. It is likewise difficult to imagine a scenario in which Vanaratna collected the Sanskrit manuscripts and Tibetan texts in Tibet, only to carry them to Nepal before copying and translating them. The conditions in Tibet were the most favorable for a project of this scope, and we will see, the conditions very much shaped the content of the codex. This would have been especially true of the Tibetan texts translated into Sanskrit; it seems unlikely that Vanaratna would take these texts back with him to Nepal, where he was at great distance from the lineage masters and *lotsāwas* who had the authority and ability to assist him in their translation.

The clearest evidence, however, that the Vanaratna Codex was compiled, translated, and scribed by Vanaratna while in Tibet comes from reading the codex alongside the biographical record. In doing so we find concrete references to the Sanskrit texts copied into the codex, a record of Vanaratna's work with the texts and teachers associated with its Tibetan texts, and evidence that he worked on translations of a number of these texts at the same time and in the same places he may have collected them in the codex

Vanaratna's Final Journey to Tibet and the Creation of the Codex

When Vanaratna departed the Kathmandu Valley for Tibet in 1453 he surely must have known it was to be his last trip across the Himalaya. He was seventy years of age, a well-established Buddhist *paṇḍita* in the Kathmandu Valley, and felt reluctant to leave Nepal. But this trip was to be very different than his previous two; rather than setting out into an unknown landscape as an unproven outsider, he was now a recognized authority among Tibet's religious elite, and was making the journey at the explicit (and costly) insistence of the Phag mo gru monarchy and its allies. He also knew this trip would not be as open-ended as his last; Jayayakṣamalla made sure of that by setting firm limits on the time he permitted Vanaratna to be away from Nepal. Thus Vanaratna's final trip to Tibet was significantly shorter than his previous visit, lasting roughly two years, but was a productive one, one in which he visited with many of his patrons, colleagues, and students for the final time and took the opportunity to collect texts and teachings

only available to him in Tibet. It is this collection that we find recorded in the Vanaratna Codex.

The collection of texts in the codex is eclectic, and reveals something of Vanaratna's interests and priorities. But it is more than just an anthology of seemingly disparate texts, it is also a material witness to Vanaratna's activities in Tibet that reveals a number of reversals in the expected patterns of teaching, transmission, and translation between the South Asian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. In it we discover Sanskrit texts copied from manuscripts housed in Tibetan libraries, clear evidence of an Indian *paṇḍita* receiving teachings and transmissions at the feet of a Tibetan *bla ma*, the translation of indigenous Tibetan texts into Sanskrit, and through that, the preservation of Tibetan texts now lost in their original language. As a record of Vanaratna's activities and his craft, the codex furthers our understanding of Vanaratna's work during this time, and his diverse relationships with the Tibetan tradition at a time when South Asian Buddhism was in steep decline and the Tibetan tradition had fully come into its own.

The codex can also be read as a map, the sequence of its texts charting the course of Vanaratna's travels across Tibet. In what follows, we will use the Vanaratna codex as just such a map, guiding us along Vanaratna's path through southern and central Tibet in the years 1453-55. Our travels with him will be structured around the units of texts introduced above, following him from the Phag mo gru court where he discovered and copied three of the four Sanskrit texts, up the gTsang po River Valley to Byam pa gling, where his personal relationship with its abbot led to the copying of the *Pañcakramopadeśa*, and onwards to the Yar 'brog and Nyang stod, where he collected, and translated, and perhaps even taught on the Tibetan texts at the end of the codex. By coordinating the codex with the biographies and historical chronicles, we will explore the conditions and relationships that defined Vanaratna's final years in Tibet, and which shaped the creation of the Vanaratna Codex.

Prelude: Vanaratna's Return to Tibet and Arrival at the Phag mo gru Court

As described in Part II, during the nearly two decades that passed between Vanaratna's second and third journeys to Tibet, the years 1438-1453, Vanaratna had become a *paṇḍita* of renown in the Kathmandu Valley. Upon his return from Tibet in 1438, he established himself as a preeminent light of the Newar Buddhist community in Patan, and won the respect and patronage of Jayayakṣamalla and the aristocracy in Bhaktapur. Such was his status in Nepal that when a Tibetan contingent arrived in the Kathmandu Valley in 1453 with a letter of invitation from the new Phag mo gru monarch Kun dga' legs pa and other Tibetan dignitaries, Jayayakṣa was reluctant to permit him to leave. Vanaratna, for his part, was also reluctant to go, and deferred the matter entirely to Jayayakṣa and the "three kings of Bhaktapur and Lalitpur." The king and his court initially refused to let Vanaratna leave Nepal, and after much negotiation between the king and the Tibetan contingent, a large payment of gold to the Nepalese king, and Vanaratna's promise to return within two years, Vanaratna departed the Kathmandu Valley for his third and final journey to Tibet.¹⁴

On the first day of the second month of the Year of the Female Water Bird (1453) the septuagenarian *paṇḍita* began his journey from the Kathmandu Valley, traveling via Dolakhā to the Tibetan plateau and on to Ding ri in southern Lha stod, where he was received by gZhon nu dpal. Vanaratna and his entourage ran into some trouble in Ding ri, where the local government would not allow him to proceed into the main valley, resulting in a delay of half a month. The reasons for this are not explicitly stated in the biographies, and the delay is curious considering

¹⁴ SG 39v.5-41r.4.

that, according to the NTŽP not even the governor of southern La stod, Si tu Lha btsan skyabs, was able to intervene. Eventually gZhon nu dpal and his reception party reached Vanaratna, and after observing the formalities of their reunion got down to work, lingering in Ding ri for some time in order to complete their translation of Vanaratna's *Śabarapādastotra*.¹⁵ While in southern La stod Vanaratna also visited Gres stag rdzong at the invitation of Si tu Lha btsan, where he gave instructions on the long-life practice of Amitāyus according to the tradition of Jitāri.¹⁶ They next proceeded the short distance to northern La stod and to Ngam ring, where they were met by 'Jam dpal ye shes who resumed his role as Vanaratna's oral translator. This permitted Vanaratna to give teachings to a large gathering of Buddhist scholars that had assembled there for that purpose, as well as afford the governor, rNam rgyal grags pa to receive extensive personal instructions from the *paṇḍita*.¹⁷ The SG reports that Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal also translated Ghaṅṭāpā's *Śaṃvaratrayodaśātmakābhisamaya* while they were there, a title that seems to have been lost.¹⁸

From Ngam ring they traveled along the gTsang po River, stopping so Vanaratna could give teachings and initiations at Bo dong bkra shis sgang, Seng ge rtse, sNar thang, the bSam 'grub rtse fort at gZhi ga rtse, and Shang 'brong sgang.¹⁹ When they reached gTsang rong ra nga they again stopped for some time, giving Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal time to complete their translation of Ghaṅṭāpā's *Śaṃvaratrayodaśātmakārcanavidhi*.²⁰ While at gTsang rong word had reached Vanaratna and his party that war had broken out Ngam shod, the region encompassing the Phag mo gru kingdom. Because travel in the region was considered risky, Vanaratna and his party decided to divert along a southern route through Rong chen and Yar 'brog that took them around the conflict.²¹ The SG is silent about who precisely the fighting was between, but given its location in Phag mo gru territory one could assume it involved at least one faction of the Phag mo gru. This brief reference in the SG to open conflict in central Tibet marks a rare instance in which the political instability that accompanied the rapid decline Phag mo gru authority in central Tibet can be felt in Vanaratna's biography.

The longer southern route took Vanaratna through Yar 'brog, where he was reunited with Nam mkha's bzang po and Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, and while there received many invitations to

¹⁵ NTŽP 35v.6-35r.1; SG 41v.7. Their collaboration in Ding ri is confirmed in the translator's colophon of Tōh 1176 [255r.2-3]: mkhas pa chen po dpal nags kyi rin chen gyis mdzad pa rje btsun dam pa de nyid kyi spyang sngar chos smra ba gzhon nu dpal gyi ding ri r bsgyur ba'o. The translation was later revised by bSod nams rgya mstho (Öta. 5102).

¹⁶ SG 42r.2. This possibly refers to the Bengali teacher of Atiśa, active in the tenth-eleventh centuries (Szántó 2012: 165). If this attribution is correct, this may be the *Aparimitāyurjñānasādhana* (Toh. 2699).

¹⁷ NTŽP 36r.1-7; SG 42r.2-4.

¹⁸ SG 42r.3. Tib. *sDom pa bcu gsum ma'i mngon rtogs*. There is no surviving work with this specific title, but it clearly belongs to the same tantric cycle as the *Śaṃvaratrayodaśātmakārcanavidhi* Öta. 4655: *dPal 'khor lo sdom pa bcu gsum gyi bdag nyid can la mchod pa'i cho ga*, also by Ghāṅṭāpā, which they translated a short time later in gTsang rong ra lnga.

¹⁹ SG 42r.4-5.

²⁰ Öta. 4655: *dPal 'khor lo sdom pa bcu gsum gyi bdag nyid can la mchod pa'i cho ga*. The colophon confirms the text was translated by Vanaratna and gZhon nu dpal at gTsang rong ra lnga: [256r.7-8] rgya gar shar phyogs kyi paṇḍi ta chen po dpal nags kyi rin chen gyi spyang sngar | 'gos lo tsstha ba gzhon nu dpal gyis gtsang rong ra lnga'i dge gnas su bsgyur ba'o. (See NTŽP 37r.1-2, SG 46r.7)

²¹ SG 42r.5-42v.5. The decision about which route to take was much discussed among Vanaratna and his party, but in the end it was a meditative vision that directed them southward. One night Vanaratna sat in deep meditation (*thugs dam*), during which he heard a Sanskrit verse sound from the *bali* offering on his shrine. It spoke a verse from the *Aparimitāyurjñānanāmamahāyānasūtra* (Tōh. 674. 'Phags pa tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po mdo, f.62r.3-4), and based on his interpretation of it, decided the northern route was unsafe.

teach in the region's main monasteries.²² Vanaratna would make a fruitful return to the region on his journey back to Nepal, and it was perhaps the connections he reestablished and the invitations he received on his detour that paved the way for his lengthier stay at that time. The conflict in Ngam shod must have abated by the time Vanaratna left Yar 'brog because he next returned to the gTsang po River valley at Byams pa gling monastery, where he paused briefly in his travels. He met there with the Byams gling *pañ chen* bSod nams rnam par rgyal ba who will figure prominently in our story later. The two were impressed with each other, so much so that bSod nams rgyal ba continued on to sNe'u gdong with Vanaratna and his entourage, where he joined the teachings to the general assembly and received personal meditation guidance from Vanaratna.²³ From there Vanaratna proceeded directly to the Yar klungs Valley and his first meeting with the new monarch, Kun dga' legs pa. The king rode out with a large party to receive him at Mon 'gar, where Vanaratna immediately prostrated before the king and offered warm words of greeting. Kun dga' legs pa then escorted him into the sN'eu gdong Palace, and with that Vanaratna's second residency at the Phag mo gru court began.²⁴ It is also here, at court in sNe'u gdong, that the story of the Vanaratna Codex begins. Being his second stay among the Phag mo gru, Vanaratna had intimate knowledge of its personalities, protocols, and most importantly for us, its libraries. We have already seen that Vanaratna was knowledgeable of the Sanskrit holdings of the Phag mo gru libraries, and when we compare the texts Vanaratna is known to have worked with the content of the codex, a startling alignment is revealed with the first unit of texts collected in the codex.

Unit One: The Amṛtakaṇikatippanī, Abhiṣekanirukti, and Hevajrasahajasadyoga

To understand the sequence of the codex's compilation we need to briefly revisit Vanaratna's first residency among the Phag mo dru some twenty years earlier. As we recall, it was during that time, beginning in 1433 and continuing as late as 1437, that Vanaratna gave a number of extended teaching programs at rTses thang and elsewhere in the Phag mo gru kingdom, and it was there during this period that we find the first clues for the contents of the Vanaratna Codex. gZhon nu dpal, who was present at the time, lists the texts Vanaratna taught on,²⁵ and informs us that he did so while reading from Sanskrit manuscripts,²⁶ manuscripts that were most plausibly among the holdings of the Phag mo gru libraries. When we compare the list of teachings Vanaratna gave based on these Sanskrit manuscripts to the contents of the Vanaratna Codex, we see two key points of overlap: the *Amṛtakaṇikatippanī* and *Abhiṣekanirukti*, the first two works in the codex.

Before we turn to an examination of the specific contents of the codex, however, it is worth pausing briefly to consider the implications of Vanaratna's prior awareness of the Sanskrit manuscripts in the Phag mo gru collection. When Vanaratna was first introduced to the Phag mo gru libraries and their Sanskrit holdings in the 1430s, he was sure to have come across a number of texts that were previously unavailable to him in South Asia, or which represented unique recensions that were different than those with which he may have been familiar. Given the number of years he spent in the Phag mo gru kingdom, he would have had ample time to familiarize himself with the extent of their holdings. Thus when he returned to Tibet in 1453,

²² SG 42v.5.

²³ SG 42v.6.

²⁴ NTŽP 37r.3-4; SG 42v.6.

²⁵ The full list is provided in Ch. 6, pp. 176-7.

²⁶ ŽP 17v.3, 17v.4-5.

well aware that at the age of seventy it was likely the last trip he would make to Tibet, Vanaratna may have carried scribal materials with him to copy those Sanskrit texts he wished to add to his personal collection and preserve for posterity. The Vanaratna Codex was copied on palm leaves, likely a rare commodity in Tibet, that measure 30cm x 5cm, a small and quite portable size that an Indian *paṇḍita* could plausibly acquire in Nepal before departing for Tibet.²⁷ We do not know what prompted him to copy these specific texts, but we can assume that the manuscripts were either unavailable to him in Nepal or were of specific philological or personal value to him. It is possible that Vanaratna intended the codex to be a portable teaching and study aid, a collection of the key works he wished emphasize in his public discourses or which he otherwise wanted regular access to during his travels. Thus, the creation of the codex was likely a premeditated act, one that was based both on Vanaratna's prior knowledge of the Sanskrit texts available to him in Tibet, and on his knowledge of what was and was not extant in the manuscript collections of Nepal.

Turning now to the Sanskrit apographs themselves, what is referred to here as the first unit of texts consists of the *Amṛtakaṇikāṭippaṇī*, *Abhiṣekanirukti*, and *Hevajrasahasadyoga*, all of which can be shown with varying degrees of certainty to be among the Sanskrit manuscripts Vanaratna relied on during his teachings to the Phag mo gru. The first text in the codex, the *Amṛtakaṇikāṭippaṇī*, is explicitly counted by gZhon nu dpal to be among those texts Vanaratna taught on based on Sanskrit witnesses in 1433. A close comparison between the recension of the *Amṛtakaṇikāṭippaṇī* in the codex and the other extant recensions is still needed, but a cursory review suggests that the version in the codex varies significantly from the recensions edited in Lal 1994.²⁸ The colophon recorded in Lal's edition names the scribe of one of the manuscripts as Rūparāja, who in the same colophon establishes himself in the lineage of Ravicandra,²⁹ who, we know from a manuscript of Abhayākara Gupta's *Varṣāpaṇavidhi* also scribed by Rūparāja, counted himself as a student of Vanaratna.³⁰ Given this overlap in lineages between the *Varṣāpaṇavidhi* and *Amṛtakaṇikāṭippaṇī*, and given that Ravicandra was a student of Vanaratna, we can tentatively presume that the *Amṛtakaṇikāṭippaṇī* was at least available within Vanaratna's circle. If Vanaratna did have access to the *Amṛtakaṇikāṭippaṇī* in Nepal, he may have collected the recension he found in Tibet for its value as a witness distinct from the one with which he was already familiar.

Like the *Amṛtakaṇikāṭippaṇī*, Sujayaśrīgupta's *Abhiṣekanirukti* is also listed among the Sanskrit manuscripts Vanaratna accessed at rTses thang during his first residency there. It is not at all clear if he had any prior access to a copy of this text, as the recension copied into the Vanaratna Codex is the sole complete witness of the treatise, apart from some scattered and undated fragments that have been discovered in Nepal's National Archives.³¹ It is thus possible that unlike the *Amṛtakaṇikāṭippaṇī*, which there is reason to believe Vanaratna had access to in Nepal, it is possible that he copied the *Abhiṣekanirukti* because it was the only version of the text he had encountered in his travels across South Asia and Tibet. In the *ŽP*, gZhon nu dpal refers to the *Abhiṣekanirukti* as a work of Śāntipā (Ratnākaraśānti), rather than Sujayaśrīgupta as is indicated in the codex,³² but this is likely due to a common misattribution by the Tibetan

²⁷ I thank Harunaga Isaacson for this observation.

²⁸ See Lal 1994: xlv. Lal makes use of three manuscripts presently held in Nepal's National Archive and the Kesar Library, corresponding to manuscripts cataloged under microfilm reel numbers B 24/23, B103/14, and E 1067/1.

²⁹ Lal 1994: 110.

³⁰ University of Tokyo Library cat. no. 307: 26r.2-4. Szántó 2012: 236, note 59. See also Ch. 5, pp. 123-4.

³¹ Onians 2009: 350.

³² VC 45r.3.

tradition. The Tibetan canon contains two translations of the *Abhiṣekanirukti*, one prepared by Avadhūtipā and Śākya brtson 'grus (Tōh 2477) that agrees with the Sanskrit witness from the codex in ascribing the work to Sujayaśrīgupta, and another by Śāntibhadra and the Tshul khriṃs rgyal ba (Tōh 2476) that attributes it to Ratnākaraśānti. Harunaga Isaacson argues that this was perhaps a deliberate attempt by the translators to raise the status of the text by assigning it to Ratnākaraśānti, rather than his less-illustrious student Sujayaśrīgupta.³³ For whatever reason, gZhon nu dPal's record of Vanaratna's teachings seems to sustain this confusion, despite the fact that evidence to the contrary was available to him in Tibet, including in the manuscript copied into the codex.

From gZhon nu dPal's first-person account we can thus place Sanskrit manuscripts of the first two Sanskrit apographs from the codex directly in Vanaratna's hands at rTses thang in 1433. The third text in the unit, the *Hevajrasahajasadyoga*, is not listed among the teachings Vanaratna is known to have given during this first residency among Phag mo gru, but Vanaratna did, prior to his departure offer an initiation at sNe'u gdong into the Hevajra system, so perhaps it was in this context (if not before) that he first became aware of the Sanskrit Hevajra materials housed in the Phag mo gru libraries. But the lack of specific reference to the *Hevajrasahajasadyoga* during Vanaratna's first residency need not detain us now, as this is almost certainly not the occasion when any of these three Sanskrit texts were copied into the codex. Rather it was on the occasion of his first stay in the Phag mo gru kingdom that Vanaratna became aware of the holdings of Sanskrit manuscripts available to him. It would only be later, during his third trip to Tibet, that he would act on this knowledge, and come equipped to copy the manuscripts he desired. Let it simply suffice for now to note that we have historical corroboration for the presence of Sanskrit manuscripts of the *Amrtakanikātippanī* and *Abhiṣekanirukti* in the Phag mo gru libraries, and that Vanaratna is known to have handled them personally. Also noteworthy is the fact that these two texts are found together in the codex before the first colophon. As we will see, this arrangement is our first evidence of a potential alignment between the sequence of texts in the codex and the chronology of Vanaratna's travels. To reach the moment when this alignment was initiated, we need to fast-forward twenty years to Vanaratna's return to the Phag mo gru in 1453.

As we have seen, in the nearly two decades that passed between Vanaratna's second and third trips to Tibet, the years between ca. 1438 and 1453, he had established himself in the Kathmandu Valley and had become a *paṇḍita* to the kings of Nepal and an *ācārya* to the Newar Buddhist community. It was perhaps during this period that Vanaratna became familiar with the stock of Buddhist texts in Nepal, and could compare it with what he knew was available to him in Tibet. Thus when Vanaratna accepted the invitation to return to Tibet in 1453, he may have made plans to take advantage of the opportunity and packed the supplies necessary to copy the Sanskrit manuscripts and other important teachings he knew were only available to him there.

When Vanaratna returned to central Tibet in 1453, he was greeted with all the honor and deference befitting his status as a Buddhist *paṇḍita*, and was immediately ushered into court to begin teaching. As with his previous visit, the leading religious leaders of the Phag mo gru and from all over central Tibet had gathered to attend Vanaratna's teachings, a group that now included bSod nams rgya mtsho, who appears to have met Vanaratna for the first time on this occasion.³⁴ bSod nams rgya mtsho was present for Vanaratna's entire teaching series at sNe'u gdong, which began with Vanaratna's conferral of *prātimokṣa* vows and *bodhisattva* commitments on Kun dga' legs pa. This was immediately followed by a full initiation into

³³ Isaacson 2010: 267. note 19.

³⁴ NTSG^b 305.1-2.

trayodaśātmaka maṇḍala of Cakrasaṃvara, during which he was assisted by the *mahopādhyāya* Kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po (d. 1462) of rTses thang monastery.³⁵ Kun dga' rgyal mtshan first met Vanaratna at rTses thang 1436, but this is the first time we are given any indication of more extensive engagement between them. Because he assisted Vanaratna in a rite of such significance, Kun dga' rgyal mtshan of rTses thang has been identified as potential candidate to be Ānandatidhvajaśrībhadrā, the Tibetan master listed ahead of Vanaratna in the *guruparamparās* from the codex.³⁶ We will examine the identity of Ānandatidhvajaśrībhadrā in more detail shortly, but given the prominent role he played in Vanaratna's activities at sNe'u gdong, the *mahopādhyāya* Kun dga' rgyal mtshan should be flagged now for further attention.

Following the initiation, Vanaratna began his main teaching program, during which he once again taught on a variety of texts on both Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna topics, and gave a number of initiations into major cycles of tantric practice.³⁷ On this occasion, as he did nearly ten years before, Vanaratna gave an initiation of the Hevajra cycle, one that bSod nams rgya mtsho reports was from the lineage of Maitripā.³⁸ It is tempting, therefore, to see this as another potential opportunity for Vanaratna to have come in contact with the Sanskrit manuscript for the *Hevajrasahajasadyoga*, though as was the case in the account of his previous visit, there is no clear evidence that he did so. But, considering that the *Hevajrasahajasadyoga* belongs to the group of Sanskrit apographs that precedes the first colophon in the codex, and that Sanskrit witnesses of two preceding texts can be placed in Vanaratna's hands while at rTses thang in the 1430s, it is reasonable to conclude that it was among the texts Vanaratna accessed in the Phag mo gru libraries. The copy of the *Hevajrasahajasadyoga* found in the codex is one of two extant Sanskrit witnesses of this *utpannakrama sādhana* composed by Ratnākaraśānti, the other also discovered in Tibet at Ngor monastery.³⁹ One could speculate that Vanaratna added the *Hevajrasahajasadyoga* to his collection because it was a work that was previously unknown to him. The text is never cited in any of his writings, it is not mentioned by name in the biographical literature, nor did either he or his Tibetan colleagues translate it into Tibetan. In fact, outside of Tibet, the Hevajra corpus does not figure prominently in Vanaratna's oeuvre; with a single exception, all references to the *Hevajra Tantra* and its corpus in Vanaratna's narrative are connected to his activities among the Phag mo gru.⁴⁰ This includes his

³⁵ SG 43r.1-2. Kun dga' rgyal mtshan is frequently referred to in Tibetan sources with title *mahopādhyāya*, and is at times also called Thal pa Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (SG: 43r.1-2; see also Gyalbo et al. 2000: 99, note 297).

³⁶ Isaacson 2008: 5; Spitz 2015: 10.

³⁷ His teachings included the *Kalāpa Sūtra*, Dharmakīrti's collected works, Nāgārjuna's *Pañcakrāma*, the *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga* based on the writings of Anupamarakṣita, as well as what may be the so-called "Three Bodhisattva Commentaries" (*rgyud sems 'grel dang bcas pa*): the *Vimalaprabhā* on the *Kālacakra Tantra* by Kalki Puṇḍarīka, the *Hevajrapinḍārthaṭīkā* of Vajragarbha, and the *Laghutantraṭīkā* on the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* by Vajrapāṇi (see Sferra 2005: 255-61). He gave initiations into the *Kālacakra*, Buddhajñānapāda's system of the *Guhyasamāja*, the thirty-seven deity maṇḍala of *Cakrasaṃvara*, and in connection with the practice manuals for the deities Vajravāhī (including the *Sarvārthasādhakā*), Mahākāla, Dhūmāṅgārī, and Acala. Vanaratna also taught on Abhayākara Gupta's "Garland Trilogy" (*phreng gsum*), and, with bSod nams rgya mtsho's assistance, gave initiations into all the maṇḍalas of the *Niṣpannayogāvalī* (SG 43r.3-46v.6; NTSG^b 305.1-25).

³⁸ SG 46v.1.

³⁹ The recension in the Vanaratna Codex and another photographed at Ngor monastery by Rāhula Sāṅkrīyāyana served as the basis for Isaacson's 2001 edition. This second recension is found in the *Hevajrasādhanaśaṅgraha*, images of which are now in the possession of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen. Isaacson explains that the two witnesses do differ, often preserving equally viable readings. See Isaacson 2001: 458-62.

⁴⁰ The first reference to the *Hevajra* cycle is found on ŹP 16v.1, where gZhon nu dpal reports that the Phag mo gru king Grags pa 'byung gnas was engaged in Hevajra practice at rTses thang just prior to his first meeting with Vanaratna. Shortly thereafter (ŹP 16v.5) Vanaratna's knowledge is tested by asking him to identify a sand maṇḍala

collaborations on the translation of four other Hevajra *sādhana*s. These four—the *Hevajrasādhana* and its *pañjikā* by Rūpyakalaśa (Tōh 1232-3), the *Prakāśanāmaśrīhevajrasādhana* of Rāhulagupta (Tōh. 1238), and the *Viśuddhanidhināmahevajrasādhana* by Advayavajra (Tōh. 1244)—were all translated with gZhon nu dpal under the explicit patronage of the previous Phag mo gru king Grags pa ’byung gnas.⁴¹ This would again put him in direct contact with Sanskrit manuscripts of the Hevajra corpus while in residence among the Phag mo gru in the 1430s.

With the addition of the *Hevajrasahajasadyoga* we reach the first of the codex’s colophons. As discussed above, the colophon that follows the *Amṛtakaṇikāṭippanī*, *Abhiṣekanirukti*, and *Hevajrasahajasadyoga* appears to have been intended as a final colophon to cap a single scribal initiative. The break at this point is a telling one; all three Sanskrit apographs that precede it can be tentatively linked to the collection of Sanskrit manuscripts Vanaratna taught from at rTses thang monastery or at sNe’u gdong in the 1430s.⁴² Given the connection between this series of texts and Vanaratna’s teaching activities at rTses thang and sNe’u gdong, it is possible to sketch the following scenario: Vanaratna first discovered the Sanskrit manuscripts of these and other works at rTses thang during his initial visit to the Phag mo gru between the years 1433 and 1436. Working from the Phag mo gru’s library of Sanskrit manuscripts, Vanaratna taught on a number of them and gained familiarity with the overall content of the collection. Thus, when he departed Nepal for third journey to Tibet in 1453 at the invitation of the Phag mo gru, he brought with him palm leaves of portable size knowing he would once again have access to their libraries. We can only speculate that Vanaratna chose these three texts to copy because of their unique value to him personally, either as novel witnesses to known texts or as works he had no prior access to. It is equally unclear why Vanaratna only copied such a small number of texts, especially considering we know he had many more palm leaves to work with. We do know that his visit in 1453-4 was a busy one, his time filled with teachings and initiations for the Phag mo gru and at other nearby institutions, and that he felt pressured to return to the Kathmandu Valley within the timeframe set by Jayayakṣamalla. We also know from the SG that Vanaratna accelerated the pace of his teachings as the end of his residency drew near,⁴³ suggesting that he may not have had much time to copy numerous manuscripts. Nonetheless, he did fill forty-five folio sides with material we can, for the most part, put in his hands at rTses thang and/or sNe’u gdong. For whatever reason, Vanaratna determined this to be sufficient and penned the final colophon to the collection. And so, in 1454, he departed sNe’u gdong with the codex in hand, and began his slow, circuitous journey back to Nepal. But his work was not yet complete, and thankfully he still had many

of Hevajra located at rTses thang. Vanaratna gave the two Hevajra initiations described above, one in 1436 and then again in 1454, both at sNe’u gdong. Vanaratna also had a vision of the Hevajra maṇḍala while consecrating the funeral reliquary of Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po at gDan sa mthil during his second residency (SG 43v.7). The only recorded instance of Vanaratna teaching or offering initiation into the practice of *Hevajra* not directly connected to the Phag mo gru comes at Byams pa gling in 1455, where he taught on an unidentified *utpannakrama sādhana* from the Hevajra cycle composed by Lūyipā (SG 47r.3). This teaching was sponsored by bSod rnam par rgyal ba, who had been at sNe’u gdong with Vanaratna and likely received the Hevajra initiation he gave there.

⁴¹ The only one of the four not to explicitly state it was sponsored by Grags pa ’byuñ gnas is the *Hevajrasāadhanapañjikā* (Tōh 1233), but since its root text does indicate his sponsorship, it is reasonable to conclude the *pañjikā* was as well. Two of these four translations—the *Prakāśanāma* and *Viśuddhanidhi*—state that they were translated at Ne’u gdon under Grags pa ’byuñ gnas’s patronage. Because Grags pa ’byuñ gnas passed away in 1452, this would have been during Vanaratna’s first residency.

⁴² Because the first six folios of the codex are unaccounted for, it is possible there were one or more additional texts preceding these three.

⁴³ SG 45r.1-45v.4.

blank palm leaves left.

Interlude

Vanaratna's stay in the Phag mo gru kingdom lasted for the better part of a year, encompassing the end of 1453 and most of 1454. Apart from his busy teaching schedule at sNe'u gdong he also found time to engage in other religious activities in the Phag mo gru kingdom and go on pilgrimage around central Tibet. He first visited the nearby Phag mo gru monastic center at gDan sa mthil, where he was asked to reconsecrate the reliquary (*mdung rten*) of rDo rje rgyal po (1110-1170), the member of the rLang clan of the Phag mo gru who first settled at the gDan sa mthil site.⁴⁴ There was concern among the Phag mo gru hierarchs that the reliquary was losing its spiritual potency (*chud zos*), and so sought Vanaratna's intervention. Vanaratna told them there was nothing wrong with the reliquary, but proceeded with the consecration anyway,⁴⁵ the success of which was marked by wondrous signs. During the same visit, Vanaratna also attended a series of initiations given by Ngag dbang grags pa (1439-1495), the abbot of gDan sa mthil. Though not reported as such, this event may have coincided with his enthronement as abbot, which occurred in 1454.⁴⁶ This is the only mention in the *rnam thars* of any of the other leading members of the Phag mo gru family, apart from the two kings who sponsored Vanaratna.⁴⁷ The NTSG reports that bSod nams rgya mtsho attended Vanaratna at dDan sa mthil, and it was on this occasion that they collaborated on a translation of Nāgārjuna's *Vajraprañidhāna*, possibly their first work together.⁴⁸ Vanaratna also found time to make a pilgrimage to Lhasa, stopping at gSang phu Ne'u thog monastery along the way to give general teachings.⁴⁹ While in Lhasa he made offerings to the Jo bo image and witnessed the unfurling and consecration of two large scroll paintings.⁵⁰ During his return to sN'eu gdong he visited 'Phan yul Nalendra,⁵¹ Tshal Gung thang,⁵² as well as many other monastic centers, and made a stop at bSam yas,⁵³ where he and bSod nams rgya mtsho visited Khirms khang gling, bSod nams rgya mtsho's family shrine.⁵⁴

As 1454 passed, Vanaratna felt pressure to fulfill his promise to Jayayakṣamalla to return to

⁴⁴ SG 43v.7-44r.2 This style of his funeral reliquary is reported as *bkra shis 'od 'bar*, a style of funerary *stūpa* whose origins have yet to be adequately traced. In this instance, the *kra shis 'od 'bar* reliquary at gDan sa mthil is said to enshrine the heart of rDo rje rgyal po (Czaja 2013: 71-77, 354, and 646 plate 90; Hazod 1998 68-69).

⁴⁵ SG 44r.1: "Nothing has happened to him, this is all meaningless chatter. He is holding up very well!" [kho rang la ci yang ma byung | lab lob bzang po med pa | su pra tiṣṭha legs pa yin gsung.

⁴⁶ Ngag dbang grags pa was the son of Grags pa 'byung gnas, and would eventually go on to take control of the monarchy in 1481 (Czaja 2013: 225, 237).

⁴⁷ SG 44v.2-3.

⁴⁸ NTSG^b 305.10-12. The colophon to the *Vajraprañidhāna* (Tōh 4384) adds that it was translated in the Kun bzang nags khrod, which according to Sørensen (2007: 25; note 28), was in the hills above gDan sa mthil. [360r.2-3: rgya gar shar phyogs kyi pañdi ta chen po dngos grub rnyes pa'i dbang phyug dpal nags kyi rin chen gyi zhal snga nas dang | de nyid kyi bka' drin las legs par sbyar ba'i tshul cung zad rig pa | dge slong chos smra ba bsod nams rgya mtsho'i sde zhes bya bas dpal kun tu bzang po'i nags khrod du bsgyur ba'o.]

⁴⁹ SG 45v.7.

⁵⁰ SG 46r.1. The *rnam thars* are unfortunately silent on which institutions put them on display or what images were shown.

⁵¹ 'Phan yul Nalendra was founded by Rang ston Shes bya kun rig in 1437, shortly after he and Vanaratna parted. Rong ston died in 1449.

⁵² The Tshal pa brKa' brgyud monastery founded by Lama Zhang (Zhang g.yu brag pa brTson 'grus grags pa) in 1187.

⁵³ SG 46r.3-4.

⁵⁴ NTSG^b 305.14-17; Ehrhard 2002: 35; note 1.

Nepal within two years, and may have received letters from Nepal instructing him to do so.⁵⁵ Kun dga' legs pa and Vanaratna's many students implored him to stay, knowing it was likely futile. The king and the assembled masters put on an elaborate *ganacakra* complete with a maṇḍala of gold, and requested him to stay for the rest of his life. If he was unable to commit to that, they would accept ten more years, or at least a few. But Vanaratna was adamant: "I made a promise to the Bhaktapur kings and others to return after a little more than year. It would not be right to fail in that."⁵⁶ Vanaratna even hints that he preferred his lifestyle in Nepal, saying "I don't need all this initiation and ritual. Nepal is an excellent place for *samādhi*."⁵⁷ He then told his students to request teachings on whatever they desired, with the promise to fulfill their Dharma wishes as best he could in the little time that remained. As he arrived, so he departed; on the fourth day of the seventh month of the Wood Male Dog year (1454) Vanaratna left the Yar klungs Valley, escorted as far as Mon 'gar by Kun dga' legs pa and a large entourage that included gZhon nu dpal. gZhon nu dpal accompanied his teacher a bit farther to Nam shod gling, where he struggled to part from Vanaratna for the final time. Everyone expressed their heartfelt sadness, offered many prostrations, and pleaded with him to remain. But Vanaratna departed nonetheless, and began his journey home to Nepal. His next stop was just a short distance up the gTsang po River at Byams pa gling monastery, and it was there that we come to the second unit of the Vanaratna codex.⁵⁸

Unit Two: Ghaṅṭāpā's Pañcakramopadeśa

The second unit in the codex consists of only one text, Ghaṅṭāpāda's *Pañcakramopadeśa*, a short instruction manual related to the Cakrasaṃvara system. The work is also known under the title *Cakrasaṃvarapañcakrama*, a title recorded in the two canonical Tibetan translations and the name given to a Sanskrit edition of the text published in volume 39 of the journal *Dhīḥ* (2005).⁵⁹ As we have seen, the *Pañcakramopadeśa* is not the only work of Ghaṅṭāpā to receive Vanaratna's attention while in Tibet. He and gZhon nu dpal translated two of Ghaṅṭāpā's other works from the Cakrasaṃvara cycle while making their way towards central Tibet in 1454: the *Śaṃvaratrāyodaśātmakābhīsamaya* in La stod,⁶⁰ and then the

⁵⁵ SG 45r.1-2. The language is a bit ambiguous, but it seems as if Vanaratna was being repeatedly ordered by some means to return quickly to Nepal: de nas phyir myur por thegs pa'i bka' lung yang yang byung ba.

⁵⁶ SG 45r. 2-4: kho pon rgyal po sogs la lo gcig lhag tsam la sleb pa'i dam bca' yod pa las 'gal ba mi rigs pa yin gsung ba.

⁵⁷ SG 45r.2: wang ga tso ga dgos pa med | sa mā dhi byed pa bal po gnas bzang ba yin gsung ba. bSod nams rgya tsho made the interesting choice to render the Tibetan terms *dbang* and *cho ga* phonetically, thereby capturing Vanaratna's mildly derogatory statement about the Tibetan emphasis on elaborate initiations and rituals, preferring instead the cultivation of unelaborate *samādhi*.

⁵⁸ SG 46v.3-6; NTŽP 37v.3-6; NTSG^b 306.17-18.

⁵⁹ This edition is based on a single Sanskrit witness held by the National Archives in Nepal in comparison with the canonical Tibetan translation. The editors relied on NAK Accession Number 3/693, (reel no. A 936/11), a collection of Buddhist works with the title *Bauddhagranthasaṅgraha*. Ghaṅṭāpā's treatise is found on ff. 64v-69r. The title *Cakrasaṃvarapañcakrama* does not appear anywhere in this Sanskrit manuscript, and thus is an interpolation in the published edition based on the Tibetan translations, which provide the title in Tibetan-phoneticized Sanskrit. In the catalog of the Nepalese German Manuscript Cataloguing Project, it is listed under title *Oḍiyānakrama*, which appears to be the title of the last of the five sections of the text, not the text as whole. The final colophon (69r.3) of that recension reads ity acintyodiyānakramaḥ pañcama[h] samāptaḥ | kṛtir iyaṃ ghaṅṭāpādānām iti. Compare with VC f.45r.7-8: ity acintyodiyānakramaḥ | samāpto 'yam pañcakramopadeśaḥ | kṛtir iyaṃ śrī oḍiyānācāryaśrīghaṅṭāpādānām...

⁶⁰ SG 42r.3.

Śaṃvaratrāyodaśātmakārcanavidhi in gTsang rong ra nga.⁶¹

The *Pañcakrama* is referenced twice in the SG in quick narrative succession. The first comes when Vanaratna taught on it in the closing days of his residence at sNe'u gdong in 1454,⁶² which could plausibly be the moment when he worked with the Sanskrit manuscript that he copied into the codex. But the second mention seems the more likely scenario behind the version in the codex: Vanaratna's collaboration on a translation with bSod nams rnam par rgyal ba at his monastery, Byams pa gling. While at Byams pa gling Vanaratna had access to two copies of the Sanskrit text, both of which were utilized while preparing their translation. This, and the fact that the *Pañcakramopadeśa* comes after the colophon separating it from the texts copied at sNe'u gdong, suggests that it was not copied there but at the next stop in Vanaratna's journey. There is a third, potentially overlapping reference to the text: the DN uniquely reports that Vanaratna composed and then taught on an instruction manual for the *Pañcakramopadeśa*, at the request of the abbot of gDan sa mthil, Ngag dbang grags pa.⁶³ This may have been on the same occasion the two met at gDan sa mthil, or this could correspond to the teachings at sNe'u gdong, above. In either case there is no record of Vanaratna's instructions surviving.

After leaving sNe'u gdong, Vanaratna visited Byams pa gling monastery at the invitation of its abbot bSod nam rnam par rgyal ba, whom he first met on his way to sNe'u gdong a year earlier. On his return journey Vanaratna made a prolonged stop at Byams pa gling, which can be judged from the number of teachings he gave there and the output of his collaborations with bSod nams rnam rgyal. bSod nams rgya mtsho, who was attending Vanaratna at the time, reports that Vanaratna gave teachings and initiations on Lūyīpā's *Buddhodaya* (Ōta. 3147), Āryadeva's *Pratīpattisārasataka* (Ōta. 4695/Tōh. 2334), and Vanaratna's own treatise on the four initiations, the *Caturabhiṣekaprakaraṇa* (Ōta. 3106). bSod nams rgya mtsho also states that each of these texts were translated on the same occasion, a fact supported by their colophons, which record them all as being collaborations between Vanaratna and Byams gling paṅ chen bSod nams rnam rgyal.⁶⁴

The *rnam thar* of bSod nams rnam rgyal composed by Byang chub rnam rgyal dge legs (d.u.) mentions another text taught by Vanaratna at Byams pa gling and translated by Sōnam Namgyal under his guidance, one not mentioned in the SG or NTSG: Ghaṅṭāpā's *Pañcakramopadeśa*.⁶⁵ Their translation, which announces itself as a revision of the earlier canonical translation by Sumatikīrti and rNgog bLo ldan shes rab (1059-1109),⁶⁶ is known as the "Byams pa gling translation" of Ghaṅṭāpā's *Cakrasaṃvarapañcakrama*.⁶⁷ The colophon of bSod nams rnam rgyal's translation gives us some important clues not only to the circumstances of its

⁶¹ NTŽP 37r.1-2, SG 46r.7.

⁶² SG 46v.2

⁶³ DN 23v.4-7. The DN reports a lineage for Vanaratna's transmission of the *Pañcakramopadeśa*. It suffers from problems of chronology, and seems to be a list of prominent lineage holders rather than a proper *paramparā*. The list runs: Vajradhara, Vajrayoginī, Ghaṅṭāpā, Kūrmapāda, Jālandhara, Kṛṣṇa, [Dīpaṅkara?]bhadrapāda, *Vijayapāda (rNam rgyal zhabs), Tilopā, Nāropā, *Yogendratilaka (rNal 'byor dbang po'i thig le), Puṅḍarīka, *Jñānadhara (Ye shes 'dzin), *Kālyāṇamati (dGe ba'i blo), Buddhajñāna[pāda], *the great lord Sujāta (rJe chen po Legs skyes), *Dīnmukta (Phyogs grol), Dharmakīrti, Ratnakīrti, and then the great *paṇḍita* himself.

⁶⁴ SG 47r.2-4, NTSN 39v.4. In addition to the translation of the *Buddhodaya* prepared with bSod nams rnam rgyal, the treatise was also translated by Vanaratna and 'Jam dpal ye shes (Ōta. 4665) on what was likely a previous occasion. There is also an alternate translation of the *Caturabhiṣekaprakaraṇa*, titled *Caturabhiṣekavyavasthāna*, which was prepared by Vanaratna and 'Jam dpal ye shes (Ōta. 4666).

⁶⁵ NTSN 39v.1. More specifically, Byang chub rnam rgyal states the *Pañcakrama* was both translated and edited during Vanaratna's stay at Byams pa gling.

⁶⁶ Tōh 1433/Ōta. 2150: dPal 'khor lo sdom pa'i rim pa lnga pa.

⁶⁷ Ōta. 4624, 100r.4: bde mchog rim lnga dril bu pas mdzad pa byams pa gling pa'i 'gyur.

creation, but potentially to the recension of the text found in the Vanaratna Codex. In it we are told that Vanaratna explained the text to bSod nams rnam rgyal based on the oral instructions of his preceptor from Mahācaitya Vihāra in Sadnagara, Buddhaghōṣa.⁶⁸ But more importantly, we learn that their translation was based on a comparison of two Sanskrit witnesses,⁶⁹ which can fairly be read to mean two *variant* Sanskrit witnesses. With this detail we can once again place Vanaratna in close proximity to not one but two Sanskrit manuscripts of a work included in the codex. The fact that Vanaratna may have copied only one of them suggests that he collected what was, for him at least, an unfamiliar or rare version of the *Pañcakramopadeśa*. Thus his act of copying it could be understood as an act of philological preservation.

While it is impossible to know the precise content of the manuscripts Vanaratna and bSod nams rnam rgyal relied on, there is evidence to suggest that one of them was the recension preserved in the Vanaratna Codex. The only two Sanskrit manuscripts of the *Pañcakramopadeśa* that have come down to us contain unique recensions of Ghaṇṭāpā's work, neither of which is purely reflected in the Tibetan translations. On the whole, the original canonical translation by Sumatikīrti and rNgog bLo ldan shes rab adheres more closely to the Kathmandu recension than it does to the one found in the codex.⁷⁰ However, the translation by Vanaratna and bSod nams rnam rgyal shows some signs of being emended in consultation with the Sanskrit text found in the codex. The most substantive example is found in the section of the text with the title *Nānāprakāraśivavajrakrama* that describes the results of fixing the mind, as the seminal drop, in various positions within the body that includes the sense organs, heart center, crown of the head, throat, and navel. The Nepalese manuscript, the version in the codex, and the original canonical Tibetan translation all agree in listing the attainments associated with the heart center onwards as, respectively, the six extraordinary abilities (*ṣaḍabhijñā*), seeing hosts of deities (*devatāvyūham paśyati*), knowledge of all scriptures (*sarvasāstrāṇi veti*), and the enjoyment of sublime celestial women (*bhūṅkte kanyāṃ surāgrajām*). The translation prepared by Vanaratna and bSod nams rnam rgyal diverges in reading an additional set of attainments—the *dharmakāya*, *mahāsukhakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*, respectively—that are only known to us from recension in the codex.⁷¹ bSod nams rnam rgyal similarly privileges a reading aligned with the codex a few lines later where he has *las kyi phyag rgya* for the codex's *karmamudrā*, instead of the canonical translation's attested *phyag rgya* and the Nepalese manuscripts *dharmamudrā*.⁷² To be sure, bSod nam rnam rgyal's translation shows the influence of both recensions, and it would take more careful study to fully discern the influence of the two extant Sanskrit recensions on his work, but these concordances with the witness in the codex point to its potential influence on Vanaratna and bSod nams rnam rgyal's work.

Given that the SG, NTSG, and the colophon of Ōta. 4624 are in agreement that the *Pañcakrama* was taught by Vanaratna at Byams pa gling and was translated on the same

⁶⁸ Ōta. 4624 103r.4-7: shes pa bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i rim pa lnga pa u rgyan nas byung ba rdzogs so | slob dpon mkhas pa rdo rje dril bu pas mdzad pa'o | rgya gar gyi mkhan po kṛṣṇa paṇḍita dang dge slong tshul khriṃs rgyal bas bsgyur las phyis bla ma chen po sumatikīrti dang dge slong blo ldan shes rab kyis bcos pa'o | slar yang shar phyogs sannagara'i mkhas pa chen po dpal nags kyi rin po che'i zhal snga pa chen sangs rgyas dbyangs kyi man ngag dang sbyar nas gus par mnyan te.

⁶⁹ Ōta. 4624 103r.6. rgya dpe gnyis dang bstun nas.

⁷⁰ This is most clearly apparent in the opening verses of the text. The *Pañcakrama* from the codex contains lines of verse and a verse structure not found in any of the other Sanskrit or Tibetan witnesses. That bSod nams rnam rgyal made no emendations here suggests that, if he was consulting the recension found in the codex, he privileged the older translation and the Sanskrit that confirmed it over the passage represented in the recension from codex.

⁷¹ VC 46v.4-6, N 66v.5-7, Ōta. 2150 262r.1-3, Ōta. 4624 101v.4-8.

⁷² VC 46v.8; N 67r.5-6; Ōta. 2150 262r.7; Ōta. 4624 102r.4-5.

occasion, and that their collaboration involved two Sanskrit manuscripts, the pattern initiated in the first unit of the codex's contents appears to be sustained here. We can confidently argue that Vanaratna had access to two Sanskrit manuscripts of a work we find in the codex, and that the sequence of the texts follows the chronology of his travel from the Phag mo gru kingdom back to Nepal. We cannot definitively place the codex's version of the *Pañcakramopadeśa* in Vanaratna's hands at Byams pa gling, but the totality of circumstantial evidence makes this a likely scenario for its incorporation into the collection.

To this point we have been able to establish Vanaratna's proximity to and engagement with Sanskrit witnesses for all of the Sanskrit apographs in the codex and show that their sequence is indicative of the time and place of their inclusion. Turning now to the Sanskrit translations of indigenous Tibetan works, we find that this pattern appears to hold for them as well.

Interlude

When Vanaratna departed Byams pa gling he retraced his journey of the previous year by returning to the Yar 'brog mtsho region and then back to the gTsang po River valley through gTsang rong ra lnga. On the way to Yar 'brog he stopped briefly at Lhun grub lha rtse in the lower Dol valley near Grwa thang, where he taught on a nine-deity maṇḍala of Amitāyus (*tshe dpag med lha dgu*).⁷³ From there Vanaratna and his party turned south towards Yar 'brog, stopping first at Gong dkar and then sNa dkar rtse, and it is at the latter where we find our next evidence for material in the Vanaratna codex. Vanaratna was invited to the region by the governors of Yar 'brog, Nam mkha' bzang po and Khri dpon Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, with whom Vanaratna had developed a close relationship over the course of his career in Tibet. In addition to the texts discussed below, Vanaratna taught on the *Āyuhśādhana*,⁷⁴ the *Śabarapādistotra*, and a number of unnamed *sādhana*s of Vajravārāhī at sNa dkar rtse.⁷⁵

Unit Three: Sanskrit Translations of Tibetan Texts

With Vanaratna's departure from Byams pa gling we also move on from the Sanskrit apographs in the codex and reach the cluster of translations of indigenous Tibetan texts. They consist of fourteen discreet works that can be grouped thematically into two additional sub-units: a cluster of three works associated with the Indian siddha Virūpākṣa and his *Amṛtasiddhi* corpus, and a series of *upadeśas*, instructions drawn from diverse Indic and Tibetan sources. Most of the texts have yet to be identified in their original Tibetan, making Vanaratna's Sanskrit translations the only known witnesses for the Tibetan instructions that were in circulation in the fifteenth century. Based on the colophons found at the end of many of the translated texts, it would appear that Vanaratna copied them into the codex in an effort to collect the teachings of a Tibetan *bla ma* he names Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā.

A particularly important and informative feature of this section of the codex is Vanaratna's inclusion of *guruparamparās*, lineage histories that stretch from their Indian lineage holders through a series of Tibetan teachers to end with Vanaratna. Seven of the fourteen translations include *guruparamparās*, and though each lineage is unique, there is enough overlap between them to suggest they were received in similar, if not the same setting. Attempts to identify the

⁷³ NTSG^b 306.20-22. Lhun grub lha rtse was a small hermitage where gZhon nu dpal briefly served as abbot (van der Kuijp 2007: 279).

⁷⁴ Tōh. 2336: *Tshe sgrub pa'i thabs*. Vanaratna and bSod rnam rgya mtsho translated this work together.

⁷⁵ SG 47r.4-5; NTSG^b 307.2-5.

Tibetan masters in the lists and trace their lineages are made somewhat complicated by the fact that Vanaratna rendered all of their names in Sanskrit, but once the names have been translated back into Tibetan (when possible), many of the individuals can be definitively identified and the lineages accurately traced. Most critically, in all of the lineage lists save one, Vanaratna is preceded by Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā, whose identity has much to tell us about the creation of this section of the codex.

When we consider these fourteen translated texts in terms of their thematic groupings and lineage histories, and when we coordinate that data with Tibetan biographies and chronicles, we can once again align the content of the codex with events during Vanaratna's travels in central and southern Tibet in 1455. We are not in the same fortunate position we found with the Sanskrit apographs, as we cannot place Vanaratna in similar close proximity to the physical texts. But we can identify specific moments in which Vanaratna taught on topics directly related to texts in the codex, locate him in a geographical region where the lineages in the *guruparamparās* thrived, and connect him directly to the most likely candidate for Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā.

Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā

Seven of the fourteen Tibetan translations in the codex include *guruparamparās*, and in six of those Vanaratna is preceded by Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā. As Harunaga Isaacson first demonstrated,⁷⁶ the name Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā is a Sanskrit translation of the Tibetan Kun dga' blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po. Determining the Tibetan identity of Ānandamati therefore has critical implications for our ability to contextualize the creation of the codex, as well as bring into sharper focus the unique set of circumstances that resulted in an Indian *paṇḍita* receiving teachings and transmissions from a Tibetan master. To date, two names have been put forward as potential candidates for Vanaratna's Tibetan teacher, the *mahopādhyāya* Kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po of rTses thang monastery, and Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros of rTse chen monastery in Nyang stod.⁷⁷ Based on evidence from Tibetan sources alone, a case could be made for either of these figures, but when we closely examine evidence from the Vanaratna Codex, specifically the *guruparamparās* to the Tibetan texts, the identity of Ānandamati is beyond doubt.

The first of these potential candidates, Kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po, often referred to with the title *mahopādhyāya*, was a prominent Buddhist master in the Phag mo gru religious hierarchy and maintained a long, formal relationship with rTses thang monastery. We first meet the *mahopādhyāya* as an attendee of Vanaratna's teachings at sNe'u gdong in 1436, and then again in 1454 when he served as Vanaratna's assistant during the Cakrasaṃvara initiation that inaugurated his second residency at sNe'u gdong. At first glance rTses thang Kun dga' rgyal mtshan does indeed seem to be a viable candidate; unlike Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros, Kun dga' rgyal mtshan appears in the biographical literature on more than one occasion, and in the case of the Cakrasaṃvara initiation, plays an active role in Vanaratna's religious activities. Because of his prominent position among the Phag mo gru, it is quite possible that he and Vanaratna were more well-acquainted than the *rnam thars* indicate. Kun dga' rgyal mtshan was, moreover, one of bSod nams rgya mtsho's main teachers. He guided bSod nam rgya mtsho

⁷⁶ See Isaacson 2008.

⁷⁷ Isaacson 2008: 5; Ehrhard 2017: 19, n. 27. Isaacson offered both names in his 2008 article, but focused more on Kun dga' rgyal mtshan because resources on Kun dga' blo gros were not available to him at the time. Ehrhard puts forward only Kun dga' blo gro, and does so confidently based on many of the same sources examined below.

through his earliest studies at rTses thang, and saw enough promise in his student to eventually appoint him as preceptor and tutor to the Phag mo gru scion Kun dga' legs pa, the future monarch who would invite Vanaratna to Tibet in 1453.⁷⁸ During his mentorship, Kun dga' rgyal mtshan transmitted a diverse array of lineages to bSod nams rgya mtsho, including lineages he received from Vanaratna,⁷⁹ thus he appears to be the sort of broadly learned and non-sectarian lineage holder Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā presents as based on the lineages reported in the codex.⁸⁰ What we find lacking in our sources is any single clear reference to the texts, teachings, or lineages found in the Vanaratna Codex, nor do we find any mention of a more personal connection between Vanaratna and Kun dga' rgyal mtshan beyond the formal meetings described by gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho. As always, and especially given the tendency of Vanaratna's biographers to excise material from their narratives, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but one would hope for more definitive evidence of a connection between Vanaratna and Kun dga' rgyal mtshan of rTses thang before identifying him as Ānandanamati. Then, there is the small matter of his name: Kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po would indeed be translated into Sanskrit as Ānandadhvajaśrībhadrā, but there are no sources that include *blo gros*, the equivalent of *-mati*, as part of Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's full name. Taken in total, the evidence for Kun dga' rgyal mtshan of rTses thang as a potential candidate to be Ānandamati is compelling enough to at least suggest him as Vanaratna Tibetan teacher, but it is likewise insufficient to settle the matter. For that we would need far more concrete evidence, which, it so happens, is precisely what we have for the other main candidate, Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po belonged to the ruling Shar kha clan of Nyang stod and was abbot of rTse chen monastery. Though his name is nowhere to be found in Vanaratna's *rnam thars*, we know from the NTSC and MCB that he and Vanaratna first met in 1426, and that Vanaratna received teachings from him on the Kālacakra, as well as other texts and practices. We can also presume that he and Vanaratna met on several other occasions, possible as late or later than 1438, the year Vanaratna returned to Nepal at the end of his second trip to Tibet.⁸¹ In the case of Kun dga' blo gros then we have a potential candidate who is attested to have been a teacher of Vanaratna in Tibetan sources, and who belonged to a clan (Shar kha) and lived in a region (Nyang stod) with which Vanaratna maintained strong ties throughout the entirety of his career in Tibet. Furthermore, the most straightforward piece of evidence is the simple fact that that Kun dga' blo gros's full name—Kun dga' blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po—is precisely translated into Sanskrit as Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā.⁸² But if all of this remains a bit circumstantial, the data provided in Vanaratna Codex allows us to identify Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros as Ānandamati with near total certainty.

The Vanaratna Codex is an immensely valuable resource to the historian for its inclusion of a number of *guruparmparās* that yield a wealth of information on the lineages being actively transmitted in fifteenth-century Tibet. Vanaratna did not make the task of studying the

⁷⁸ Ehrhard 2002: 40.

⁷⁹ NTSG^b 296.8-15, 318.14-319.1. This includes Vanaratna's teachings on the *śaḍaṅgayoga* from the Kālacakra system, and a long-life practice of Amitāyus based on the system of Jītari.

⁸⁰ See NTSG^b 326-27 for a list of lineages held by Kun dga' rgyal mtshan. Though the list of teachings given there are certainly not exhaustive, they can be taken as representative of his primary influences.

⁸¹ As we recall from the previous chapter, the last recorded date we have for Kun dga' blo gros in 1439, at which time he was of advanced age.

⁸² Kun dga' blo gros refers to himself using his full name in the colophon to his *Nyang stod bla ma'i mtshan gyi deb ther* (477.2-3).

guruparamparās an easy one, as in all cases he either translated the names into Sanskrit, or in some cases transliterated them instead, but we are nonetheless able to recreate many of the original Tibetan names and identify a number of these figures with reasonable accuracy. The *guruparamparā* of the *Amarasiddhiyantraka* composed by Prajñāsīmha is distinctive in that nearly all of the Tibetan masters, including its Tibetan author, can be accurately identified and shown to belong to a lineage directly tied to Nyang stod and its institutions, a lineage that leads to Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros.

The *Amarasiddhiyantraka* is the second of the Tibetan translations in the codex, and belongs to the cluster of texts connected to the *Amṛtasiddhi* tradition that traces back to the Indian *siddha* Virūpākṣa. More will be said below about the *Amṛtasiddhi* and the three related texts from the codex, but for now let our attention focus on its *guruparamparā*, which gives us the following lineage:

***Amarasiddhiyantraka*: VC 53r.1**

Sanskrit Translation	Tibetan Identity
Māraṇḍedeva [sic?]	
Dharmabhadra	Chos kyi bzang po (ca. 12th-13th century)
Kamalavān	Padma can (ca. 13th century)
Kumārajñāna	gZhon nu ye shes (ca. 13th century)
Sūryadhvaja	Nyi ma rgyal mtshan (ca. 13th century)
Jñānadhvaja	?
Prajñāsīmha	Rong pa Shes rab seng ge (1251-1315)
Āryadeva	?
Ānandatidhvajaśrībhadrā	Kun dga' blo gros rgyal msthan dpal bzang po
Vanaratna	

The list begins ambiguously with Māraṇḍedeva,⁸³ who also appears in the *guruparamparā* of the *Mahad-amarasiddhiyantra*, the next work in the codex. It is not possible to definitely identify this figure, but his place at the head of the list suggests him as the Indian master from whom the first of the Tibetan lineage holders, Dharmabhadra, received the transmission.⁸⁴ Dharmabhadra is Vanaratna's translation of Chos kyi bzang po (ca. twelfth-thirteenth century) who belonged to the dPyal clan of Nyang stod. Also known as dPyal lo tsā ba,⁸⁵ Chos kyi bzang po was a student of two Indian masters who visited Tibet, Śākyaśrībhadrā (1127-1225) and Niṣkalaṅka (ca. twelfth century).⁸⁶ He was also the founder of Thar pa gling monastery, the family monastery of the

⁸³ There appears to be a marginal emendation to *māraṇḍedeva* at this point in the codex that would render it *mayorakaṇḍedeva* or *mārayokaṇḍedeva*, but *māraṇḍedeva* appears later in the codex without emendation. See VC 63r.1 and 65v.6-7.

⁸⁴ One cannot help but suspect Māraṇḍedeva to be a corruption of *ḍeya*, and therefore invoke the mythic ṛṣi Mārkaṇḍeya who received yogic instruction from Dattātreya in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*.

⁸⁵ Chos kyi bzang po was one of the many members of the dPyal clan to hold this title (van der Kuijp 2009: 5, note 13).

⁸⁶ Considering Śākyaśrībhadrā and Niṣkalaṅka were known Indian gurus of Chos kyi bzang po, it is tempting to identify one of them as Māraṇḍedeva, but without further evidence, that is purely speculative. In at least two lineages in which Niṣkalaṅka precedes Chos kyi bzang po he is listed as Niṣkalaṅkadeva, which could have been corrupted in the texts Vanaratna consulted or misheard if received orally, resulting in Māraṇḍedeva. See BDRC

dPyal clan and an important institution in Nyang stod.⁸⁷ He is followed in the *paramparā* by Kamalavān, whom we can identify as Padma can (ca. thirteenth century), also a member of the dPyal clan of Nyang stod. Little is known about this figure, but we can be confident in his identification because of his appearance, as dPyal Padma can, after Chos kyi bzang po in a lineage list for the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*.⁸⁸ As in that lineage, Padma can is followed in the *Amarasiddhiyantraka* by gZhon nu ye shes (ca. thirteenth century), or Kumārajāna in Vanaratna's translation. Though not a member of the dPyal clan, gZhon nu Ye shes served as abbot of the dPyal family monastery Thar pa gling.⁸⁹ He is in turn followed by Sūryadhvaja, or Nyi ma rgyal mtshan (ca. thirteenth century), who is also known as Thar pa lo tsā ba due to his association with Thar pa gling monastery.⁹⁰ Nyi ma rgyal mtshan spent fourteen years in India and was one of the few Tibetans believed to hold the abbacy of Vajrāsana at Bodh Gaya.⁹¹ He was renowned as a teacher of the Kālacakra system, and was a teacher of Bu ston rin chen grub (1290-1364).

Next in the list is one Jñānadhvaja, but unfortunately this Tibetan master, whose name would be rendered *Ye shes rgyal mtshan cannot be identified. The next Tibetan master in the *Amarasiddhiyantraka* list is the author of the text, Prajñāsiṃha, who can be identified as Rong pa Shes rab seng ge (1251-1315). Shes rab seng ge was abbot of the dPyal clan's Man lung monastery, and taught widely in southern and central Tibet.⁹² Shes rab seng ge also appears in the lineage of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* mentioned above, following immediately after gZhon nu Ye shes. Little is known about the Āryadeva who intervenes in the *guruparamparā* between Shes rab seng ge and Kun dga's blo gros/Ānandamati. This same Āryadeva, presumably, appears again in the next *paramparā* from the codex, the *Mahad-amarasiddhiyantra*. We also find a figure known alternately as Thar pa gling Āryadeva and Nyang stod Āryadeva preceding Kun dga' blo gros in two other lineages not related to the codex.⁹³ Therefore, though little can be said about the final link between Kun dga' blo gros and the rest of the lineage, we can at least locate him in the same region and institutions as the other lineage masters, including Kun dga' blo gros.

The degree of geographical, institutional, and lineal specificity provided by the members of this *guruparamparā* allow us to confidently confirm Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros as Ānandamati. Additionally, much of the biographical information we have concerning the Buddhist masters given in this *paramparā* comes down to us in Kun dga' blo gros's own composition, the *Myang stod bla ma'i mtshan gyi deb ther*, a historical chronicle of Nyang stod.⁹⁴ Given that we have a record of a meeting between Kun dga' blo gros and Vanaratna in

lineages nos. L0RKL335 and L8LS13811 regarding these lineages. Niṣkalaṅkadeva's name also appears in a Tibetan lineage associated with Virūpākṣa that was not transmitted to Chos kyi bzang po, the *Bir wa pa'i blo sbyong gi brgyud pa* (BDRC lineage no. L0RKL159).

⁸⁷ Vitali 2015: 547.

⁸⁸ bKra shis chos 'phel 37v.5.

⁸⁹ Vitali 2015: 558.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Vitali 2010: 170-71.

⁹² Vitali 2015: 561-2.

⁹³ The name Nyang stod Āryadeva is found in the *dPal rdo rje 'jigs byed chen po ro lang s brgyad 'khor lha dgu pa rwa lugs kyi dkyil 'khor du dbang bzhi rdzogs par nos pa'i lung brgyud* (BDRC W1PD107937 vol. kha p. 216). Thar pa gling Āryadeva is found in the *Dug dbang rma bya rgyas pa'i smin byed dang u'i rtags sogs rtags can mi 'dra pa 'ga'i lung brgyud* (BDRC W1PD107937 vol. kha, p. 221, 22).

⁹⁴ Though the *Myang stod bla ma'i mtshan gyi deb ther* was consulted directly, many of the details presented here and below are drawn from Roberto Vitali's excellent study of the text (Vitali 2015), in which he coordinates it with other contemporary sources to flesh out the details of what is otherwise an exceedingly terse presentation of the eminent masters of Nyang stod.

1426, that Vanaratna is known to have received teachings from this Tibetan master, and that we can tie him geographically and lineally to one (and as we will see, more) of the *guruparamparās* in the Vanaratna Codex, we should now have little doubt that the Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā who transmitted most, if not all of the Tibetan works in the codex to Vanaratna was Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros dpal bzang po of Nyang stod. And with Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā now confidently identified, we can examine the rest of the texts in the codex and consider the question of when and where Vanaratna translated and recorded them.

The Amarasiddhi Collection

The unit of Tibetan translations that follows the four Sanskrit apographs begins with three works that by title, content, and lineage are connected to the Indian *mahāsiddha* Virūpākṣa (ca. eleventh century) and his *Amṛtasiddhi*, a treatise that codified the practices of *haṭhayoga* and served as a seminal influence on later Buddhist and non-Buddhist *haṭhayoga* systems.⁹⁵ The Tibetan translations from the codex that elucidate this system include brTson 'grus seng ge's (1207-1278) *Sūryaprabhā*, Shes rab seng ge's (1251-1315) *Amarasiddhiyantraka*, and the *Mahad-amarasiddhiyantra*, which is of unknown authorship but is directly attributed to Virūpākṣa's system.⁹⁶ The *Amṛtasiddhi* itself was first translated into Tibetan in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, and was transmitted to Tibet at least four additional times, with the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries being a particularly fertile time for the *Amṛtasiddhi* tradition on Tibetan soil.⁹⁷ The earliest of these transmissions passed through the Shangs pa bka' rgyud and Jo nang master gNyan ston Chos kyi shes rab (1175-1255), a figure who appears in the *guruparamparā* for the first Sanskrit translation in the codex, the *Sūryaprabhā*.

The *Sūryaprabhā* is a work by the Tibetan author brTson 'grus seng ge (Vīryasiṃha in Vanaratna's translation), a direct disciple of gNyan ston Chos kyi shes rab. Though there is no extant work with the Tibetan equivalent of *Sūryaprabhā*, we can tentatively identify the text Vanaratna cites as the *Sūryaprabhā* with an extant work by brTson 'grus seng ge titled '*Chi med grub pa'i 'khrul 'khor bzhugs stod* (CKK), which survives as a single handwritten Tibetan manuscript in a collection of rare Shang pa bKa' brgyud works.⁹⁸ The title is not their only point of disagreement, however; Vanaratna's translation varies substantially from the CKK, enough to suggest he was reading a different recension or perhaps a different but closely related text. Vanaratna's translation is capable if a bit coarse, and it is entirely possible he emended the text as he translated.⁹⁹ As will be discussed below, Vanaratna taught on an *amarasiddhiyantra* practice

⁹⁵ Mallinson 2016: passim; 2019: 2-6.

⁹⁶ VC 63r.2: śrīvirūpākṣeṇa kṛtam mahadamarasiddhiyantram.

⁹⁷ Mallinson 2019: 3; Schaeffer 2002: 520-23. It is unclear why Vanaratna chose to translate '*chi med* with *amara* instead of the expected *amṛta*. The Tibetan tradition was certainly aware of the standard title *Amṛtasiddhi*; the canonical translations of the *Amṛtasiddhi* (Öta. 5051) and its commentary the *Amṛtasiddhivṛtti* (Öta. 5056) both use *amṛta* in their phonetically-rendered Sanskrit titles. One possibility is that Vanaratna was completely unfamiliar with the Indic tradition and simply translated the Tibetan as he thought appropriate. Alternatively, the use of *amara* may reflect a convention among the Tibetan lineage holders from which it came down to Vanaratna.

⁹⁸ See Sumra 1977.

⁹⁹ We can see an example of both the obvious overlaps and clear divergences between Vanaratna's translation of the *Sūryaprabhā* and CKK by comparing their opening statements. The same pattern holds for the remainder of the text, but despite their divergences it is perfectly clear they are describing the same set of practices. Many of the differences between them seem to be based in Vanaratna's understanding, or lack thereof, of the Tibetan text. My comparison of the *Sūryaprabhā* and the '*Chi med grub pa'i 'khrul 'khor bzhugs stod* is preliminary, so some of the readings that follow are conjectural: VC 47r.8-9: natvā śrīśahajan nātham [em. śrīśahajanātham]

from the same lineage as the *Sūryaprabhā* and CKK at sNa dkar rtse, so the text in the codex may reflect adjustments made based on his teaching experience. A full comparison of the *Sūryaprabhā* and the 'Chi med grub pa'i 'khrul 'khor bzhugs stod is needed to determine their precise relationship.

Like the *Sūryaprabhā* in the codex, the CKK includes a *guruparamparā*, which overlaps precisely up to the author brTson 'grus seng ge.¹⁰⁰ Vanaratna gives us the following *guruparamparā* for the *Sūryaprabhā*:

***Sūryaprabhā*: VC 50v.9-10**

Sanskrit Translation	Tibetan Identity
Virūpākṣa	
Kṛṣṇabrāhmaṇa	
Kṛṣṇaśmaśāna	
Pūrvakarmanātha	Las stod mGon po (d.u.)
Dharmaprajñā	gNyan ston Chos kyi shes rab (1175 - 1255)
Buddhaśāstr	Sangs rgyas ston pa = brTson 'grus seng ge (1207-1278)
Kumārasiddhi	gZhon nu grub (d. 1319)
Bodhiprajñā	?
Puṇyadhvaśrībhadra	bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1312-75)?
Dharmaśrīdhvaśrībhadra	Chos dpal bzang po (1371-1439)

The list is headed by Virūpākṣa, the author of the *Amṛtasiddhi* and font of its lineage, followed by two additional Indian masters, Kṛṣṇabrāhmaṇa and Kṛṣṇaśmaśāna. Kṛṣṇabrāhmaṇa cannot be definitively identified, but he also appears (as Bram ze nag po) in the lineage of the CKK. So too does the curiously-named Kṛṣṇaśmaśāna, about whom a bit more can be said. This “Charnel Ground Kṛṣṇa,” is quite likely the Indian master known by the Tibetan epithet Dur khrod pa, who was the guru of an unnamed Indian yogin who first transmitted the *Amṛtasiddhi* lineage to gNyan

sarvasaṃkalpavarjitaṃ | sarvabhāvasvabhāvaṃ vai prajñopāyātmakaṃ vibhum | kāyacittāmarasya vai vācyasārasya saṃgrahaṃ | gṇaiḥ pūrṇaṃ sadāṃ nāyaṃ sarvadoṣanirākṛtaṃ || amarasiddher idaṃ yantraṃ buddhasiddhipradāyakaṃ | janmanīḥa likhiṣye 'haṃ svārādhitāḥ svaśiṣyakaiḥ | nyūnādhikaṃ parityajya yathā śrīmadguror vacaḥ | asmin eva mahāmūdrāsiddher āmnāyaśūcaṇaṃ | śrīvirūpākṣapādena kṛtaṃ sāmānyāvarjitaṃ [em. sāmānya°] | sarveṣāṃ api tantrāṇāṃ guhyārthasamgrahikṛtaṃ | prāptaṅ cābhyāsitaṃ yena devaiḥ sarvaiḥ sa pūjyate.

CKK 294.3-4: lus ngag yid gsum dad pas gus btud nas | brjod bya'i snying po lus sems 'chi med kyi | sangs rgyas tshe 'di nges par 'grub byed cing | nyes pa'i skyon sel yon tan rab rdzogs pa'i | 'chi med grub pa'i 'khrul 'khor [conj.]'dir brjod bya | de la rje btsun bīr wa pa'i | thun mong ma yin gdams pa' mchog | phyag rgya chen po mnam bśad pa'i | rgyud nams kun du sbas pa'i don | ming 'di gang gis thos pa yis | lha nams kun gyis mchog par 'gyur.

¹⁰⁰ cf. VC 50v.9-10 and CKK 294.1-3. The opening lineage in the CKK includes the Indians Virūpa, Kṛṣṇabrāhmaṇa, and Kṛṣṇaśmāsāna, followed by the Tibetans Las [sic] stod mgon po, and brTson 'grus seng ge's guru, gNyan ston Chos kyi shes rab. [bde chen rgyal po lhun grub 'dus ma byas | longs spyod rdzogs sku rdo rje 'chang chen dang | nus pa mthar phyin rtogs pa mchog gyur pa'i | rnal 'byor dbang phyug dpal ldan bir wa pas | dag pa gñis ldan lus sems 'chi med 'gyur | kun gyi [?] mchod rten bram ze nags po dang | yi dam mkha' 'gros dag pa mkha' (em. mkhas) spyod du | gshegs par lung bstan dur khrod nags po dang | bde chen phyag rgya nyon mongs rtsa 'dud grol | mka' spyod mngon gshegs las stod mgon po dang | phang lang mi thogs gnam lcags 'bar ba yang | me tog rgyan gyur sangs rgyas gnyan ston dang | rgyud pa'i bla ma dus gsum sangs rgyas la | lus ngag yid gsum dad pas gus btud nas...]

ston Chos kyi shes rab.¹⁰¹ Kurtis Schaeffer has convincingly argued that this is likely the Indian *siddha* Eṇadeva, who is known as Dur khrod pa in a number of Tibetan translations of works from the *Amṛtasiddhi* corpus.¹⁰²

The remaining lineage masters of the *Sūryaprabhā* are all Tibetans, some of whom can be identified with reasonable certainty. Following Kṛṣṇaśmaśāna comes the almost unintelligibly named Pūrvakarmanātha. This name might remain a mystery if were not for the lineage in the CKK. In brTson 'grus seng ge's list, a master named Las stod mGon po appears after Kṛṣṇaśmaśāna. *Las stod* is an orthographic variant of La stod, the region of central Tibet to the west of Nyang stod and south of the gTsang po River to Ding ri and the border with Nepal. Rather than translate or transliterate *las stod* as a toponym, Vanaratna treated each term individually, giving us the Sanskrit renderings *pūrva* (*stod*) and *karman* (*las*), and then reasonably translating *gon po* with *nātha*. This choice is curious because Vanaratna spent a great deal of time in La stod, so one would expect him to be aware of its different spellings and pronunciations. It is uncertain who precisely this “protector from La stod” is, but it could be La stod dKon mchog mkhar (1084-1171), a student of the Shang pa hierarch Khyung po rnal 'byor (1050-1127).

The next three Tibetans are prominent masters of a crossover Jo nang branch of the otherwise prominently Shang pa transmission line:¹⁰³ Dharmaprajñā is gNyan ston Chos kyi shes rab; Buddhāśāṣṭṛ is the author of the text, brTson 'grus seng ge, who is listed here using a translation of his epithet, *sangs rgyas ston pa*; and Kumārasiddhi is brTson 'grus seng ge's principal student gZhon nu grub (d. 1319).¹⁰⁴ Identification becomes less certain with the remaining names in the list. Bodhiprajñā, or *Byang chub shes rab, remains unknown, but Puṇyadhvaśrībhadra could possibly be the Sa skya hierarch bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1312-75), who also appears in the *guruparamparās* of *Marmopadeśa-2* and the *Rāgamārgopadeśa*.¹⁰⁵ This bSod nams rgyal mtshan was a teacher to Nya dbon Kun dga' dpal, the teacher of Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros who immediately preceded him as abbot of rTse chen monastery.

The *Sūryaprabhā* is the only text among the Sanskrit translations to include a *guruparamparā* that does not end with Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadra. Instead we find Dharmāśrīdhvajaśrībhadra, who may be Chos dpal bzang po (1371-1439) of Gung thang. This Sa skya pa master met Vanaratna when the *paṇḍita* passed through the kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang on his return to Nepal at the end of his second trip to Tibet. This would be their one and only meeting, as Chos kyi bzang po died a short time later in 1439 while Vanaratna was in Nepal. It therefore seems unlikely, given the totality of evidence, that Vanaratna translated and copied the *Sūryaprabhā* during this single meeting with Chos dpal bzang po. Considering it is the first among the *Amarasiddhi* texts, and given that Vanaratna received the other two from Kun dga'

¹⁰¹ In a biography of gNyan ston Chos kyi shes rab composed by Nam mkha' bsam grub rgyal mtshan, we find the following brief account of his initial reception of the *Amṛtasiddhi* lineage: “Thinking ‘I need to focus on buddhahood,’ I entered into a strict three-year retreat and engaged in practice. One day during that time I had a craving to [go out and] look around. When I did, I discovered a yogi had arrived. I asked him “Where did you come from? Who is your guru? What have you learned?” [He replied:] I came from India, my guru is *Śmaśānika (Dur khrod pa bya ba), and I have learned the **amarayantra*.” [190: ...sangs rgyas pa zhid la gtad dgos snyam nas lo gsum mtshams [dam] por bcad nas sgrub pa byas | de dus na nyin gcig blta snying 'dod pa zhid byung nas bltas pas rnal 'byor pa gcig byung nas khyod gang nas 'ongs | bla ma su yin | ci shes dris pas rgya gar nas 'ongs | bla ma dur khrod pa bya ba yod | 'chi med kyi 'phrul 'khor bya ba shes zer nas...]

¹⁰² Schaeffer 2002: 520.

¹⁰³ Smith 2001: 53-57

¹⁰⁴ Mei 2009: 93-5.

¹⁰⁵ This identification was first made by Harunaga Isaacson in his 2008 article on the Vanaratna Codex (5).

blo gros, it seems likely he received the *Sūryaprabhā* at the same time. It is possible then that Vanaratna left Chos dpal bzang po as the last member because he was the first master Vanaratna received the lineage from. Alternatively, the absence of both Kun dga' blo gros and Vanaratna from this list could be a simple oversight. Being the first of the lineages recorded in the codex, Vanaratna may have copied it exactly as he heard it from Kun dga' blo gros, who would not have included himself or Vanaratna in the lineage. Recognizing the oversight, he rectified it in the next *paramparās* by adding both his guru's name and his own in the subsequent lists.

The second of the three *Amṛtasiddhi* texts is the *Amarasiddhiyantraka* composed by Shes rab seng ge. The text appears to have been lost, making Vanaratna's translation the only available witness. But as the title indicates, it teaches a similar set of *yantras* as found in both the *Sūryaprabhā* and *Mahad-amarasiddhiyantra*. The *guruparamparā* has been described at length above, so our attention now turns to the *Mahad-amarasiddhiyantra*, the third and final *Amṛtasiddhi* work in the codex. It appears to be a translation of an otherwise unknown work whose author is not given, but whose origins are ascribed to Virūpākṣa. Vanaratna provides the following lineage:

Mahadamarasiddhiyantra: VC 55v.6-7

Sanskrit Translation	Tibetan Identity
Vajradhara	
Vajravārāhī	
Virūpākṣa	
Upendranātha	
Gorakṣa	
Prajñāśrī	
Māraṇḍedeva	
Dharmabhadra	Chos kyi bzang po (ca. 12th-13th century)
Dhīmanraśmi	?
Vinayadhara	?
Amoghadvaja	'Jam dbyangs don yod rgyal mtshan (1310-1344)?
Āryadeva	?
Ānandatidhvajaśrībhadra	Kun dga' blo gros rgyal msthan dpal bzang po
Vanaratna	

The lineage begins with the mythic fonts of many Vajrayāna lineages in India, Vajradhara and Vajravārāhī, followed by its first temporal lineage master, Virūpākṣa. The *paramparā* then briefly veers into Śaiva territory with Maheśvara, Upendranātha,¹⁰⁶ and Gorakṣa[nātha].¹⁰⁷ Uncertainty reigns with the next two members of the list, Prajñāśrī and, once again, Māraṇḍedeva. One is inclined to regard them as Indian lineage holders, but even about this we cannot be certain. If we were inclined to understand Prajñāśrī as a translation of a Tibetan name, it might be possible to

¹⁰⁶ Unidentified. Given his place in this lineage between Śiva (*maheśvara*) and Gorakṣa, this could be an alternate or mistaken reference to Matsyendranātha.

¹⁰⁷ The overlap of Buddhist and Śaiva lineage holders in the history of the *Amṛtasiddhi*'s transmission in India has been studied in Mallinson 2019.

identify him as Shes rab dpal (d.u.), an abbot of Man lung monastery in Nyang stod with vague lineage connections to the dPyal clan,¹⁰⁸ but such a claim is highly speculative and would entail Māraṅḍedeva to also be a Tibetan as he follows Prajñāśrī in this *paramparā*.

We are momentarily back on familiar ground with Dharmabhadrā, who also followed Māraṅḍedeva in the previous *paramparā* and so can once again be identified safely as the Tibetan master dPyal Lotsāwa Chos kyi bzang po. The identity of Dhīmanraśmi unfortunately remains as mystery. The most likely Tibetan equivalent, *bLo ldan 'od zer, does not point us in the direction of any known Tibetan figures who align with this work or its Tibetan lineage. Vinayavajra is also ambiguous, as the Tibetan equivalent, *'Dul ba 'dzin pa, is more commonly used as an epithet rather than a proper name. A number of Tibetans with that title were active in south-central Tibet, but the majority date to a period earlier than that of Chos kyi bzang po, and thus are unlikely references for Vinayadhara if their position in this lineage list is correct. Amoghadvaja, or *Don yod rgyal mtshan, also cannot be definitively identified, but this could be a reference to 'Jam dbyangs don yod rgyal mtshan (1310-1344), the thirteenth Sa skya throne holder. After these enigmatic figures the *guruparamparā* concludes with Āryadeva, who also appears in the previous lineage list, followed by Ānandatidhvajaśrībhadra and Vanaratna.

This lineage proves more opaque than that of the *Amarasiddhiyantraka*, but given the number of overlaps it would appear to have been transmitted through a similar line of Tibetan masters. Here again we find Dharmabhadrā/Chos kyi bzang po following Māraṅḍedeva as the most likely head of the lineage in Tibet, which finally reaches Vanaratna through the same pair of masters, Āryadeva and Ānandamati. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the lineage for the *Mahad-amarasiddhiyantra* was prevalent in the Nyang stod region just as was the lineage for the *Amarasiddhiyantraka*. The lineage for the *Sūryaprabha* is distinct in terms of lineage masters, and does not end with Ānandamati as do the other two, but given their largely Jo nang and Shang pa bKa' brygud affiliation, and the predominance of teachers from Nyang stod, it is reasonable to conclude that it was transmitted to Vanaratna in a setting similar to that of the other two *Amṛtasiddhi* texts.

The Amarasiddhi Collection at sNa dkar rtse

The three works connected to Virūpākṣa's lineage of the *Amṛtasiddhi* form a thematic sub-unit among the Tibetan translations in the codex, and as a unit they are the last of the texts in the codex that can be confidently coordinated with data from the biographies. Both the SG and NTSG report that after his stay at Byams pa gling—where the preceding text, the *Pañcakramopadeśa*, may have been incorporated—Vanaratna next visited sNa dkar rtse monastery on the shores of Ya 'brog mtsho. At sNa dkar rtse, Vanaratna is reported to have given a series of teachings on the *yantras* from Virūpākṣa's *Amṛtasiddhi* tradition, and specifically on a lineage that was passed down through Virūpākṣa's direct disciple Kṛṣṇabrāhmaṇa.¹⁰⁹ No specific texts are mentioned in the biographies, but the reference to a lineage passing through Kṛṣṇabrāhmaṇa suggests that Vanaratna's teachings were associated with the same lineage as the *Sūryaprabhā*. In the wording of bSod nams rgya mtsho, who was present for the teaching, Vanaratna gave instruction or practice advice (*gdams*), rather than formal teachings on a specific

¹⁰⁸ Vitali 2015: 562

¹⁰⁹ SG 47r.4-5: vi rü pā kṣa'i lugs kyi 'chi med grub pa'i gdams pa gngang. 'di ni vi rü pa'i dngos slob bram ze nag po zhabs la gspan par snang.

text.¹¹⁰

From the biographies we know that Vanaratna taught on Virūpākṣa's system of the *Amṛtasiddhi* at sNa dkar rtse, teachings from a lineage similar to the one reported for brTson 'grus seng ge's *Sūryaprabhā*. And because the other two texts teach a similar set of techniques and share transmission lineages, it is reasonable to assume all three were accessed on the same occasion. Whether or not Vanaratna acquired these texts at sNa dkar rtse or elsewhere is not clear, but we can at least be confident he had them in his possession by the time he arrived. Thus we can again connect the texts from the codex with specific scenes from Vanaratna's biographical narrative, and can do so in a way that suggests the sequence of the text follows the chronology of Vanaratna's travels in 1455. The section of the SG and NTSG that describe Vanaratna's activities at sNa dkar rtse are the last in which we find such explicit associations with material from the codex, but because Kun dga' blo gros features prominently in the lineages for the *Amṛtasiddhi* texts as well as all of the *guruparamparās* of the *upadeśas* that follow them, it is probable that Vanaratna translated and copied all of the Tibetan texts around the same time and in the same geographical area.

The Upadeśas

The remaining texts in the Vanaratna codex are an eclectic group of eleven instructions seemingly drawn from both Indian and Tibetan sources. Whereas the preceding three Tibetan works appear to be formal written compositions, the situation with the *upadeśas* is more opaque. The instructions cover a range of topics and yogic techniques arranged without discernable theme or intentional sequence. They vary in length from six and a half folio sides (the *Śalākapañcaka*) to less than a single line of text (the *Vāyukarma*), and with the exception of the final *Śrīvajrayoginyah Prāṇāyāmadhāranayor Upadeśa* that covers two and a half folio sides, they become progressively shorter towards the end of the codex. A few of the texts lack clear identifications of authorship, and only two, the *Śalākapañcaka* and *Hāḥ Ālambanasamudra*, can be definitively connected to a known work. Each of the *upadeśas* is marked as distinct with a brief preamble, usually consisting of a single line, that reports that the given instruction of such-and-such person (if a name is given at all) is here written down (*likhyate*), followed occasionally by a few descriptive words on the content. Beyond this it is impossible to determine if the individual instructions were actual compositions of the stated person, or if they belong to a body of oral instructions associated with that teacher by lineage and tradition. None of the *upadeśas* can be directly linked with Vanaratna's activities in 1453-55, but considering that this collection follows the body of *Amṛtasiddhi* texts, and that the four *guruparamparās* in this section of the codex also end with Ānandamati/Kun dga' blo gros, it is probable that they were received and translated by Vanaratna under the same or similar conditions as the three *Amṛtasiddhi* texts, which follow a similar line of transmission and can be tied to Vanaratna's travels in 1455. There is, however, no evidence external to the codex that suggests Vanaratna and Kun dga' blo gros met in 1455, so the precise settings in which Vanaratna received these instructions and compiled them

¹¹⁰ It is worth noting at this point that there may have been some uncertainty about Vanaratna's lineage of for the *Amarasiddhi* corpus. Someone in the audience at sNa dkar rtse questioned Vanaratna about his lineage, to which he replied that he had met Virūpākṣa in person and received the teachings from him at an Avalokiteśvara temple in Uruvāsa in Magadha, along with a second yogin identified only as "madman" (*pā gha la*; SG 47r.6). What is especially curious about this remark is that, according to gZhon nu dpal in the DN, it was at this temple and on this same occasion that Vanaratna received his prophecy to go to Tibet which, as described previously, differs markedly from his account of the prophecy given in the ŽP.

remains uncertain

The unit of *upadeśas* begins with the first of two instructions bearing the title *Marmopadeśa*, which will be referred to here as *Marmopadeśa-1*. No author or attribution is provided, but the brief preamble notes that the instruction concerns the difference between what is true/real and false/unreal. This introductory line also states that it was passed from ear to ear, pointing to a potentially oral setting for the text’s transmission.¹¹¹ The *guruparamparā* of the *Marmopadeśa-1* demonstrates a strong bKa’ brgyud affiliation:

Marmopadeśa-1: VC 55r.3-4

Sanskrit Translation	Tibetan Identity
Vajradhara	
Tailīpādā = Tilopā	
Nāropādā	
Mi la ras pa	Mi la ras pa (1040-1123)
Dharmēśvara	*Chos kyi dbang phyug = Mar pa chos kyi blo gros?
Guruvaīdya	sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen (1079-1153)
Dvīparap	gLing Ras pa Padma rdo rje (1128-88)
Jinaputra	?
Nāthavajra	rGod tshang pa mGon po rdo rje (1189-1258)
Punaḥkāntāra	Yang dgon pa rGyal mtshan dpal (1213-58)
Ratnavān	Rin chen ldan (b.1202)
Mahāsrāguha	Zur phug pa Rin chen dpal bzang (d.u)
Dhvajaśrī	’Ba’ ra ba rGyal mtshan dpal bzang (1310-91)
Matiśrī	?
Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadra	Kun dga’ blo gros rgyal msthan dpal bzang po
Vanaratna	

The list begins with the standard names of the Indian forbearers of the Tibetan bKa’ brgyud lineage: Vajradhara, Tilopā, and Nāropā. Nāropā is followed, surprisingly, not by Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros as is the case in *Śalākapañcaka* lineage below, but one Dharmēśvara, or Chos kyi dbang phyug in Tibetan translation. This could in fact refer to Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros, either as an honorific title, or because Vanaratna misunderstood the Tibetan. Mi la ras pa follows, thereby making Guruvaīdya surely none other than the physician (*vaidya*)-turned-guru sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen (1079-1153).

From here the lineage list begins to take on a distinctly ’Brug pa bKa’ brgyud character, and specifically that of the “upper” (*stod*) branch of the ’Brug pa tradition.¹¹² Dvīparapa refers to gLing Ras pa Padma rdo rje (1128-88), and Nāthavajra two places later to rGod tshang pa mGon po rdo rje (1189-1258). A figure named Jinaputra (Tib. *rgyal sras*) falls between them in the *guruparamparā*, but no obvious associations can be made as the term *rgyal sras* is a common

¹¹¹ VC 65v.8. The preamble reads in full: namo vajradharāya | śrīmad vajradharaṃ natvā sadasaddvayarūpakam likhyate guptacatvari kaṇṭāt kaṇṭe (em. kaṇṭa) pravāhataḥ.

¹¹² What follows draws from a lineage found in Mon rtse Kun dga’ dpal ldan’s (1408-75) *bKa’ brgyud gser ’phreng* (Smith 2001: 46-51).

honorific epithet. This could be the first 'Brug chen, gTsang pa rGya ras Ye shes rdo rje (1161-1211) who often falls between gLing ras pa and rGod tshang pa mGon po rdo rje in the Upper 'Brug pa lineage. rGod gtsang pa mGon po rdo rje was in turn the teacher of Yang dgon pa rGyal mtshan dpal (1213-58), whose name Vanaratna awkwardly translates with Pūnahkāntāra. Yang dgon pa was one of the most important disciples of Ko brag pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan, whose work *bGegs sel ha dmigs rgya mtsho* was translated by Vanaratna and copied into the codex as the *Hah Ālambanasamudra* (see below). Ratnvān then must refer to Yang dgon pa's student Rin chen ldan (b.1202), a lineage holder of both 'Brug pa and Sa skya lineages.¹¹³ Mahāsruguha is likely Zur phug pa Rin chen dpal bzang (d.u), with Dhvajaśrī corresponding to 'Ba' ra ba rGyal mtshan dpal bzang (1310-91), who follows Zur phug pa in the Upper 'Brug pa lineage. Matiśrī, the link between these 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud masters and Kun dga' blo gros, is less certain, as no one with that name is found in Upper 'Brug pa lineage history. rGyal mtshan dpal bzang is known to have a student by the name of gTsang pa bLo gros bzang po (1360-1423),¹¹⁴ but no clear connection can be established between him and Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros, who follows him as Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadra.

The next of the *upadeśas*, the *Śalākapañcaka*, has already been studied extensively in a 2015 Master's Thesis by Sonam Spitz. Though the *Śalākapañcaka* cannot be identified with a specific Tibetan work, Spitz has shown that its content aligns with literature of the "the five nails" (*śalākapañca/ gzer lnga*) genre, a set of practices for dispelling obstacles (*bgegs sel*), especially those related to illness.¹¹⁵ In the codex, the *Śalākapañcaka* is introduced as "the essential core of entire tradition," and no statement of authorship is provided.¹¹⁶ The *guruparamparā* shows clear bKa' brgyud and Jo nang affiliations, and many of the masters have been identified by Spitz:¹¹⁷

Śalākapañcaka: VC 68v.6-9

Sanskrit Translation	Tibetan Identity
Tailīpādā = Tilopā	
Nāropāda	
Marpa	Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros (1012-97)
Mi la ras pa	Mi la ras pa (1040-1123)
Gdhem liñ pa	gLing kha ba (d.u.)?
Yer pa	Mal yer pa (1105-1170)
Žañ	bLa ma Zhang, brTson 'grus grags pa (1123-93)
Lha phuk pa	Lha phyug mkhar ba Nyi zla 'od (1135-1215)
Bodhiśrī	
Jñānaratna	Shar pa ye shes rin chen (1248–1294)?
Ānandaprajñā	?
Jinajñāna	Byang bsem rgyal ba ye she (1247–1320)
Guṇasāgara	Yon tan rgya mtsho (1260-1327)

¹¹³ BA 405-6.

¹¹⁴ BA 406.

¹¹⁵ Spitz 2015: 8-10; 13-15.

¹¹⁶ VC 68r.4: natvā śrīśahajam nātham vākpaṭhātītagocaram likhyate nikhilāmnāyasāram śalākapañcakam.

¹¹⁷ Spitz 2015: 10-13.

Sarvajñā	Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292-1361)?
Matidhvaja	Sa bza mati paṅ chen bLo gros rgyal mtshan (1294-1376)
Devendra	Lha dbang rdo rje rin chen (ca. 14th century)
Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadrā	Kun dga' blo gros rgyal msthan dpal bzang po
Vanaratna	

The list begins, like the previous lineage, with the Indian *siddhas* Tilopā and Nāropā and the founding members of the Tibetan bKa' brgyud lineage, Mar pa lo tsā wa Chos kyi blo gros and Mi la ras pa. The identity of Gdhem gliñ pa is uncertain, but Spitz is reasonable in speculating that this could be gLing kha ba (d.u.),¹¹⁸ a disciple of Mi la ras pa and teacher to the next figure in the list, Mal yer pa (1105-1170).¹¹⁹ From him the lineage passes to bLa ma Zhang, brTson 'grus grags pa (1123-93), founder of the Tshal pa branch of the bKa' brgyud school.¹²⁰ The lineage stays in the Tshal pa line for at least another generation, being passed to bLa ma Zhang's disciple Lha phyug mkhar ba Nyi zla 'od (1135-1215). The identity of Bodhiśrī is uncertain; Spitz puts forward the Sa skya master mKham chen rgan lhas pas (d.u.), also known as Byang chub dpal, but no direct connections can be drawn between this master and those who precede and follow him.¹²¹ The next two figures are also speculative; Jñānaratna could be Shar pa Ye shes rin chen (1248-1294), who was a Sa skya master and teacher to the founding members of the Jo nang tradition that is well-represented in the lineage that follows. This fact led Spitz to conjecture, albeit very tenuously, that Ānandaprajñā is Vanaratna's corrupted rendering of Kun spangs zhangs, the first Jo nang hierarch, but no further evidence can confirm this identification.¹²² Shar pa Ye shes rin chen was the teacher of Byang sems rgyal ba ye shes (1247-1320), the second Jo nang hierarch and the likely identity of Jinajñāna here. From this point the lineage of the *Śalākapañcaka* remains in Jo nang hands for a few generations, passing to the third Jo nang throne holder Yon tan rgya mtsho (Guṇasagara; 1260-1327), then to the "the omniscient" (Tib. *kun mkhyen*) Dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan (Sarvajñā; 1292-1361) and his disciple Sa bzang mati paṅ chen bLo gros rgyal mtshan (Matidhvaja; 1294-1376). Next comes Devendra, about whom little can be said. Spitz conjectures that Devendra is Lha dbang rdo rje rin chen (ca. 14th), presumably because a Tibetan master with this name is known to be a student of Sa bzang mati paṅ chen, but little else commends him as Devendra. Being the lineage holder preceding Kun dga' blo gros, it seems more likely that this is Āryadeva who appears in two other lineages from the codex, and who can be directly linked both Nyang stod and Thar pa gling monastery. Ānandamati and Vanaratna naturally end the list.

After the *Śalākapañcaka* comes one of the more intriguing entries in the codex, the *Haḥ Ālambanasamudra*. It is introduced as an "instruction [on the syllable] *haḥ* that pacifies all

¹¹⁸ Spitz 2015: 11.

¹¹⁹ Spitz (2015: 38) is also correct in emending the codex here. VC 68r.7 reads *zhang yer pa*, which Spitz emends to simply *yer pa*. No source attests to Mal yer pa bearing the epithet Zhang, and because Lama Zhang appears next in the lineage list, this seems to be a slip of Vanaratna's pen. For a brief biography of Mal yer pa, see Yamamoto 2012: 59-62.

¹²⁰ Yamamoto 2012 offers a comprehensive study of this influential and controversial twelfth-century master.

¹²¹ Spitz 2015: 12. Spitz's assertion is based on a lineage master named bLa ma Khams pa appearing after Lha phyug pa Nyi zla 'od, or before Shar pa ye shes rin chen in different lineage lists associated with the Tibetan transmission of the *gzer lnga* genre.

¹²² Ibid.

illness,¹²³ and is explicitly identified as the work of Ko brag pa in its brief colophon.¹²⁴ Ko brag pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1170-1249) was a famous master active in the Ding ri region of southern Tibet. Though few materials on his life and works remain, he was known as a master of the Kālacakra, Zhi byed, and Lam 'bras systems, and was a prominent figure in the early 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud lineage.¹²⁵ In this capacity he was teacher to Yang dgon pa rGyal mtshan dpal, who we met above in the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud lineage for *Marmopadeśa*-1. Apart from a small collection of songs recorded in the *Khams gsum 'dran bral grub thob ko rag pa'i mgur 'bum*, none of Ko brag pa's works survive in their original Tibetan. We do know, however, that a text by the name of *bGegs sel ha dmigs rgya mtsho* is regarded as one of his most important compositions.¹²⁶ Though it is impossible to compare the two works, this title is the clear basis for Vanaratna's translation *Haḥ Ālambanasamudra*, making this Sanskrit translation the sole extant witness of Ko brag pa's lost work. Lacking a *guruparamparā* for this text, we can only assume that it followed lines of transmission similar to those above to reach Kun dga' blo gros and Vanaratna, or perhaps it was newly available to Vanaratna at the time and in the location he copied the lineages he received from Kun dga' blo gros. The lack of a lineage history suggests the possibility that Vanaratna translated and copied the text without receiving formal instruction or transmission.

Next comes the second of the *upadeśas* with the title *Marmopadeśa*. *Marmopadeśa*-2 was the first of the works from the codex to receive scholarly attention when Harunaga Isaacson presented his study of the Tibetan names in the *guruparamparā*.¹²⁷ The lineage runs as follows:

***Marmopadeśa*-2: VC 68v.6-9**

Sanskrit Translation	Tibetan Identity
Virūpākṣa	
Ḍombīheruka	
Alalavajra	
Garbharīpāda	
Jayaśrījñāna	
Aprāptacandra (=Durjayacandra)	
Siṃhavajra	
Vīravajra	
Gaṅgādhara (= Gayadhara)	
Śākyajñāna	'Brog mi lo tsā wa Shā kya ye shes (ca.990-1050)
Śīlāpagrha	Se ston Kun rig (1029-116)
Matulakāntāra	Zhang ston pa Chos 'bar (1053-1135)
Ānandagarbha	Kun dga' snying po (1092-1158)
Puṇyāgra	bSod nams rtse mo (1142-82)
Kīrtidhvaja	Grag pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216)

¹²³ VC 73v.7: namo gurubyah | sarvarogaśāntīkaraṇa haḥ upadeśo likhyate.

¹²⁴ VC 75v.10: kobrakpādena viracita haḥ ālmabanasamudrah samāpta iti.

¹²⁵ Stearns 2000: 3-5.

¹²⁶ Stearns 2000: 26, note 44.

¹²⁷ Isaacson 2008: 3-5.

Ānandadhvaja	Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182-1251)
Āryadharmarāja	Chos rgyal 'phags pa bLo gros rgyal mtshan (1235-80)
Ratnaśrī	dKon mchog dpal (ca. 12th/13th century)
Vastraśīlaguha	Na bza' brag phug pa bSod nams dpal (1277-ca.1350)
Puṇyadhvaja	bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1312-75)
Ānandaśrī	Nya dbon Kun dga' dpal (1285-1379)
Gurusiddhi	Man lung Gu ru bSod nams dpal (b.1239)
Ānandamatidhvajaśrībhadra	Kun dga' blo gros rgyal msthan dpal bzang po
Vanaratna	

Though the text, which is attributed to Ḍombiheruka,¹²⁸ has not been identified, most of the Tibetan lineage masters have already been unmasked by Isaacson, showing the work's clear pedigree in the Lam 'bras system of the Sa skya school. To summarize Isaacson's findings, the list begins with a series of nine Indian masters who are familiar to lineages of the Sa skya tradition. Of specific note is Vanaratna's mistaken rendering of Durjayacandra as Aprāptacandra. Isaacson argues this mistake reveals the oral setting for Vanaratna's reception of the teaching, one in which he misheard the Tibetan *mi thob* (*aprāpta*) instead of *mi thub* (*durjaya*).¹²⁹ Isaacson also corrects confusion regarding the last of the Indian masters in the lineage, which should read Gayadhara instead of Gaṅgādhara. From this point the list of Tibetan masters begins, starting with Śākyajñāna, which refers to 'Brog mi lo tsā wa Śā kya ye shes (ca.990-1050). He is followed by Se ston Kun rig (Śīlāpagrha; 1029-116) and Zhang ston pa Chos 'bar (Mātulakāntāra; 1053-1135). Next come the five hierarchs of the Sa skya lineage: Kun dga' snying po (Ānandagarbha; 1092-1158), bSod nams rtse mo (Puṇyāgra; 1142-82), Grags pa rgyal mtshan (Kīrtidhvaja; 1147-1216), Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (Ānandadhvaja; 1182-1251), and Chos rgyal 'phags pa bLo gros rgyal mtshan (Āryadharmarāja; 1235-80). Ratnaśrī refers to dKon mchog dpal (ca. twelfth-thirteenth century), and Vastraśīlaguha is Na bza' brag phug pa bSod nams dpal (1277-ca.1350). Puṇyadhvaja, familiar to us from lineage list of the *Sūryaprabhā*, is bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1312-75), and Ānandaśrī refers to Nya dbon Kun dga' dpal (1285-1379), the Jo nang hierarch who was one of Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros's teachers. Between Kun dga' dpal and his disciple Kun dga' blo gros appears the name Gurusiddhi, whom Isaacson speculated could be Man lung Gu ru bSod nams dpal (b.1239). Isaacson's suggestion is a tenable one, as bSod nams dpal, also known as Grub thob Man lung gu ru, was born into the Bran clan of Nyang stod, studied with members of the dPyal clan, and was a teacher to Shes rab seng ge, the author of the *Amarasiddhiyantraka*.¹³⁰ If this identification is correct, his place immediately ahead of Kun dga' blo gros is impossible, suggesting that the order of Ānandaśrī and Gurusiddhi should be reversed. As expected, Kun dga' blo gros and Vanaratna end the list.

The final *guruparamparā* in the codex belongs to the *Rāgamārgopadeśa*, which is introduced as a work of (an) Indrabhūti.¹³¹ The complete lineage is as follows:

¹²⁸ VC 76r.1: namo gurubhyaḥ | ādināthaṃ namaskṛtvā sūnyāśūnyasvabhāvakaṃ ḍombīheruka āmnāyaṃ likhyate 'kṣarasādhanam.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 5. His plausible argument, as well as an alternate perspective, will be discussed further below.

¹³⁰ Vitali 2015: 559-61.

¹³¹ VC 76v.2: indrabhūter (em.; indrabhūte ms.) rāgamārgopadeśo likhyate.

Rāgamārgopadeśa: VC 77r.3-5

Sanskrit Translation	Tibetan Identity
Śrī Mahāsukha	
Mahā-Indrabhūti	
Śrī Brahmāpāda	
Brāhmaṇī Siddhivajra [sic?]	
Indrabhūti Antarāla	
Ācarya Upamapāda	
Jñānabhūti	
Śreyo Bhūti	
Padmavajra	
Ḍombīheruka	
Antaraṅgapāda	
Devī Bhramarapādma [sic]	
Devabhaginī Lakṣmī	
Indrabhūti Choṭa	
Brāhmaṇa Ratnavajra	
Kaśmīra Prajñāgupta	
Śākyajñāna	'Brog mi lo tsā wa Shā kya ye shes (ca. 990-1050)
Ratnarāja	'Khon dKon mchog rgyal po (1034-1102)
Sān Gonpava	Zhang ston pa Chos 'bar (1053-1135)
Ānandagarbha	Kun dga' snying po (1092-1158)
Puṇyāgra	bSod nams rtse mo (1142-82)
Kīrtidhvaja	Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216)
Ānandadhvaśrībhadra	Sa skya Paṅdita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182-1251)
Dharmarāja	Chos rgyal 'phags pa bLo gros rgyal mtshan (1235-80)
Guṇaśrīsiddha	Grub chen Yon tan dpal (1237-1323)
Śīlaguha	Na bza' brag phug pa bSod nams dpal (1277-ca.1350)
Puṇyadhvaśrībhadra	bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1312-75)
Dharaṇīśrī	gZungs kyi dpal ba (1306-89)
Ratnarāja	'Khon rDo rje rin chen (d.u.)
Ānandaśrī	Nya dbon Kun dga' dpal (1285-1379)
Ānandatidhvajaśrībhadra	Kun dga' blo gros rgyal msthan dpal bzang po
Vanaratna	

The Indian lineage for this work passes through a series of masters who are collectively linked to Uḍḍiyāna in the ninth and tenth centuries, and corresponds closely with the lineage of the *Phyag rgya'i lam skor* (PLK), a work attributed to Indrabhūti the Younger and transmitted in Tibet within the Sa skya tradition. Like the PLK, the *Rāgamārgopadeśa* also follows a Sa skya line of transmission, one similar to that of *Marmopadeśa-2*, above. The Indian lineage is unique not only for its specific geographical ties to Uḍḍiyāna, but also for its inclusions of a number of

prominent female adepts from the region, and so merits close attention.

Authorship of the PLK is attributed to Indrabhūti, in this case Indrabhūti the Younger, and includes all three known Indrabhūtis—elder, intermediate, and younger—each believed to have been kings of Uḍḍiyāna.¹³² The anonymous Tibetan compiler of the PLK,¹³³ who provides a *paramparā* with explanatory notes, states that he extracted the lineage of Indian masters from the *Tattvāmṛtopadeśa*,¹³⁴ which, apart from a few slight modifications and the introduction of scribal errors, appears to be correct. The compiler was also helpful for his notes that provide additional information on the Indian lineage and its reception by the Sa skya pas in the eleventh century. Taken together, these two sources offer a number of clarifications for the *guruparamparā* found in the *Rāgamārgopadeśa*.¹³⁵ The lineages of the *Rāgamārgopadeśa* and the PLK align as follows:

<i>Rāgamārgopadeśa</i>	<i>Phyag rgya'i lam skor</i>
Vajradhara	*
Śrī Mahāsukha	Śrī Sukha (dPal bde ba)
Mahā-Indrabhūti	*
Śrī Brahmāpāda	Brahmāpāda (Tshangs pa)
Brāhmaṇī	Brāhmaṇī Siddhavajrā (Bram ze mo ni rdo rje grub)
Siddhavajra	*
Indrabhūtir Antarāla	King Vajrabhūti (Badzra bhū ti rgyal)
Ācārya-Upamapāda	Upamācārya (dPe yi slob dpon)
*	Gos bral
Jñānabhūti	King Jñānabhūti (Dzā na bhū ti rgyal)
Śreyobhūti	Śreyobhūti (Śrī o bhū ti)
Padmavajra	Padmavajra (Padma badzra)
Ḍombīheruka	Ḍombīheruka (Ḍo mbī)
Antaraṅgapāda	Antaraṅgapāda (Yan lag bar ma'i zhabs)
Devī Bhramarapadma [sic]	Devī Bhramarapadma (Lha mo bung ba'i pad ma)
Devabhaginī Lakṣmī	Princess Lakṣmīṅkarā (Lha lcam legs smin)
Indrabhūti-choṭa	Indrabhūti the Younger (<i>chung ba</i>)
Brāhmaṇa-Ratnavajra	Ratnavajra (Rin chen rdo rje)
Kaśmira-Prajñāgupta	Prajñāgupta (Shes rab gsang ba)

¹³² There is a considerable amount of orthographic inconsistency in the Tibetan texts, which at times render the name of one or all these three Indian masters as Indrabodhi or Indrabuddhi. In the codex Vanaratna is consistent in using Indrabhūti in all cases, thus the name has been standardized as such here.

¹³³ All that can be said for certain is that he must post-date 'Broḡ mi Lotsāwa and dKon mchog rgyal po, both of whom are referenced in the lineage at the end of the PLK. One is inclined to think the text was arranged and ancillary material composed by 'Jam dbyangs blo gter dbang po (1847-1914), who arranged the collection in which the PLK is found, but the same lineage and similar (but not identical) explanatory interlinear notes are found in A mes zhabs's (1597-1659) '*Khon ston 'jam pa'i dbyangs kun dga' bsod nams lhun grub kyis rjes su bzung ba'i tshul gyi sarga*.

¹³⁴ PLK 239v.5: indra bhū ti chung bas mdzad pa'i de kho na nyid kyi bdud rtsi'i man ngag las... The lineage in the *Tattvāmṛtopadeśa* (Tōh 1337) can be found on f. 323v.5-6.

¹³⁵ The PLK is also helpful in providing the Tibetan equivalents for Vanaratna's Sanskrit back-translations of these Indian lineage masters.

'Brog mi Lotsāwa Śākya Ye śes
'Khon dKon mchog rgyal po

'Brog mi Lotsāwa Śākya Ye shes
'Khon dKon mchog rgyal po

The lists are in near perfect agreement, and with a single exception their divergences are due to points of confusion. The lineage in the codex presents interpretive challenges because of the way Vanaratna delineated the members of the list in his colophon. In all of the preceding colophons Vanaratna is consistent in separating individual members of the *paramparās* with a punctuating vertical stroke (*danḍa*), so that each line of text contains the name of a single lineage holder.¹³⁶ In the *Rāgamārgopadeśa*, however, he either breaks with this practice or was uncertain about which Tibetan terms constituted a distinct name and what was an epithet. Thus from our perspective it is difficult to clearly identify the lineage members without the assistance of the *Tattvāmṛta* and PLK. The confusion begins at the head of the list where, based on his previous practices, Vanaratna appears to name two distinct lineage masters: Śrī Mahāsukha and Indrabhūti the Elder.¹³⁷ Though agreeing in case, number, and gender, the two are separated by the same punctuation used in the previous colophons. The PLK, on the other hand, begins the list with Śrī Sukha (dPal bde), and makes no mention of Indrabhūti the Elder. According to the PLK's brief commentary on the *guruparamparā*, *śrīsukha* is an epithet of the senior Indrabhūti, not a separate figure as seems to be recorded in the *Rāgamārgopadeśa*.¹³⁸ We do, however, find an alternate account of this lineage that conforms more closely with Vanaratna's reading. In his *'Khon ston 'jam pa'i dbyangs kun dga' bsod nams lhun grub kyis rjes su bzung ba'i tshul gyi sarga*, A mes zhabs (1597-1659) first replicates the lineage found in the PLK under the heading "The Lineage of Indrabhūti's System,"¹³⁹ following which he provides an alternate version which begins with Śrī Mahāsukha followed by Indrabhūti.¹⁴⁰ Though they are listed distinctly, there is nothing to indicate if they are to be read as separate figures, or if the former is intended as an epithet of the latter as in the PLK. It is clear that the lineage Vanaratna received from Kun dga' blo gros aligns more closely with the second list, but it seems Vanaratna was unsure if the two lines constituted two separate lineage masters, and so simply replicated the structure of the Tibetan.

The *Rāgamārgopadeśa* and PLK are in agreement about the following member, Brahmāpāda,¹⁴¹ (Tshangs pa'i zhabs), about whom we know nothing more. Uncertainty also haunts Vanaratna's next entry, which reads *brāhmaṇī siddhavajraḥ* as a single line of text. These seem to be two distinct figures because of their lack gender agreement, but because *brāhmaṇī* is descriptive and not a proper name, the identity of this figure remains obscure. The PLK reads *bram ze mo ni rdo rje zhabs*,¹⁴² with the topical marker *ni* seeming to identify the *brāhmaṇī* as Siddhavajrā. That the Sa skya tradition understood this to be the case is further confirmed by the lineage history as reproduced in A mes zhabs's work, where he adds an interlinear note identifying Siddhavajrā as a yoginī (*rnal 'byor ma*).¹⁴³ The Indian tradition, however, supports

¹³⁶ The exception is the *Śakālapañcaka*, which gives the lineage in prose at the beginning of the text, rather than in list form in the colophon. See VC 68r.4-9.

¹³⁷ VC 77r.3: śrīmahāsukhaḥ | mahā indrabhūtiḥ.

¹³⁸ PLK 240r.2: dang po dpal bde'i zhal snga zhes bya ba ni | indra bhū ti chen po phyag na rdo rje'i sprul pa yin.

¹³⁹ A mes zhabs 5r.3: indra bo dhi'i lam gyi brgyud pa.

¹⁴⁰ A mes zhabs 5r.5: dpal bde ba chen po | indra bo dhi.

¹⁴¹ The PLK simply reads *tshangs pa* here, but the Tibetan translation of the *Tattvāmṛtopadeśa* on which it based reads *tshangs pa'i zhabs* (323v.4). Though it is obvious that the compiler of the PLK drew directly from the *Tattvāmṛta* as stated, this is not the only scribal error to creep into his rendering, as will be seen below.

¹⁴² PLK 239v.6.

¹⁴³ A mes zhabs 5r.3: bram ze mo ni rdo rje grub rnal 'byor ma.

reading them as two separate figures. In her *Sahajasiddhipaddhati*, the female adept of Uḍḍiyāna, Lakṣmīnkarā, describes a teacher-student relationship between one Brāhmaṇī Vajravatī and a male Siddhavajra, supporting Vanaratna’s reading.¹⁴⁴ The clearest reading, however, comes from the *Tattvāmṛta*, which gives her name in full: *bram ze mo ni rdo rje ldan*, that is, Brāhmaṇī Vajravatī.¹⁴⁵ Thus it would appear that at some point in the transmission of the Sa skya lineage, the brāhmaṇī Vajravatī (rDo rje ldan) was confused and conflated with the male Siddhavajra (rDo rje grub). Based on the *Sahajasiddhipaddhati* we can be reasonably confident that the *brāhmaṇī* listed by Vanaratna in the *Rāgamārgopadeśa* is meant to be Brāhmaṇī Vajravatī, the teacher of Siddhavajra.

Next, we meet the second Indrabhūti in the *Rāgamārgopadeśa paramparā*, the “intermediate” (*antarāla*) Indrabhūti. In the *Tattvāmṛta* and PLK, this position is occupied by king Vajrabhūti, who the commentator confirms as the intermediate Indrabhūti.¹⁴⁶ The lists remain in alignment for the next member as well, Upamācārya, after whom the lists diverge briefly. The *Tattvāmṛta* and PLK both read *gos bral*, “unclothed,” next, but a person of this name is absent from the *Rāgamārgopadeśa*. A mes zhabs adds an interlinear note in his reproduction of the *paramparā*, adding that *go bral* refers synonymously to *gcer bu*, “naked,”¹⁴⁷ which has a Jaina ring to it (as *nirgrantha*), but little else can be said about this lineage master who is missing from Vanaratna’s list.

The remainder of the two *paramparās* are in agreement, but with a few issues to be resolved. Both lists include Jñānabhūti, which the PLK identifies as “king” Jñānabhūti. He is followed in both lineages by Śreyobhūti,¹⁴⁸ Padmavajra, and Ḍombīheruka. Following these three comes the curious figure Vanaratna renders as Antaraṅgapāda, who is otherwise unattested in Indic sources. In our Tibetan sources his name appears alternatively as *Yan lag bar pa/bar ma/bar ma’i zhabs*,¹⁴⁹ and while Vanaratna’s back translation is a fair literal rendering, it falls oddly on the Sanskrit-trained ear. As this name is found only in this lineage list, no additional information is available to clarify his identity. The same is true for the next member of the *guruparamparā*, Devī Bhramarapadma, which is Vanaratna’s translation of *lha mo bung ba’i padma*.¹⁵⁰ Outside of this lineage, there are no references to a female Indian teacher of this name in either Indic or Tibetan sources, certainly none that can confirm the accuracy of Vanaratna’s back-translation.

The next figure in the lineage is the well-documented female adept, princess Lakṣmīnkarā

¹⁴⁴ Tōh 2261: 11r.2-13v.3.

¹⁴⁵ Thus it is unclear if the PLK’s reading of *rdo rje žabs*, which is purportedly taken from the *Tattvāmṛta*, represents a scribal error, deliberate emendation, or genuine variant. Curiously, Siddhavajra is absent from *Tattvāmṛta*’s lineage, which skips over him to the next figure in the PLK and *Rāgamārgopadeśa*, Vajrabhūti/the Intermediate Indrabhūti.

¹⁴⁶ PLK 240r.2: śrī vajra bhū ti rgyal ba ni indra bhū ti bar pa.

¹⁴⁷ A mes žabs 5r.4: gos bral [gcer bu] zhal snga de bzhin no.

¹⁴⁸ Both the *Rāgamārgopadeśa* and PLK read the name of this figure as Śreyobhūti, but if we go back to the *Tattvāmṛta*, the source for the PLK, we find instead Śrī Ogabuddhi (Tōh 1337, 323v.5: de bzhin śrī o ga bu ddi), which appears to be an error corrected by the later tradition. This “error” is replicated in multiple recensions of the bsTan ’gyur, however.

¹⁴⁹ The *Tattvāmṛta* reads *yan lag rab ma* (323v.5), but this is presumably a scribal error and should be emended to *yan lag bar ma*.

¹⁵⁰ Here again we find a lack of gender agreement in Vanaratna’s translation, as Brahmarapadma is declined in the masculine after the feminine Devī. Given the lack of syntactical gender markers in Tibetan, the only evidence to suggest this is a female adept comes from A mes zhabs, who adds an interlinear note identifying her as a *ḍākinī*: (5r.5) *bung ba’i mkha’ ’gro ma padma de bzhin no*.

of Uddiyāna.¹⁵¹ In her autobiography, recorded in the *Sahajasiddhipaddhati*, she identifies herself as the younger sister of King Indrabhūti,¹⁵² which is likely why Vanaratna refers to her as *devabhaginī* in his *guruparamparā*. Her autobiography tells us that, despite being her elder brother, Lakṣmī instructed Indrabhūti on a number of points of practice, making it fitting that she precedes him in the lineage. The list next include Indrabhūti the Younger, whom Vanaratna interestingly refers to using the more colloquial *choṭa*, rather than a Sanskrit term. Indrabhūti the Younger, author of the *Tattvāmṛta* and PLK, is naturally the final member of the *paramparās* in those works. In the lineage of the *Tattvāmṛta*, which is replicated in the PLK, Indrabhūti the Younger refers to himself in the first person,¹⁵³ and it is only in the commentary of the PLK’s compiler that we are told that this refers to Indrabhūti.¹⁵⁴

The unnamed compiler of the PLK uses his explanatory notes to report the final members of the Indian lineage beyond Indrabhūti the Younger. These include Indrabhūti’s student, the *brāhmaṇa* Ratnavajra, followed by the “Red Paṇḍita” Prajñāgupta.¹⁵⁵ Vanaratna’s list agrees with this sequence, and follows A mes zhabs alternate lineage in explicitly noting that Prajñāgupta hailed from Kashmir (Tib. *kha che*). Like Vanaratna’s list, the Tibetan compiler of PLK tells us that ’Brog mi Lotsāwa Śākya Ye shes and ’Khon dKon mchog rgyal po (1034-1102) were the first Tibetan recipients of the PLK, both receiving it directly from Prajñāgupta in the late tenth/early eleventh century.¹⁵⁶ The lineages found in the *Tattvāmṛta*, PLK, and its reproduction by A mes zhabs all end here. In the final stanza of his lineage history, the compiler of the PLK adds that, following ’Brog mi and dKon mchog rgyal po, Indrabhūti’s lineage was upheld by “the great masters of the Sa skyā tradition,”¹⁵⁷ a fact clearly observable in the remainder of Vanaratna’s *guruparamparā* for the *Rāgamārgopadeśa*.

Vanaratna’s *guruparamparā* for the *Rāgamārgopadeśa* overlaps to some degree with the Sa skyā lineage of *Marmopadeśa-2*, but is distinct enough to represent a separate line of transmission from the Sa skyā hierarchs to Grub chen Kun dga’s blo gros. The Sa skyā lineage begins with ’Brog mi, as it does in *Marmopadeśa-2*, who is followed by a member unique to this list, ’Khon dKon mchog rgyal po, a disciple of ’Brog mi and father to Kun dga’ snying po. Kun dga’ snying po follows two positions later, but between them is a name that reads Sāñ Gonpava. The most likely Tibetan candidate is Zhang Chos ’bar (1053-1135), who was student of dKon mchog rgyal po and teacher to Kun dga’ snying po. Zhang Chos ’bar appears in *Marmopadeśa-2* as Mātulakāntāra, which translates Zhang dgon pa ba, one of Chos ’bar’s alternate names. Here Vanaratna simply chose to phoneticize rather than translate this epithet.

Next comes the familiar set of five Sa skyā hierarchs who also appear in *Marmopadeśa-2*: Kun dga’ snying po (Ānandagarbha), bSod nams rtse mo (Puṇyāgra), Grags pa rgyal mtshan (Kīrtidhvaja), Sa skyā Paṇḍita Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (Ānandadhvaja), and Chos rgyal ’phags pa bLo gros rgyal mtshan (Dharmarāja). The *Rāgamārgopadeśa*’s lineage deviates momentarily from *Marmopadeśa-2* by including Sa skyā Paṇḍita’s disciple Grub chen Yon tan dpal (Guṇaśrīśiddhi; 1237-1323) in place of dKon chog dpal. The two lists align with Na bza’ brag

¹⁵¹ For a sustained treatment of Lakṣmī’s life and works see Kragh 2011 and 2018.

¹⁵² Tōh 2261: 12v.2.

¹⁵³ Tōh 1337: 323v.; PLK 240r.1-2. bdag kyang dang por grub pa yin.

¹⁵⁴ PLK 240r.2: bdag kyang dang por grub pa yin zhes bya ba ni indra bhū ti chung ba yin no.

¹⁵⁵ PLK 240r.3: indra bhū ti chung ba’i slob ma | jo bo bram ze rin chen rdo rje | de la jo bo dmar po zhes bya ba shes rab gsang bas gsan pa yin no.

¹⁵⁶ PLK 240r.4-5: dpal shes rab gsang bas | bla ma chen po ’brog mi dang | dge bshes ’khon ston dkon mchog rgyal po la sogs pa mang po la gsungs.

¹⁵⁷ PLK 240r.5: thams cad kyi gdams ngag ni bla ma chen po sa skyā pa la mnga’.

phug pa bSod nams dpal (Śilāguha) and bSod nams rgyal mtshan (Puṇyadhvaja), but then deviate again. In *Marmopadeśa-2* bSod nam rgyal mtshan is followed directly by Nya dbon Kun dga' dpal, but here two additional names intervene. The first is bSod nam rgyal mtshan's disciple gZungs kyi dpal ba (Dhāraṇīśrī; 1306-89), who belonged to the rDzong branch of the Sa skya tradition.¹⁵⁸ The second, Ratnavajra, can be tentatively identified as 'Khon rDo rje rin chen (d.u.), who according to the *Myang chos 'byung* was among Grub chen Kun dga's blo gros's many teachers.¹⁵⁹ The *Rāgamārgopadeśa's guruparamparā* ends with Nya dbon Kun dga' dpal (Ānandaśrī), Kun dga' blo gros, and Vanaratna.

There are seven additional *upadeśas* at the end of the codex, and apart from the final work, the *Śrīvajrayoginyāḥ Prāṇāyāmadhāraṇayor Upadeśa* which covers five folio sides, the remaining instructions are exceedingly short, some taking up no more than a single line. They cover a diverse range of topics and are attributed to a number of different authors, some of whom cannot be identified. The first instruction that follows the *Rāgamārgopadeśa* is the *Cūṣaṇopadeśa*, a work comprising two lines of the codex and attributed to Ḍombīheruka. Following this is the *Vāyukārma*, a work said to be composed by one Goputra, but nothing is known of an Indian or Tibetan author with this name. Next comes the *Sugatyupapatti Upadeśa* authored by Mahāśikharadharmasvāmin, about which more will be said below, followed by Vibhūticandra's *Kalpaśamopadeśa*. Like the *Kalpaśamopadeśa*, the title of the next instruction, the *Dhyānasya Upadeśa*, appears to be more descriptive than formal. The final two works in the codex—the *Oḍḍiyānayantra*, and *Śrīvajrayoginyāḥ Prāṇāyāmadhāraṇayor Upadeśa*—are unattributed to any author, Indian or Tibetan.

Of these final seven *upadeśas*, two stand out for being not only translations of Tibetan texts, but for being what appear to be specific instructions by Tibetan, rather than Indian masters. At the end of the *Dhyānasya Upadeśa* Vanaratna remarks that it is the instruction of someone named Śrī Śāluguru, which sounds suspiciously like a phoneticization of Zhwa lu, the renowned Sa skya monastery in gTsang not far from Nyang stod. The author then, would be the “the illustrious (*śrī*) guru of Zhwa lu,” possibly a reference to the monastery's most renowned abbot, Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290-1364).¹⁶⁰ Another possibility is Zhwa lu's second abbot, Grags pa rgyal mtshan a student of Bu ston who was influential at the Phag mo gru court during the period of Vanaratna's first residency there.

Of special significance is the *Sugatyupapatti Upadeśa*. It is introduced as being the work of an author named Mahāśikharadharmasvāmin, which would translate the Tibetan phrase rTse chen Chos rje. rTse chen, as we know, was an important secular and monastic complex in Nyang stod. It was the family seat of the Shar kha clan to which Kun dga' blo gros belonged, was the institution for which he served as abbot beginning in 1374,¹⁶¹ and was where Vanaratna first met him. The Tibetan term *chos rje* is most frequently used as a title, so taken together *mahāśikharadharmasvāmin/rtse chen chos rje* would refer to the “Dharma Lord of rTse chen monastery,” and thus to Kun dga' blo gros himself, which would make the *Sugatyupapatti Upadeśa* Vanaratna's translation of his Tibetan guru's own teaching.

¹⁵⁸ Stearns 2001: 39

¹⁵⁹ MCB 86r.4.

¹⁶⁰ This attribution would potentially make significant the fact that Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros was considered a reincarnation of Bu ston (Vitali 2015: 516).

¹⁶¹ Vitali 2015: 515-17.

Compiling the Upadeśas

The collection of *upadeśas* that make up the last unit of the codex is intriguing and puzzling. Vanaratna's translations form a compendium of instructions covering an array of yogic topics derived from sources both Indic and Tibetan. And as is clear from their *guruparamparās*, the lineages had been in Tibetan hands for generations. The *upadeśas* are set off from the preceding translations of the *Amarasiddhi* treatises by a large decorative feature that encompasses approximately a quarter of the folio and takes up the space two lines of text.¹⁶² It appears to intentionally demarcate the transition between two thematic units, one consisting of the *Amarasiddhi* translations, and the other a more varied collection of instructions. The collection of *upadeśas* also raises an important question regarding the setting for its creation: did Vanaratna meet Kun dga' blo gros one final time in 1455, or does this collection represent Vanaratna's efforts to gather the lineages and instructions of his former Tibetan teacher before leaving Tibet?

Resolving this question would go a long way to resolving the mysteries of the codex, but it may not be possible to do so, at least with presently available resources. If Vanaratna did meet with Kun dga' blo gros in 1455, the texts in this section of codex would likely represent a mixture of oral and textual transmission. If, on the other hand, they did not meet, it is perhaps more likely that Vanaratna collected the texts of the instructions he had previously been given, and/or received their reading transmissions from other Tibetan *bla mas*. The *guruparamparās* make it clear, however, that in either scenario Vanaratna was compiling the instructions of his Tibetan teacher.

Both of these possibilities are supported by features of the codex. The arrangement of the *upadeśas* lacks any clear logic and may simply be ad hoc, reflecting of the order in which Vanaratna received or collected them rather than indicating a preexisting collection of instructions. Most, if not all would have originally been transmitted orally, and they may or may not have been in a written format when Vanaratna's received them. A potential indication of their oral transmission can be found Vanaratna's preamble to *Marmopadeśa-1*, where he notes that it has been "passed down from ear to ear."¹⁶³ Additionally, each of the *upadeśas* includes a preamble containing basic introductory information that typically (but not always) includes the title, a statement of authorship, and a description of content. The preambles all state that the given *upadeśa* has been "written down" (*likhyate*), suggesting that Vanaratna was committing them to writing after receiving them orally, either in the form of instructions or as a reading transmission (Tib. *lung*).

There is an increasing looseness as the sequence progresses in the codex, so that the final instructions are pithy, lack formal titles, and do not include colophons with a transmission history. With one important exception, all of the *upadeśas* from *Marmopadeśa-1* to the *Rāgamārgopadeśa* are of substantial length and include full *guruparamparās*, whereas the remainder appear to be arrangements of key points from oral instructions. In two of these latter instructions, Vanaratna specifically uses the phrase *kaścil likhyate*,¹⁶⁴ "writing down some of..." We see this in the preamble to Vibhūticandra's *Kalpaśamanopadeśa*, which reads *vibhūticandrasya kalpaśamanopadeśa kaścil likhyate*, indicating that Vanaratna was copying down a few key points he found particularly relevant. The same phrasing is used for the

¹⁶² VC 65v.7-8.

¹⁶³ VC 65v.8: *kaṃāt kaṃe* (em. *kaṃa*) *pravāhataḥ*. It is of course possible that these and other preambles are not the words of Vanaratna, but instead represent introductory or interlinear notes in the original Tibetan.

¹⁶⁴ VC 78r.2

instruction attributed to Śrī Śāluguru (Zhwa lu Guru): *dhyānasya api upadeśaḥ kaścil likhyate*.¹⁶⁵ The final two instructions—the *Oḍiyanayantra* [sic] and *Vajrayoginyāḥ Prāmāṇadhāraṇayor Upadeśa*—both lack attribution, have descriptive titles, and lack lineage histories. These final *upadeśas* may therefore be closer to personal notes rather than translations of formal instructions or texts.

There is also good evidence that some of the *upadeśas* were textual translations. This may specifically be true for Ko brag pa’s *Haḥ Ālambanasamudra*, but could also apply to the *Śalākapañcaka* and the longer, more sophisticated *upadeśas*. As Spitz has discovered, there is a close relationship between Vanaratna’s translation of the *Śalākapañcaka* and a cluster of Tibetan texts that associated with the brKa’ brgyud tradition, and specifically the Tshal pa line of bLa ma Zhang found reported in the codex’s *paramparā*.¹⁶⁶ Ko brag pa’s *Haḥ Ālambanasamudra*, or *Gegs sel ha dmigs rgya mtsho* is known to us outside the codex only through writings of Kun dga’ grol mchog (1507-66), who reported receiving its transmission.¹⁶⁷ Vanaratna’s translation of the text, the only surviving version, is situated between the *Śalākapañcaka* and *Marmopadeśa-2*, but does not include a *guruparamparā* as they do. This may be because it is a translation of a text, rather than of an oral transmission.

In previous studies of the codex scholars have pointed to evidence that Vanaratna received at least some of the *upadeśas* orally. Sonam Spitz suggests that the unrefined if not simplistic Sanskrit used to translate the *Śalākapañcaka* indicates Vanaratna’s hastiness in translating within an oral setting.¹⁶⁸ Harunaga Isaacson argues that it may have been the oral delivery of *Marmopadeśa-2* that caused Vanaratna to hear *mi thob (aprāpta)* instead of *mi thub (durjaya)* and thus mistranslate the Tibetan name of Durjayacandra. Isaacson adds that it would be unlikely that Vanaratna would make such an error when copying from a written source.¹⁶⁹ This scenario seems not so clear, however. The hastiness Spitz attributes to Vanaratna’s translations may just as likely be due to the limited time he had to translate the *upadeśas* before leaving Tibet. It could also be, as Spitz argues elsewhere, that they were compiled for personal use, or represent a first draft for later revision.¹⁷⁰ It could also be argued that Vanaratna’s Sanskrit was “simplistic” and “unrefined” by nature, and that it serves as a fair representation of Sanskrit learning in Indic Buddhist communities during its later stages.¹⁷¹ A cursory reading of the codex shows numerous instances of awkward or faulty syntax, spelling errors, and the like, but it would take careful scrutiny of his entire oeuvre to determine if the Sanskrit of the codex is representative of Vanaratna’s Sanskrit ability. And while Isaacson’s observation is certainly plausible, it is equally possible that the error was textual and not oral. He is certainly correct to observe that Vanaratna would not have confused *mi thub* and *mi thob* aurally or in writing, but this would be a very easy error for a Tibetan scribe or editor to make, so the mistaken reading could have been in the hypothetical text he was copying.

When Vanaratna was at sNa dkar rtse in 1455 he was very close to Kun dga’ blo gros’s home region of Nyang stod, and to his monastery, rTse chen, the site of their first meeting in 1426. The accounts of that meeting do not mention any of the texts translated in the codex, so if

¹⁶⁵ VC 78r.6

¹⁶⁶ Spitz 2015: 9.

¹⁶⁷ *Khrid brgya’i brgyud pa’i lo rgyus* 11r.6-11v.1: zha lugs la ko brag pas mdzad pa’i khrid yig dang | bgegs sel ha dmigs rgya mtsho’i lung tsam yod la. Also see Stearns 2000: 4, note 11.

¹⁶⁸ Spitz 2015: 15-16, 24.

¹⁶⁹ Isaacson 2008: 4.

¹⁷⁰ Spitz 2015: 6.

¹⁷¹ Alexander von Rospatt, personal communication 04/21/21.

they met again in 1455 around the time Vanaratna was at sNa dkar rtse, the codex could document a new set of instructions and transmissions. Many of them could have been supported by texts, but some of the instructions would have been purely oral. Vanaratna would have then translated and compiled them hastily during his stay in the area. If they did not meet, Vanaratna was perhaps collecting the teachings he had previously received from Kun dga' blo gros, either in 1426 or at a later, unrecorded meeting. Most of the *upadeśas* would likely be textual in that case, but he may have received their transmission from another local teacher.

Kun dga' blo gros would have been around ninety in 1455,¹⁷² weakening the argument for their meeting, but not entirely eliminating the possibility. Among the *upadeśas* near the end of the codex is an instruction that appears to be from Kun dga' blo gros himself, the *Sugatyupapatti Upadeśa*. The *Sugatyupapatti* is a short instruction on the use of subtle-body yogas to ensure a favorable rebirth at the moment of death.¹⁷³ One can't help but think this instruction was given from one aged master to another during their final meeting late in their lives.

The Collection, Translation, and Compilation of the Vanaratna Codex

With the last of the *upadeśas* we reach the end of the Vanaratna codex. There is no colophon, no final dedication of merit, or any other clear indication that this was meant to be the end of Vanaratna's project. The *Vajrayoginyāḥ Prāmāṇadhāraṇayor Upadeśa* simply ends, leaving three quarters of folio blank, as well as its entire *verso* side. Perhaps after already penning one final dedicatory colophon only to continue his project, Vanaratna anticipated discovering additional material to compile. For whatever reason he did not, and within a short period of time he was back at his seat at Gopicandra Vihāra in the Kathmandu Valley.

If the above account is accurate, even if approximate, the Vanaratna Codex began its life in 1453 as a bundle of blank palm leaves Vanaratna packed among his belongings and carried over the Himalaya for the purpose of copying Sanskrit manuscripts he had previously discovered and to collect the texts and teachings he had been given by Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros and perhaps other Tibetan masters. Vanaratna's initial motivation appeared to be partly philological; the first four texts are all copies of Sanskrit manuscripts, and hints from the collection suggest they were copied because they were either unavailable to him in South Asia or represented alternate recensions to those that were. Three of the four apographs were made in the Phag mo gru Palace at sNe'u gdong or elsewhere in their kingdom and were drawn from the large collection of Sanskrit manuscripts housed there. The fourth was compiled a short distance away at Byams pa gling monastery. Vanaratna used all four of the Sanskrit texts while engaged in other exegetical and literary activities, either as the source for his teachings or as the basis for translations he made with his Tibetan colleagues.

The remainder of the collection is comprised of Sanskrit translations of Tibetan texts and teachings that reveal Vanaratna to be a student of Tibetan masters in addition to being a teacher to them. Most, and presumably all of the Tibetan works in the codex reflect his discipleship under Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros, a relationship that may have lasted for thirty years. In Kun dga' blo gros Vanaratna met a master of broad religious interests who embodied the eclectic religious environment of the time. The lineages he transmitted to Vanaratna were passed down

¹⁷² Kun dga' blo gro's date of death is not known. The last known reference comes in 1439, sixteen years before Vanaratna's return to Tibet.

¹⁷³ VC 78r.2: iti maraṇakṣaṇe sugatiprāptyupadeśa.

from Indian sources through generations of Tibetan masters of the 'Brug pa, Tshal pa, and especially Shangs pa bKa' brgyud lineages, as well as the Sa skya and Jo nang traditions. The set of transmissions recorded in the codex thus faithfully represent the religious culture of Nyang stod, a region where a number of sects thrived, but where none established hegemony.¹⁷⁴ When Vanaratna returned to Tibet in 1455, he undertook the considerable project to collect, translate, and scribe the teachings he received from Kun dga' blo gros. He did so not only motivated by personal interests, but with the aspiration to make the teachings he discovered in Tibet accessible to the South Asian, Sanskritic Buddhist community in Nepal and beyond.

Because we do not yet know if Vanaratna met Kun dga' blo gros during his final visit to Tibet, we cannot say if Vanaratna received the collection of texts and teachings orally or if they represent textual translations. The collection begins with the cluster of *Amarasiddhi* texts, which Vanaratna used as the basis for teachings at sNa dkar rtse. Of the three, only brTson 'grus seng ge's can be connected to an extant work, the rest coming down to us only through Vanaratna's translations. The same is true for the series of *upadeśas* that close the codex. We cannot connect any of them to Vanaratna's other activities at the time, so they seem to have been collected in connection with personal instructions. Many of these works appear to originate in an oral setting, but two are suspected to have circulated in textual form: the *Śalākapañcaka* of the Tshal pa bKa' brgyud tradition and Ko brag pa's *Gegs sel ha dmigs rgya mtsho*.

The collection is remarkable for containing Sanskrit translations of Tibetan works, most of which are now only available to us through Vanaratna's translation efforts. The Sanskrit of his translations is rough and presents interpretive challenges at times, which may reflect his hasty transcription of oral teachings, or the provisional nature of the draft. More likely, however, is that Vanaratna's command of literary Tibetan was not strong enough to produce wholly faithful translations. It thus seems likely that he did not work closely with his Tibetan translator colleagues, the most prominent of whom were present with him at the time. If he had, they likely would have been able to clarify some of the problematic readings in the codex. Rather, the Tibetan translations, and specifically the collection of *upadeśas* seem to be a personal project, perhaps reflecting the more intimate teacher-student relationship he shared with Kun dga' blo gros. The *upadeśas* themselves suggest as much; many of them, particularly Kun dga's blo gro's instructions for the moment of death, appear to be personal practice advice rather than formally transmitted teachings.

After translating and copying the last of the *upadeśas*, Vanaratna ceased working on the codex and set out for Nepal. He remained there for the final thirteen years of his life, and one wonders how the texts he collected in Tibet may have influenced his public teachings and personal practice. After Vanaratna's death in 1468, the codex remained in the Kathmandu Valley for four centuries, preserved in its libraries, private collections, and archives until the nineteenth century, when the British Colonial officer Brian Houghton Hodgson found it there. He carried it back with him to England, where it currently sits in the Royal Asiatic Society of London, catalogued as RAS Hodgson 35. This manuscript, likely scribed in Vanaratna's own hand, has thus taken a remarkable journey from the Buddhist cultures of the fifteenth century Himalayan region to the libraires of the European academy. No matter its location, it has continued to serve as Vanaratna's *deyadharmā*, his gift of the Dharma.

¹⁷⁴ Vitali 2105: 569-70.

Epilogue: Vanaratna's Final Journey Home

In the context of studying the Vanaratna Codex, we followed Vanaratna approximately halfway through his journey home to Nepal. Based on our alignment of the content of the codex with Vanaratna's travels as recorded in the biographies, it would appear that much if not all of the manuscript was penned during Vanaratna's stay in the Phag mo gru kingdom, at Byam pa gling monastery, in and around sNa dkar rtse in Yar 'brog, and perhaps in Nyang stod. Vanaratna still had a long road to traverse after leaving sNa dkar rtse, and had some important encounters along the way. His route took him across familiar territory, and it seems evident that, given his advanced age, Vanaratna used this last leg of his journey as a farewell tour, visiting students and patrons, and taking one last look at what was by now the familiar landscape of central Tibet.

Vanaratna's first stop after leaving Yar 'brog was Byam chen in Rin spungs, which he visited at the invitation of the clan's patriarch Nor bu bzang po. He was invited to consecrate a large gilded statue of Cakrasaṃvara that had been newly erected at Byams chen, and during the course of the elaborate rite had powerful meditative experiences that are reported at length in the SG.¹⁷⁵ While in Rin spungs territory Vanaratna also visited gTsang rong ra lnga, where he had two significant encounters. The first was with the Sa skya master and founder of the nearby sKyed mo tshal monastery, Byams chen rab 'byams pa Sangs rgyas dpal (1412-85), who came to gTsang rogn ra lnga specifically to meet the *pandita*. The account of their meeting appears only in the NTSG, and though detailed, is more concerned with bSod nams rgya mtsho interactions with the master than of the content of his meeting with Vanaratna.¹⁷⁶

A more substantively reported meeting took place between Vanaratna and the famous female master Chos kyi sgron ma (1422-55), a widely-regarded teacher believed to be an emanation of Vajrayoginī.¹⁷⁷ The account of their meeting reported in the SG is brief, but a lengthier description of their encounter can be found in Chos kyi sgron ma's *rnam thar*.¹⁷⁸ There we are told that when Chos kyi sgron ma arrived, Vanaratna was in closed retreat, performing the funerary rites for a recently-deceased student. She elected to spend a night there to be sure she met the *pandita*, and was able to gain an audience with him the next day. Their conversation began with Vanaratna inquiring about her family, the royal family of Mang yul Gung thang, and reminding her that they first met when Vanaratna visited her father's palace many years earlier when she was fourteen. Vanaratna then teased her by inviting her to India with him, but then let her in on the joke while also making an insightful statement about his relationship with

¹⁷⁵ SG 47v.1-6.

¹⁷⁶ NTSG^b 307.12-308.7. Chos grags ye shes only identifies Vanaratna's visitor as rDzong dkar rab 'byam pa, but Erhard goes further in identifying him as Sangs rgyas 'phel based on a note in the NTSG^b that bSod nams rgya mtsho and the rDzong dkar rab 'byam pa continued to exchange letters, one of which is still extant among bSod nams rgya mtsho's collected letters (Erhard 2002a: 50, and 51, note 19; 2002b f. 53r-54v).

¹⁷⁷ Diemberger has suggested that Vanaratna, because of his personal connection to the practice of Vajrayoginī/Vajravārhāhī, played a role in identifying Chos kyi sgron ma as an emanation of Vajravārhāhī, but offers no evidence to support her contention apart from the simple fact he was devotee of Vajravārahī (2007: 50).

¹⁷⁸ The *Ye shes mkha' 'gro bsod nams dpal 'dren gyi sku skye gsum pa rje btsun ma chos kyi sgron ma'i rnam thar*. The single extant witness of this *rnam thar*, a hand-written manuscript of 146 folios, is incomplete, leaving both the author and its date of composition unknown. Diemberger believes that the author was a contemporary of Chos kyi sgron ma, dPal 'Chi med grub pa (d. ca. 1496), who hailed from Gung thang and accompanied her throughout her travels in central Tibet. If her plausible argument is correct, then Chos kyi sgron ma's *rnam thar* was composed in second half of the fifteenth century by a man who was present for many of the events it describes. This would lend his account of the her meeting with Vanaratna significant historical value, if it was reported faithfully (Diemberger 2007: 75-83).

Jayayakṣamalla and his feelings about Nepal:¹⁷⁹

“When you were young, I told you that you should go to India, did you forget? Now that you have become an *avadhūtā* (*bya bral ma*), everything is easier. Would you like to go to India with me?”

The illustrious lady answered, “May it be as you say.”

[Vanaratna] smiled and said, “I’m not going to India now, but will spend some time in central Nepal. Though I don’t find working with the king to be of much benefit, it is good for my personal training, so that’s what I will do.”¹⁸⁰

Vanaratna then penned some verses of instruction for her, placed them in an offering bowl, and offered both the verses and the bowl to Chos kyi sgron ma. Vanaratna also offered her personal instruction, which Diemberger plausibly suggests, based on the cryptic language of the *rnam thar*, may have involved sexual yoga.¹⁸¹

[She then] received transmissions [from Vanaratna] she had not received from [Bo dong] Phyog las rnam rgyal. The teacher and student both stayed in the meditation hut, which the translator did not enter, where all [Chos kyi sgron ma’s] wishes were fulfilled.¹⁸²

Here again we are reminded that Vanaratna, despite his consistent declaration of being a fully ordained monk, may have engaged in the sexual yogas as a matter of formal practice, and did not regard it as a violation of his monastic commitments.¹⁸³ Vanaratna and Chos kyi sgron ma parted company shortly thereafter, at which time Vanaratna gifted her a cloak that had previously been offered to him by a female practitioner in Yar ’brog.¹⁸⁴ Chos kyi sgron ma died within a year, at the young age of thirty-four.¹⁸⁵

Before leaving Rins spungs, Vanaratna stopped at bSam grub rtse to pay a final visit to the head of the Rin spungs clan, Nor bu bzang po, who expressed a strong desire that they continue to meet as master and disciple life after life.¹⁸⁶ We are never told much about Vanaratna’s relationship with Nor bu bzang po and the rest of the Rin spungs clan, which is surprising given that the Ring spungs rose to power during the thirty years Vanaratna visited Tibet and were surely influential in his activities at the Phag mo gru court. We have noted that Vanaratna made repeated stops in Rin spungs, and often gave teachings there, but it is only now, in this final encounter between the most powerful man in central Tibet and the Indian *paṇḍita*, that we get a

¹⁷⁹ *Chos kyi sgron ma’i rnam thar* 131v.3-133r.2; Diemberger 2007: 226-7.

¹⁸⁰ *Chos kyi sgron ma’i rnam thar* 133r.2-5: nyid gzhon nu mar gnas pa na rgya gar la ’byon gsung ba de ma snyel lam bar (?) | da ni bya bral ma mdzad tsa na ’jug bde ba yin pas nged rang lhan par rgya gar la thegs sam gsung | dpal gyi dbang mos de skad bgyid par zhu zhus pas | slar zhal ’dzum mdzad nas kho bo rgya gar du mi ’gro | bal yul mthil du re shig stod | bal po’i rgyal po dang tsha byas phan thogs chen po med kyang rang bstan bsgom pa la so sod po yod pas de ltar du bgyid pa yin.

¹⁸¹ Diemberger 2007: 137-8, 227.

¹⁸² *Chos kyi sgron ma’i rnam thar* 133v.5-6: rje chen po phyogs las rnam rgyal ma thob pa’i lung zhu rgyu yod gsung | dpon slob gnyis ka bsam bstan gyi kang bur bzhugs lo tsā yang ma btsug par thugs kyi re ba gang bar mdzad.

¹⁸³ About his see Chapter Four, pp. 94-97.

¹⁸⁴ *Chos kyi sgron ma’i rnam thar* 133v.6-134r.5; Diemberger 2007: 227-8.

¹⁸⁵ Diemberger 2007: 69.

¹⁸⁶ SG 48v.2.

glimpse of the personal relationship between them.

After leaving Rin spungs, Vanaratna next passed through Senge rtse and Bo dong en route to northern La stod. While on the road, bSod nams rgya mtsho set about studying and transcribing the Indic quotes Vanaratna would cite during in his teachings, which he compiled into a bilingual Sanskrit-Tibetan collection that comes down to us under the title *Zhal lung rin po che'i snying pa'i phreng ba* (Öta. 5096).¹⁸⁷ Upon reaching northern La stod, Vanaratna spent considerable time in its capital, Ngam ring, meeting with and giving a final round of teachings to his longtime students and patrons. bSod nams rgya mtsho reports that Vanaratna taught on Herukadeva's *Pratipattisāraśatakavivarāṇa*, Koṭālipā's *Ātmayoga*,¹⁸⁸ Carpaṭi's *Sarvasiddhikara*, and gave oral instructions on the *śaḍaṅgayoga*. The SG states that all of these texts were translated by Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho at this time as well; the translator's colophon for the *Pratipattisāraśatakavivarāṇa* confirms this,¹⁸⁹ thus we can assume this statement to be true for the other works as well. The people of La stod showered Vanaratna with devotion and affection, knowing that this was likely the last time they would see him.¹⁹⁰ An entourage from La stod escorted Vanaratna as far as Chubar, where Vanaratna, bSod nams rgya mtsho, and the entire party performed a large *gaṇacakra*. bSod nams rgya mtsho expressed his wishes to travel on to Nepal with his guru, but Vanaratna demurred, sending him back to Tibet to wait for a more favorable time. bSod nams rgya mtsho parted with him there, leaving him in the hands of one Drung Lotsāwa¹⁹¹ and a small party of Tibetans who took him as far as Temal, where the envoys of Jayayakṣamalla met him and escorted him back to the Kathmandu Valley.¹⁹²

Thus with the final *gaṇacakra* Vanaratna performed with his Tibetan students on the Tibet-Nepal border, Vanaratna's long engagement with Tibet, its people, and its distinctive mode of Buddhism came to a close. Our study of Vanaratna's final journey to Tibet has been framed by a study of the Vanaratna codex, a single document that serves as an apt summation of Vanaratna's career in the Land of Snow, encapsulating both the shifting terrain of South Asian and Himalayan Buddhism, as well Vanaratna's negotiations of it. By the time Vanaratna left Tibet for the final time he had served not only as a teacher and scholar of Buddhism for his Tibetan disciples, but had himself become a student of Tibetan masters, a holder of Tibetan lineages, and gained a degree of proficiency in the classical (and perhaps colloquial) Tibetan language. In his Tibetan career with thus see further evidence of the personal qualities that guided and shaped his earlier travels: resilience in the face of hardship, an insatiable curiosity, flexibility and openness to the fluid status of Buddhism in the different cultures he encountered, and the humility to remain a perpetual student of Buddhism, even when his discipleship was an inconvenient truth for his admirers. These qualities not only ensured his eventual success in Tibet, but they also enriched his own learning and practice, a fact clearly evident in the Vanaratna Codex.

Vanaratna left Tibet for the final time in 1455, but his career as a *paṇḍita* was far from over. In the remaining thirteen years of his life, his activities in service of the Nepalese Buddhist community and aristocracy expanded, and his prestige in the Kathmandu Valley continued to

¹⁸⁷ NTSG^b 308.12-17.

¹⁸⁸ Tōh. 2339. This was also translated by Vanaratna and bSod nams rgya mtsho, but the colophon does not confirm the date or location.

¹⁸⁹ Tōh. 2335 299v.2-3: rgya gar shar phyogs sadna ga ra'i paṇḍi ta chen po śrī va na ratna'i zhal ngar | dge slong chos smra ba bsod nams rgya mtsho'i sde zhes bya bas dpal ngam ring gi yang rtser mnyan zhing bsgyur ba las | physis legs par brtags shing zhus te gtan la phab pa'o.

¹⁹⁰ SG 48v.3-4; NTSG^b 308.17-20.

¹⁹¹ Unidentified.

¹⁹² SG 48v.4-49r.4; NTSG^b 308.20-309.9.

grow. Because bSod nams rgya mtsho visited him there a decade later, we know a great deal about the years between Vanaratna's return to the Valley in 1455 and his death in 1468. Much of that has been detailed in preceding chapters, which describe how fully integrated Vanaratna was in the spiritual life of Buddhist Nepal, and how highly esteemed he came to be there. bSod nams rgya mtsho parted from his teacher for the last time in 1466, when the *lotsāwa* set out from Patan and returned home to central Tibet. Even after leaving Nepal, bSod nams rgya mtsho kept abreast of Vanaratna's activities in the final year and half of the *paṇḍita*'s life, recording them and the circumstances of his passing in the SG. It is thus to these final years of Vanaratna's life, the events surrounding his death, and the legacy of his long, far-reaching career, that we now turn in the conclusion of this study.

Conclusion

The Passing of the Great *Paṇḍita*

1468

In the preceding chapters, we have followed Vanaratna as he charted a course from his birthplace in eastern India, to the island of Sri Lanka, across the southernmost reaches of the Indian subcontinent to the Buddhist heartland of Magadha, and onwards to the Himalayan region, where he served Buddhist communities in the Kathmandu Valley and Tibet. Through Vanaratna’s eyes—and the words of gZhon nu dpal and bSod nams rgya mtsho—we have been given unprecedented insights into Vanaratna’s remarkable career as he toured, trained, and taught in a varied and rapidly shifting Buddhist landscape, and seen the immediate, personal impact of the monumental, paradigmatic shifts that were taking place in South Asian and Himalayan Buddhism in the fifteenth century. After forty years in India, and another forty spent shuttling back and forth over the Himalayan range between Nepal and Tibet, Vanaratna’s life and career came to an end in the Kathmandu Valley, in the city of Patan, on Monday, the twenty-second day of the month of Mārgaśīrṣa, Nepal Saṃvat 588, (1468).¹ In this concluding chapter we will examine the final year of Vanaratna’s life, the events of which serve as a fitting capstone to his long, productive, and celebrated career. The final scenes of his life will also provide an opportunity to conclude with a few brief reflections on the major themes of Vanaratna’s life and career.

Sources of a Death

When Vanaratna died in 1468, well over a year had passed since he parted with his biographer, bSod nams rgya mtsho. Thus unlike the preceding sections of his biography—which were either dictated by Vanaratna, witnessed directly by the biographer, or both—bSod nams rgya mtsho had to piece together the narrative of his guru’s passing from second hand, anecdotal evidence. bSod nams rgya mtsho tells us something about his sources for Vanaratna’s final year:

These deeds at the end of [Vanaratna’s] life are common knowledge, and a letter composed by ’Phags pa bstan ’phel and his kinsmen, who were in general agreement, was brought [to me]. I then added this and the oral reports to the biography I had already written.²

In the NTSG, Chos grags ye shes provides more detail on ’Phags pa bstan ’phel and his meeting with bSod nams rgya mtsho, which was also the moment when bSod nams rgya mtsho received confirmation that his guru had died:

By that time [bSod nams rgya mtsho] believed that the great and precious *paṇḍita* was in another realm, but apart from the certainty he gained in meditation, he couldn’t be entirely sure... [Then,] ’Phags pa bstan ’phel and a second [relation] returned from visiting the great *paṇḍita* in Nepal, and brought with them the share of [Vanaratna’s] bone relics meant for [Vanaratna’s] close Tibetan disciples that had been given to them by the headman of Temal. [bSod nams rgya mtsho] immediately got up from his bed, lit

¹ Pal 1985: 237.

² SG 59r.3-4: de ltar mdzad pa tha ma’i nram thar thams cad la thun mong du gyur cing kha ’tshal pa che long nrams ’phags pa bstan ’phel grogs mched kyis yi ger bris nas khyer byung ba dang ngag las thos pa nrams nram thar gong ma m tha’ dag dang gung bsgrigs nas bris pa yin.

some fine incense, and with complete devotion threw his body to the ground and made many prostrations. He held the relics to his heart and entered for a while into a meditative state.³

Though not explicitly mentioned in the NTSG, this is surely the occasion on which bSod nams rgya mtsho received the letter he describes in the SG, and so would have been able to discuss the details of Vanaratna's final year with messengers that brought them. Thus, despite being on the far side of the Himalayan range during the events he describes in the SG, bSod nams rgya mtsho was able to complete the biography of his guru by relying on eye witness accounts.

Because bSod nams rgya mtsho was not present during Vanaratna's final year and thus did not witness the events he describes first-hand, because he did not have Vanaratna's personal testimony to rely on as he did for previous sections of the SG, and because this final section of Vanaratna's biography deals with the spiritually-charged description of the passing of an eminent religious figure, we can assume that bSod nams rgya mtsho drew from the stock of common Buddhist tropes and clichés used to narrate the death of realized Buddhist masters. As we will see in the narrative that follows, Vanaratna's death is described in eulogistic and hagiographical terms, and in them we hear the narrative echoes of the passing of the historical Buddha and the many Indian and Tibetan masters whose lives and deaths have been celebrated in Buddhist literature. As a prominent Buddhist littérateur writing in a religious idiom for an audience of religiously-minded secular and ecclesiastical figures, such moves would have been expected of bSod nams rgya mtsho, and indeed he does not disappoint. But, as was the case throughout Vanaratna's biographies the eulogistic and hagiographical are well-balanced with the historical and personal, providing data that not only carries the ring of fact, but which can be corroborated by other contemporary sources not available to bSod nams rgya mtsho in Tibet but to which we have access. Thus, as was the case with the previous sections of the *rnam thars*, we can carefully engage with this last section of the SG as important historical witness for the final year of Vanaratna's life and the Nepalese setting in which it unfolded.

To aid us in this we are fortunate to have an additional witness to Vanaratna's final year that was not available to bSod nams rgya mtsho, but which closely aligns with his account: a Newari *paubhā* commissioned by the *saṅgha* of Gopicandra Vihāra to commemorate Vanaratna's passing (image 1). The original painting, now housed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, was created using watercolors on a cotton cloth canvas measuring 69.4 x 99.7 cm.⁴ From the inscription located in the upper left corner of the image (image 1.1), we know that the painting was executed in 1469, likely to commemorate Vanaratna's passing.⁵ The inscription is entirely focused on key events from the last period of his residence in Nepal, recording the details of his alms giving in 1456 and 1467, and the precise date and time of his passing in 1468. The original image from 1469 is faded, worn, and incomplete, and its inscription is nearly illegible; however, a copy of the image was made in 1862 (images 1.2 and 1.2.1) which clarifies

³ NTSG 376.19-377.2: dus de rnam su paṅ chen rin po che zhing gzhan du dgongs pa thugs dam gyi nges pa las mkhyen tshod du dga' bas...rje paṅ chen gyi sku mdun du bal por bsnyegs te phyin pa'i 'phags pa bstan 'phel ba gnyis la te mal ba gtso bo dpon phyag gis | bod kyi zhal slob drag pa rnam la rten skal gyi gdung rus mtshon pa bskur 'dug pa'i cha shas syan drangs byung ba la | de ma thag bzhugs stan las bzhengs te bdug pa'i rgyun bzang po sbyar | mi phyed pa'i gdung shugs kyi sku lus sar phab pa'i phyag lan mang di mdzad cing | sku gdung de rang gi thugs kar bcangs nas yun ji zhiḡ mnyam gzhag gi ngang du bzhugs pa gnam 'dug.

⁴ Pal 1985: 211; Huntington and Bangdel 2003: 143.

⁵ Pal 1985: 211.

many of the details of the original image, provides a more legible reading of the inscription,⁶ and demonstrates that the original *paubhā* is missing an upper register that contains an image of a large central buddha figure surrounded by monks and flanked by *mahāsiddhas* and other buddhas.⁷

Vanaratna's commemorative *paubhā* does not identify the artisans or atelier responsible for the exquisitely executed image, but thanks to the work of Pratapaditya Pal and Gautama Vajracharya, we can be all but certain that the image was the work of Adyayarāja Puna from the Thamchu Vamtha neighborhood in northern Kathmandu (Yambu), and Udrayarāma Puna of Kilāgal, also in northern Kathmandu.⁸ We know this because of Pal's discovery of the portrait of Gaganasiṃ Bhāro and his wives introduced in Chapter Five (image 23), a portrait painted in a style that matches closely with Vanaratna's commemorative *paubhā*. The inscription included in Gaganasiṃ's portrait identifies the artists as Adyayarāja Puna and Udrayarāma Puna, and though the inscription does not provide a date,⁹ we know that Gaganasiṃ Bhāro was a high-profile aristocrat (*nayaka*) at the court of Kīrtisiṃha of Dolakhā, who ruled in the latter half of the fifteenth century and died in 1474.¹⁰ While Pal notes the general similarities between the portrait of Gaganasiṃ and the commemorative *paubhā*, it is the comparative work of Gautama Vajracharya that convincingly determines that the two masterpieces are the work of the same artisans. As noted by Vajracharya, the most compelling stylistic similarities are found in the depiction of feminine features: Vajracharya draws our attention to the women's slim eyebrows, elongated eyes, three skin folds at the neck, the style and design of their earrings and other ear ornaments, their uncharacteristically flat chests, and their hairstyles, which include a unique triad of hair swirls of hair along the women's brow line.¹¹ It is unfortunate that the artisans responsible for the original *paubhā* commemorating Vanaratna's death were not named in its inscription, but based on even a cursory comparison with the portrait of Gaganasiṃ Bhāro and his wives, there can be little doubt they are the work of the same Newar master artisans.

The commemorative *paubhā* describes three events that took place during Vanaratna's final years in Nepal. We have already examined the first of these events, Vanaratna's creation of a food bank and his large-scale alms distribution, in Chapter Five. To briefly recap, we recall that bSod nams rgya mtsho described Vanaratna's alms-giving activities in 1456 as follows:

Vanaratna gradually exchanged the gold he had been offered by the Tibetans for grain, and established a perpetual supply to provide for all the beggars in the kingdom. It continues to this day. Beginning with musicians in the early morning, [grain] would be given to the large gathering of people [at Gopicandra], continuing until the sun set.¹²

⁶ The inscription in the 1862 images introduces a small number of errors, and includes an additional statement about the patrons of the later image and their motivations for having the image copied. As stated there, the image was copied not only as an act of merit-generation, but also to preserve the original image which even at that time was considered fragile and worn (Bangdel 2003: 143).

⁷ That this upper register was included in the original image is verified by traces of ornamental features still evident at the top of the original 1469 image.

⁸ Pal 2003: 280-81.

⁹ The inscription does provide the lunar month, day of the week, and reigning *nakaṣṭra* associated with the paintings completion, but does not provide the year. In his study of the inscription Pal notes that the word *saṃvat* does appear followed by damaged *akṣaras*, but that there is not sufficient space to include enough numerals to account for the year, thus it was likely left out through simple scribal error (Pal 2003: 281).

¹⁰ Pal 2003 211, 280-1; Vajracharya 2004: 69.

¹¹ Vajracharya 2003: 42-3; 2004: 66-7, 74-5.

¹² SG 49v.1-3.

We also know from the SG that Vanaratna maintained no sectarian bias in his generosity, thus religious mendicants of diverse sectarian affiliations were frequent visitors to his foodbank.¹³ All of these details are confirmed in the inscription from the commemorative *paubhā*:¹⁴

In Saṃvat 576 (1456) Śrī Vanaratnapā, residing in the illustrious Gopicandra Vihāra, offered one measure of grain to ascetics (*tapasī*), Śaiva mendicants (*jaṅgama*), Brahmins, and householders. He [also] offered one measure of grain to visiting yogins (*paradeśī jogī*), to virtuous yogins and yoginīs, and one measure to those from the local monasteries (*bāhā-bahī*). He provided these offerings from sunrise to sunset.

Following the description of Vanaratna’s alms-giving in 1456, the inscription next accounts for an offering of similar scale performed in the year prior to Vanaratna’s death:

Again in Saṃvat 588 (1467), on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Śrāvana, on a Wednesday, Vanaratnapā made offerings to the entire monastic order consisting of 1,290 persons. This included offerings of one full bowl for everyone, a *pathi* of grain, and currency (*dām*) as a donation (*dakṣiṇa*).¹⁵

This portion of the inscription records Vanaratna’s performance of a *dāna* ceremony and is corroborated closely by the description found in the SG. We will examine this scene in more detail below.

The inscription in the original *paubhā* then concludes by stating the date of Vanaratna’s passing.¹⁶

In Saṃvat 589 (1468), on Monday, under the *pūrvaphalgunī nakṣatra*, at midnight on the seventh day of the dark half of the month of Mārgaśīrṣa, Vanaratna attained buddhahood.

This is in perfect accord with the SG, where bSod nams rgya mtsho writes that Vanaratna retired to his private quarters at Gopicandra on the evening of the twenty-second day of Mārgaśīrṣa, and passed away during the night.¹⁷ This scene will also be discussed in more detail below.

Lingering Questions

Before turning to the details of Vanaratna’s final year, there are some lingering, even controversial questions about the commemorative *paubhā* that need to be addressed. In Chapter Four we discussed this same *paubhā* in connection with the widespread but ultimately misguided belief that Vanaratna gave up his monastic vows and took a wife after settling in the Kathmandu

¹³ SG 49v.3-4.

¹⁴ A transcription and translation of the inscription made by Ian Alsop can be found in Pal 1985: 236-7. The reading here is based on that translation, but been emended to accord with more recent scholarship on the inscription by Yogesh Raj and Punya Parajuli. Their insights were shared with me over the course of several informal conversations in Kathmandu and in emails throughout the fall of 2019.

¹⁵ As above, this reading is based on Ian Alsop’s transcription and translation in Pal 1985, with key emendations based on the insights of Yogesh Raj and Punya Parajuli.

¹⁶ As above, this reading is based on Ian Alsop’s transcription and translation in Pal 1985, with key emendations based on the insights of Yogesh Raj and Punya Parajuli.

¹⁷ bSod nams rgya mtsho’s description of Vanaratna’s passing will be cited and discussed below.

Valley. This conjecture is based entirely on scholarly interpretations of the image from the *paubhā*, and the central position of an otherwise unidentified female figure. Beginning with the work of Pratapaditya Pal in 1985, and sustained by many scholars since, a commonly held view is that the image depicts Vanaratna's widow distributing alms in commemoration of his passing. Pal even goes so far as to name the image "Vanaratna's Wife Distributing Alms,"¹⁸ a title echoed by Hubert Decler who states the image depicts "the alms distributed by [Vanaratna's] widowed consort,"¹⁹ and by Gautama Vajracharya who states the woman is Vanaratna's "female assistant in tantric rituals."²⁰ The question of Vanaratna ordination status and his reliance on a tantric consort, and a refutation of the view that he took a wife has been sufficiently addressed in Chapter Four, and based on the argument presented there we can be reasonably confident that the female figure in the image is not Vanaratna's wife or tantric consort. But the question of who the female is and what scene is being depicted in the *paubhā* remains.

Evidence from both the *paubhā*'s inscription and from the SG strongly suggests that the scene in the *paubhā* is directly related to Vanaratna's alms-giving activities, and specifically to his establishment of a foodbank from which alms were distributed to religious mendicants and the poor throughout Vanaratna's later years in Nepal and after his passing. The female figures in the painting—which includes the large central female and the two smaller females that flank her—are clearly distributing grains and other alms to a crowd of people who, in their attire and ornamentations align closely with the descriptions of the diverse crowd that would gather daily at Gopicandra seeking alms.²¹ In the image we see the musicians that bSod nams rgya mtsho stated would show up early in the morning, as well as the diverse cast of religious figures mentioned in the SG and listed with some detail in the *paubhā*'s inscription. Considering that bSod nams rgya mtsho states that the alms distribution at Gopicandra was a daily affair throughout Vanaratna's life, and that he alludes to the fact that it continued for some time after his death, it seems apparent that this is the event depicted generically in the *paubhā*. That the artists chose not to include Vanaratna in the image, but instead feature a set of women distributing the alms, has fueled the debate over the identity of these women, and particularly the largest of the three figures.

Confident that the main female figure, nor any of the smaller female figures for that matter, is Vanaratna's wife/consort, we can turn our attention to the single other attempt that has been made to establish her identity. In her 2003 study of both the original commemorative *paubhā* and its 1862 replica, Dina Bangdel posits that the main female figure is White Tārā, a claim she makes based on iconographic details of the figure and evidence from the textual record. Bangdel begins her evaluation of the image by justifiably refuting the claim that it depicts Vanaratna's wife on epigraphic and iconographic grounds, first noting that the inscription lacks any reference to Vanaratna's wife, including what she says would have been the customary statement about his wife's meritorious acts on her deceased husband's behalf. She follows this by stating that identifying the figure as Vanaratna's wife is problematized by both the figure's compositional placement and her iconography. She notes that the figure's prominence in the image identifies her as a figure commanding veneration, and that her specific iconography—white color, placement

¹⁸ Pal 1985: 211.

¹⁹ Decler 2005: 87.

²⁰ Vajracharya 2004: 69.

²¹ The details of the individual figures come through much more clearly in the 1862 replica of the image. A close comparison of the two images leaves little doubt that the latter faithfully replicates the essential features of each individual figure, despite the fact that the later image was painted in a different style.

on a raised dais (which Vajracharya considers a “courtyard”),²² and especially the blue lotus held in the *vitarka* or “teaching” *mudrā*—merits identifying the figure as White Tārā. She then further argues that textual evidence linking Vanaratna to a lineage of White Tārā practice confirms her identification.²³

While Bangdel’s argument is certainly more plausible that those that contend the figure is Vanaratna’s consort,²⁴ her evidence nonetheless remains inconclusive, and the identification unconfirmed. The pale white color of the main figure, the blue lotus she holds, and the *mudrā* in which she holds would indeed be compelling supports for her argument, but are more problematic than Bangdel contends. The unique whiteness of the main figure’s complexion is quite apparent in the 1862 replica, but less so in the original image, where it is impossible to differentiate the pigmentation of the main female figure from others in the image. The original painting is faded and worn to the point that makes a comparison of the pigmentation of the various figures a challenge, but it does appear that the main figure shares the same white complexion with a number of other figures, making it less of a defining feature. Also problematic is Bangdel’s identification of the main figure’s hand gesture as the *vitarka mudrā*; while the figure’s hand gesture does resemble the *vitarka mudrā*, a comparison of her gesture with the gestures made by Gaganasiṃ and his wives, a work painted by the same artists, reveals that this gesture appears to simply be a common style employed by those artists when rendering hands that hold an object. In the portrait of Gaganasiṃ and his wives, all three figures are secular in nature and the setting is intimate and domestic. Thus while we may be inclined based on the perceived religious nature of Vanaratna’s commemorative *paubhā* to interpret the gesture that holds the blue lotus to also be spiritually potent, it would appear that the hand gesture of the main female figure is little more than a stylized gesture repeated often in the images made by the same artists. Thus we should be hesitant to place too much interpretive value on that specific element of the figure’s iconography. The blue lotus held by the central female figure remains a compelling piece of evidence for her identification as Tārā, but it is the only iconographic feature that merits this conclusion and thus is insufficient to advance this identification beyond the level of conjecture.

Bangdel also looks to the literary record to establish a connection between Vanaratna and Tārā that would be sufficiently strong to merit Tārā’s inclusion in an image that is otherwise entirely centered on Vanaratna’s activities. To do this she draws our attention to an image (a *tsag li*, to be precise) of White Tārā that is said to “belong to the tradition of Vanaratna,”²⁵ as evidence of a connection between Vanaratna and the goddess. The image in question, however, comes from a set of deity portraits that has been dated to the early nineteenth century, the *Rin ’byung brgya rtsa* studied by Martin Willson and Martin Brauen, and the authors of the study were unable to identify any specific texts composed by Vanaratna featuring White Tārā.²⁶ This aligns with what we know of Vanaratna’s biography and extant oeuvre, which contains only minimal, passing references to Tārā. According to bSod nams rgya mtsho, Vanaratna did commission a small statue of Tārā to include in the shrine at Gopicandra, and Śākya mchog ldan

²² Vajracharya 2003: 43

²³ Huntington and Bangdel 2003: 143-45.

²⁴ This opinion is not shared by Hubert Decler, who says emphatically of her identification of the female figure as Tārā: “Sorry: no way. Out of the question” (Decler 2005: 106, note 43). Considering she offers more compelling evidence to support her argument than he does of his, his forcefulness seems unwarranted.

²⁵ Nags rin lugs kyi sgrol dkar; in Willson and Brauen 2000: 33.

²⁶ Willson and Brauen 2000: 3-4, 21-22, 32-33, 239.

believed Vanaratna held a lineage of White Tārā practice originating with Vibhūticandra,²⁷ but there is no evidence in the available literature to confirm that Tārā was a significant deity for Vanaratna, that she was a key part of his spiritual repertoire, or otherwise identify her as a deity of such importance to him and his followers that she should be depicted as the central figure in the *paubhā* commissioned to commemorate his death. It is of course possible, if not likely, that we simply do not have enough available evidence on the place of Tārā in Vanaratna's personal pantheon or that of his students to concretely affirm or deny Bangdel's argument, but at this time her claim remains largely unsupported.

The effort by scholars to identify the central figure in the *paubhā* has perhaps been a bit too strenuous, and has conversely been reliant upon the thinnest of evidence. It seems that, for now at least, the information needed to confirm the female figure's identity is simply lost to history. It is clear from her scale and placement in the image that someone of importance is being depicted, which makes it all the more curious that this person was not named in the inscription, as a prominent donor would have been, or that aspects of the image do not tie her more explicitly to Vanaratna's narrative or oeuvre. Also curious is the fact that Vanaratna was not himself pictured, despite the fact that his is the only name provided in the inscription and that it describes the alms-giving activities he directed at Gopicandra Vihāra.²⁸ If we set aside our search for the identity of the central figure and do not concern ourselves with Vanaratna's absence from the image, the *paubhā* has a compelling story to tell. In it we see not just one but three women distributing alms to the array of Nepalese citizens the SG and inscription confirm would routinely gathered at the gates of Gopicandra Vihāra. That these women remain nameless focuses our attention on them not as individuals, but as members of the Gopicandra community who engaged in the act of alms giving in service of their guru, likely as an act of merit-generating devotion. That this activity at Gopicandra was a key expression of its communal identity is suggested by the fact that it, rather than a formal portrait of Vanaratna, was selected to memorialize his passing and serve as a remembrance of him for the community he left behind. There are more details about Vanaratna's life and activities that the *paubhā* offers us, details that will be considered below, but a search for the identity of the main female figure in the image should not obscure the possibility that this image was not meant to valorize a specific individual, but rather serve as expression of the community Vanaratna established in Nepal during his long career.

²⁷ Śākya mchog ldan in fact sought Vanaratna out specifically to receive this practice, which he believed the *paṇḍita* had received directly from Vibhūticandra. 'Jam dpal ye shes teased the young Śākya mchog ldan about this, pointing out that Vanaratna and Vibhūticandra were not contemporaries, so this was impossible. The NTŚC does not state if Vanaratna ever did grant Śākya mchog ldan teachings on the practice (NTŚC 40r.1-2; 40v.1).

²⁸ Here it is perhaps worthwhile to note that Hubert Decler, uniquely, asserts that the image of a buddha flanked by monks/arhats, *mahāsiddhas*, and other buddhas in the upper register of the 1862 replica (and thus presumably in the 1469 original) is in fact a representation of Vanaratna himself. Decler argues (2005: 87) that the buddha figure is Vanaratna as an awakened buddha residing in the Tuṣita heaven following his passing. He bases his argument entirely on the resemblance between this image and a statue ostensibly of Vanaratna located in Punakha, Bhutan, that was erected in remembrance of his visit there in 1435/6. The Bhutanese statue of Vanaratna does indeed resemble a stock representation of a buddha, but is generic to the point that using it as point of comparison for the *paubhā* is ineffective. Furthermore, there is no indication in the *paubhā* that the buddha figure is to be understood as Vanaratna, that it depicts a scene taking place in Tuṣita, or that the two images are meant to be understood relationally. Other art historians studying the image have declined to make a connection between the two registers of the painting, and are in agreement that it represents one known buddha or another, though there seems to be no consensus on which buddha it may be.

Vanaratna's Final Year: 1467-68

Drawing from bSod nams rgya mtsho's account, and framed by the *paubhā* commissioned following Vanaratna's death, we resume Vanaratna's narrative in 1466 at the point we left it at the end of Chapter Five. Ten years had passed since Vanaratna made his final return from Tibet in 1456, when he reached the Valley with the Vanaratna Codex in hand, and resumed his career as a *paṇḍita* and *vajrācārya* for the Newar community, and as an advisor to Jayayakṣamalla in Bhaktapur. At this moment in 1466, bSod nams rgya mtsho had recently visited his guru in Nepal, and reported that when he left him, the *paṇḍita* still at the height of his spiritual, literary, and physical powers:

[Vanaratna continued to teach me] through the middle of the second month of the Year of the Female Fire Dog (1466). By this time he was eighty-three years old, but he still looked quite physically youthful and did not at all need to curtail his activities. Thus he remained a glorious and sublime protector for all beings.²⁹

Even at this late stage of his life, Vanaratna was still receiving invitations from outside of Nepal—from Tibet of course, but also from Pandua in east India and perhaps as far as Kashmir—but declined them all out of a wish to remain in Nepal and focus on his practice of *samādhi*.³⁰

At this point in bSod nams rgya mtsho's account, the tenor of Vanaratna's personal reflections begins to change, and in them we see Buddhist tropes of cosmological and doctrinal entropy being mapped onto Vanaratna's narrative as the time of his death approaches. bSod nams rgya mtsho himself declares the year 1467/8 (or rather, the Year of the Male Earth Mouse) to an especially degenerate time,³¹ before articulating the same sentiment through Vanaratna's words to his Nepalese disciples:

[Vanaratna] would say again and again, "As a yogin I have the power to live a long time, and I have the power to die right now. The times are quite poor, people are becoming wicked, there are no meaningful ways to be of benefit, nor is there any indication that the [opportunities] to be of benefit, or for [cultivating] *samādhi* would be better somewhere else. Therefore, there is not much time left, so let me give you whatever teachings you desire."³²

Because bSod nams rgya mtsho was not present and would not have had access to Vanaratna's reflections, it is likely that here bSod nams rgya mtsho is leaning into the common Buddhist tropes of degeneration to frame Vanaratna's passing in a manner familiar to a Buddhist audience.

²⁹ SG 54v.2-3: me mo khy'i dbo can zla ba la mthil nas bteḡ | 'di dus dgung lo gya gsum pa yin te | sku gzhoṅ sha phun sum tshogs shing spyod lam gyi gnas pa gzhan du 'gyur ba med pas 'gro ba mtha' dag gi dpal dgon dam par bzhugs pa yin no.

³⁰ SG 54v.3-55r.1. About the invitations Vanaratna received in these years, see Ch. 5, p. 137.

³¹ SG 55r.1-2: lo 'di'i phyi ma sa pho byi ba'i so ga'i dus tsam nas snyigs ma las ches snyigs mar...

³² SG 55v.1-2: nged rang rnal 'byor pa yun rin po sdod pa'ang dbang yod | da lta 'chi ba'ang dbang yod | da ni dus kyang ma bzang | mi rnams kyang ngan par song | don bya ba chen po ci yang med | gnas gzhan du 'gro ba don che ba dang | sa mā dhi bzang ba'i mtshan ma byung | de'i don gyis yun rin po med | khyed rang chos 'dod pa rnams la'ang ci dang ci 'dod pa ster zhes yang gsungs 'dug.

Whether or not this reflects the actual conditions Vanaratna faced in Nepal is a matter of scholarly disagreement. Some, such as Luciano Petech, understand the available historical evidence to indicate that the long period of relative peace and prosperity initiated by Jayasthitimalla and sustained by Jayayakṣamalla began to founder in the final decades of the latter's rule. In this argument, Jayayakṣamalla initiated a political fracturing of the Kathmandu Valley by parceling out the administration of the kingdom's cities, towns, and regions to his many sons, resulting in an intense succession struggle following the king's passing. With his sons in control of different parts of the Valley, and with the *mahāpātras* of Patan taking de facto control of that city, governance of the kingdom rapidly devolved from the power-sharing model of the earlier Malla kings to one of multiple, competing power centers, a volatile political paradigm that initiated an era of political tension, intrigue, and open conflict that extended until the defeat of the dynasty at the hands of Prṥhvinārāyaṇa Shāh (1723-75) in 1768. Much of the instability and conflict would have occurred well after Vanaratna's death, but Petech also claims that there was a palace coup in 1462, when Jayayakṣa's son Jayarāyamalla usurped the throne for nearly a decade. If this version of events is correct Vanaratna's sentiments articulated by bSod nams rgya mtsho may parallel the historical reality of the decline and breakdown of Malla rule under which Vanaratna prospered during his long career in the Kathmandu Valley. D.R. Regmi has cast significant doubt on this argument through his own careful reading of colophons and other materials from the period, and is particularly doubtful about Petech's claim of Jayarāyamalla's usurpation of the throne. Though he does acknowledge that Jayayakṣa's delegation of authority to his sons likely sowed the seeds of political fragmentation within a few generations, he insists that all evidence suggests that Jayayakṣa and his sons ruled jointly and in relatively harmony through the end of Jayayakṣa's reign.³³ Apart from articulating Vanaratna's ostensible feelings on the conditions of his life using Buddhist clichés of entropy, the SG is silent about the specifics of these conditions, leaving us with little to extract from them to frame the political situation in the final years of Vanaratna's life.

Vanaratna's Final Offering to the Nepalese Community

In bSod nams rgya mtsho's telling, Vanaratna was aware of his immanent death and would tell his students that he would soon depart for the Buddhist pure realms, alternately telling them he was bound for Tuṣita or Sukhāvātī.³⁴ Knowing his death to be near at hand, Vanaratna is said to have taken an active role in preparing for his own passing by planning a rite through which he could generate spiritual merit (*puṇya*) for himself and his community, a final grand gesture to the Buddhist community that had given him a home and supported him for decades. bSod nams rgya mtsho then makes the dubious assertion that there were no well-established funerary custom in Nepal, leaving Vanaratna and his students to come up with their own end-of-life rite:

In Nepal, when anyone died, be they lay or ordained, noble or lowly, there had never been a tradition of funeral rites or the gathering of merit. [Vanaratna] thus gave instructions on the most essential elements [of such a rite] that they could arrange for themselves. He took all the gold and other items he had been offered in Tibet and exchanged them for the requisites and goods to be used to put on a lavish festival. On the eighth day of the eighth month of Pūrvabhadrapāda, everyone in the realm—all

³³ Regmi 1965: 452-80; Petech 1984: 180-82.

³⁴ SG 57r.2-3.

monastics and nobility together with the beggars and everyone else—gathered in large numbers to put on an exceedingly excellent celebration.³⁵

Despite the uninformed statement that the Newar Buddhist community lacked funerary or merit-generating customs in the fifteenth century, the rite purportedly devised by Vanaratna and mentioned in both the commemorative *paubhā* and the SG bears a striking resemblance to the body of *dāna* rites that are now a regular feature of the Newar Buddhist's community's ritual calendar. Through the work of William Tuladhar-Douglas and others we know that the fifteenth century was a fervent period in the advancement of distinctly local forms of Buddhism in Nepal, and among the many innovations incubated in that century were a collection of *dāna* rites rooted in the mythic narrative of the buddha Dīpaṅkara that codified acts of merit-generating generosity between the laity—and specifically the nobility—and the monastic *saṅgha*. This emerging body of rites was given authoritative status in a collection of scripture composed in Nepal beginning in the fifteenth century—specifically the fifteenth-century *Kapiśāvadāna* and the seventeenth-century *Piṇḍapātrāvadāna*—out which a range of *dāna* rites were formulated; namely, the *pañcadāna*, *navadāna*, and *samyak mahādāna* rites and their corollaries.³⁶

We can draw a clear line that connects the mythologies and ritual paradigms associated with these *dāna* rites and the lavish offering feast put on by Vanaratna and his community at Gopicandra Vihāra. We do so by once again looking to both the SG and to Vanaratna's commemorative *paubhā*, which not only reveal this connection, but also corroborate each other's description of the event. The first key point of correspondence between Vanaratna's rite and the *dāna* rites that would become a feature of Newar ritual life is the prescribed date of their performance. The contemporary *pañcadāna* rite is traditionally observed on the eighth day of the bright fortnight (*śuklapakṣa*) of the month of Guṃlā (July-August) according to the Newar calendar, the same period given the name Śrāvāṇa in Sanskrit. Both the SG and the inscription from the *paubhā* confirm that this was the date on which Vanaratna's *dāna* rite was performed. The SG states that the rite was observed on eighth day of the eighth month during the lunar transit of *pūrvabhadrapāda*, while the *paubhā* tells us it was performed on the eighth day of the bright fortnight during the solar month of Śrāvāṇa in Nepal Saṃvat 588 (1467/8). Thus we see that Vanaratna's rite is aligned with what is now the fixed date of the *pañcadāna* rite.

A second correlation between Vanaratna's *dāna* rite and the body of contemporary *dāna* festivals is their shared origin in the mythology of the previous buddha Dīpaṅkara. According to the scriptural touchstones for Newar *dāna* rites—the *Kapiśāvadāna* and *Piṇḍapātrāvadāna*—the paradigmatic ritual offering that informs the Newar Buddhist rites was made by Sarvānanda, king of the city of Dīpavatī, to the buddha of the *satyayuga* Dīpaṅkara and his monastic *saṅgha*.³⁷ There are numerous versions of this myth, and the details of their encounter vary

³⁵ SG 55v.3-5: khyad par bal yul na snya ser drag zhan su lnga par gyur kyang | dgongs rdzogs dang dge rtsa sogs kyi lugs ye med pa la rang dbang ba'i mdzad pa mkhos su phebs pa bstan par bzhed pas | phyag na bod kyis phul ba'i gser sogs yo byad gang yod phal che ba ston mo'i chas dang yon gyi 'bra men sogs su bsgyur nas | khirms stod can hor zla brgyad pa'i tshes brgyad la | yul de'i nang par gtogs pa'i rab tu 'byung ba 'ju 'ju thams cad dang | gzhan yang slongs mo ba srid do cog dang bcas pa'i 'du ba shin tu che ba la | ston mo shin tu bzang po gnang.

³⁶ Vaidya 1986: 73-83; Tuladhar-Douglas 2015: 39, *passim*; Galdi 2019: 93-103.

³⁷ Dīpaṅkara is, of course, a prominent figure in Buddhist mythology, and stories from his narrative are recounted in a number of classic Buddhist texts, with the *Mahāvastu* treating it most extensively. There is little evidence, however, of a cult of Dīpaṅkara active in Nepal prior to the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thus the emergence of the cult to Dīpaṅkara appears to have been integral to the project of formulating distinctively Newar expressions of Buddhism in the fifteenth century. A critical move in establishing the cult of Dīpaṅkara and the origins of the *dāna* festivals in Nepal was to overlay the mythology of Dīpaṅkara with the mythology of Buddhism

widely, but whatever their differences, the *dāna* rite performed by the king of Dīpavatī in veneration of the previous buddha consistently serves as the template upon which the Newar rites were formulated. And in this the rite devised or adopted by Vanaratna is no different, as confirmed by bSod nams rgya mtsho:

This tradition [of Vanaratna's rite] comes from the time of the previous Teacher. At that time the king of the city of Dīpavatī had devotion to the teachings of non-Buddhist mendicants (*kun tu rgya ba/parivrājaka*), and was particularly fixated on purity. When the time came for [the king] and his court to be tamed, the Teacher and his entourage came to the city with the intent to refute [the teachings on] purity and definitive conduct (*nges spyod?*), but the king and his court had absolutely no faith. At a later time the earth under that entire realm began to disintegrate and shake, and the king and his court were terrified, certain that they would sink beneath the ground. He looked around and noticed that all the places where the Teacher and his entourage has placed their feet were not shaking. This instilled great faith in him, prompting him to invite them back. He made elaborate preparations for the occasion, including having the entire area sprinkled with scented water, strewn with flower petals, decorated with streamers made of various silks, arranged for song, dance, and music and had the whole road covered with unblemished fabrics from Kāśī. He made offerings by [having people] dress in masks of the three major gods, among others, and proffer offering water and the like. He then fed them an abundance of fine food and drink, prostrated to them, reverentially made offerings as appropriate to fill their alms bowls to the brim and then sat down in order to receive teachings. When the Teacher was finished teaching the Dharma, the king and his court became followers of the Buddhist teachings. [Vanaratna] said, "Following this precedent we regard the monastics of this kingdom to be like that teacher and retinue, and so will put on an offering feast [like in] the city of Dīpavatī."³⁸

This version of the meeting between Sarvānanda and Dīpaṅkara in Dīpavatī is unlike any other in the available literature, and is particularly distinct from the versions canonized in the Newar scriptures that serve as the basis for the modern body of rites. This points to the possibility of that there were a plurality of competing narratives circulating in Nepal during Vanaratna's lifetime, and that the version described by Vanaratna was part of complex of Dīpaṅkara myths that were being developed and employed in the formulation of large-scale *dāna* rites. Eventually

in the Kathmandu Valley. This was done, in part, by locating Dīpaṅkara's encounter with Sarvānanda on Nepalese soil, which was achieved by associating the city of Dīpavatī with Patan, and locating key scenes in the monastic institutions in the city (Graldi 2019: 93, 103-6).

³⁸ SG 55v.5-56r.6: de'i tshul yang sngon ston pa zhal bzhugs pa na mar me ldan zhes bya ba'i grong khyer gyi rgyal po kun tu rgyu'i chos la mos shing gtsang sbra la mchog tu 'dzin pa byung | de 'khor dang bcas pa 'dul ba'i dus la bab pa na | ston pa 'khor dang bcas gtsang sbra dang nges spyod ched du 'gog pa'i spyod lam gyis grong khyer der gshegs pa la | rgyal po 'khor bcas mchog tu ma dad | ji zhid na yul de'i sa thams cad zhig cing gyur nas rgyal po 'khor bcas sa 'og tu 'bying ba snyam pa'i skrag dang ngas byung ba na legs par brtags pas ston pa 'khor bcas kyi zhabs kyi bcags pa'i sa gang yin thams cad ma nur ba mthong bas mchog tu dad slar spyang drang | de'i tshe sa gzhi thams cad spos chus chag chag btab cing me tog sil ma 'gram | dar sna tshogs kyi lda lding dang glu gar dang rol mo sogs rgya cher sbyar | lam thams cad du ka śi ka'i ras ma nyams pa gting | lha chen po gsum la sogs pa'i 'bag gyon nas argha sbreng ba sogs kyi mchod cing | bza' ba dang bca' ba bsad pa mang po bstabs | phyag bstal te | lhung bzed gyu bar rig pa'i mthar yon phul nas chos mnyan pa'i phyr 'dug pa la | ston pas chos bstan pas rgyal po 'khor bcas sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la zhugs pa byung | nged rang kyang sngon byung gi tshul de dang mthun par yul 'di'i rab tu byung ba la ston pa 'knor bcas su blas nas | mar me ldan gyi grong khyer gyi mchod pa'i dus stong byed pa yin gsung.

a different version of the myth would be set down in works like the *Kapiśāvadāna* and *Piṇḍapātrāvadāna*, but as these texts only began to take shape in this period, it is reasonable to assume that there were other mythic templates available. Thus in Vanaratna's narrative we may see a version of the foundational mythology of *dāna* rites in Nepal that eventually lost out to the myth as we know it today. It is impossible to say if Vanaratna was an active agent in the creation of these mythologies or a passive consumer of them, but the fact that the narrative conveyed by bSod nams rgya mtsho is distinct from other sources places Vanaratna in the midst of a dynamic period in the development of Newar Buddhist literature and ritual practices.

Having shown the close correspondences between the timing and foundational mythology of the *dāna* rite performed by Vanaratna and the *pañcadāna*, *samyak mahādāna*, and related body of offering rites, the next logical question to ask is to what degree Vanaratna's feast offering resembles these rites. Taking into consideration that these rites were in the formative stages of development in the fifteenth century, and accounting for the centuries of development they would undergo to reach their contemporary form, we find that the many of the features of Vanaratna's offering align closely with modern observances of the various *dāna* rites. Both the terse description in the *paubhā* and the lengthier description in the SG bear this out. As cited above, the *paubhā* simply reports that Vanaratna offered one full vessel of food, a bushel (*pāthi*) of grain, and a monetary offering (*dām*) to 1,290 monastics,³⁹ a number large enough to reasonably be considered inclusive of the entire community of qualified Śākyas and Vajrācāryas in Patan, thus potentially offer a useful and rare statistic for the community at the time. bSod nams rgya mtsho learned a great deal more about the rite from his informants, making his account particularly illuminating for Vanaratna's rite:

[Vanaratna] sent word to the people of Temal, saying, "I am putting on a festival for departing to Tuṣita. Please come and bring whatever offerings you can afford. It will be of benefit to me now, will be beneficial for you later, and will create the auspicious conditions for [us], master and disciples, to meet in Tuṣita." They came bearing all the offerings they could afford, and placed them at His Eminence's throne in the hall of Gopicandra Vihāra. Scented water was sprinkled in all the open spaces, flowers were scattered, and offerings of music, song, and dance of the highest quality were arranged. The offerings were arranged in front and to the side of a painting that depicted Brahmā offering bathing water, Indra waving a fan, Viṣṇu sprinkling reception water, and so forth. The road along which the monastic *saṅgha* would travel was overspread with fine-quality cloth, fabrics, and silks. [The *saṅgha*] was then invited, and all the offerings were properly distributed. After this was complete, [Vanaratna] distributed thirty-two clean and pleasing items of food and drink, together with a coin that had an exchange value of sixteen bushels of rice.⁴⁰ And as payment to each *saṅgha* he gave two loads of *littshi* (?), and all the beggars were given equal portions. It was reported [to me] that everyone was in agreement that a festival as beneficial as this, abundant with excellent goods, had never been witnessed before in Nepal.⁴¹

³⁹ Pal 1985: 236-7. Thanks again go to Yogesh Raj and Punya Parajuli for the insightful comments on this portion of the inscription.

⁴⁰ I thank Khenpo Yeshe of UC Berkeley for clarifying this challenging line.

⁴¹ SG 56r.6-56v.5: te mal ba rnam la'ang nged dga' ldan du 'gro ba'i dus stong cig byed | khyed rang mams kyang yo byad ci 'byor khyer shog | 'dir nged la phan | phyi mar khyed rang la phan pa yin | phyi ma dga' ldan du dpon slob 'jom pa'i rten 'brel yod gsung ba phebs | khong rnam kyi kyang yo byad ji 'byor khyer nas phyin | de nas go bi candra'i gtsug lag khang gi bkad par bdag nyid chen po khri bshams pa la bzhugs | srang bar thams cad spos chus

Read in combination, these *paubhā*'s inscription and the accounts from the SG confirm that many of the elements observed in contemporary Newar *dāna* rites can be seen in Vanaratna's rite as well. At the heart of all *dāna* rites is the structure that positions the laity as the benefactors of the monastic *saṅgha*. Their exchange of material support for spiritual merit involved, then as now, an invitation from the laity to the monastic community to travel from their monasteries to the home of their patrons in order to receive offerings that have been arrayed around a shrine erected specifically for the purpose.⁴² That Vanaratna was himself a prominent local guru, his house a *vihāra*, and the shrine his throne does not alter this basic formula of the *dāna* rite. This core structure is confirmed when Vanaratna's announced that he aspired to perform a rite that would serve the monastic community of Nepal just as the king of Dīpavatī did for the previous Buddha, and is reiterated by his invitation to an opulent reception of the monastic community at Gopicandra. Vanaratna conceived of his offering as a communal, rather than individual affair, drawing in a diverse array of patrons and giving them a stake in performance of the rite. This is most notably apparent in his invitation to the people of Temal, who had supported him throughout his decades in Nepal, and specifically during his journeys to Tibet. He returned their kindness by expressly inviting them to come to Patan, to include their offerings among his own, and to reap the abundant merit that would result. Though only the Temal people are mentioned by name, Vanaratna frequently uses the first person plural pronoun "we" (*nged rang*) when discussing his preparations, indicating that the rite was put on by the larger community at Gopicandra, and perhaps beyond. bSod nams rgya mtsho also notes in passing the diverse array of participants when he wrote, "everyone in the realm—all the monastics and nobility together with the beggars and everyone else—gathered in large numbers to put on an exceedingly excellent celebration."⁴³ Included here is the only reference in the entire passage that indicates the nobility (Tib. 'ju 'ju; Newari: *juju*) of the Kathmandu Valley participated. The term *juju* is typically reserved for the king or members of the royal line, but here it is more plausibly used to refer to local dignitaries in Patan and perhaps elsewhere in the Valley. Historically the king of Nepal has played a role in leading the festivities,⁴⁴ but one would think that the king or members of the royal family would have been mentioned more explicitly had they actually been in attendance. Nonetheless, the fact that the nobility was mentioned generically at least suggests that prominent dignitaries from the community were involved in the rite to some degree.

In the contemporary observances of the *dāna* rites the material offerings bestowed on the *saṅgha* have become somewhat standardized, and here too we see some correspondence between modern iterations of the rite and Vanaratna's performance, though the similarities are admittedly superficial. Taking as an example the modern observance of the *pañcadāna* rite, the "five offerings" are typically comprised of grain products augmented by offerings that vary according

chag chag btab cing me tog bkram | rol mo dang glu gar la sogs pa'i mchod pa'i bkod pa phul du byung ba bshams | tshangs pas khros chab 'bul ba dang | brgya byin gyis bsil yab g.yob pa dang | khyab 'jug gis argha sbreng ba sogs ri mor bris pa'i mdun du dngos su'ang bshams | dge 'dun rnams 'byon pa'i lam du ras dang gos dar yug bzang po bting ba la phyan drangs te | mchod pa rnams tshul bzhin du bstabs pa'i mthar bza' ba dang bca' ba'i khyad par gtsang zhing bsod pa grangs sum cu rtsa gnyis ma | 'bras men re la 'bras pham bcu drug ma byed dus kyi 'bra men re'i yon dang bcas pa gngang bas | dge 'dun re re'i rnyed pa littsha gnyi re'i khur po byung 'dug cing | slongs mo mtha's dag la'ang cha mthun ar rtsal bar snang te | bal por da lta phan 'di pas 'du ba che ba dang rnyed pa bzang ba'i dus ston ma byung zhes thams cad kha mthun du gleng zhing 'dug zer ro.

⁴² Vaidya 1984: 75-6.

⁴³ SG 55v.4-5.

⁴⁴ van den Hoek 1996: 199; von Rospatt 2018: 188.

to the patron's means and preference, but which can include currency.⁴⁵ bSod nams rgya mtsho's account only provides detail of a secondary set of offerings made after the initial offerings were distributed, so we can make little in the way of comparisons based on his testimony. The *paubhā* on the other hand records the fact that Vanaratna made offerings of grain and currency to the 1,290 monastics who attended,⁴⁶ and bSod nams rgya mtsho corroborates the inclusion of monetary donations. Thus the offerings described in both sources tabulate well, at least generically, with offerings made in contemporary practice. Such correspondences go only so far, however, as these offerings are widely used in diverse Buddhist contexts.

In addition to what may have been a predetermined set of offerings, it is clear that Vanaratna's offering was considerably lavish, augmented by his personal wealth and the wealth of his community. We told that after an initial round of offerings were made, another set of offerings were distributed that included precisely thirty-two types of food and drink, coins of significant exchange value, and intriguingly, substantial offerings made to entire monastic *saṅghas* rather than just individuals. The Tibetan phrase *dge 'dun re re* (each *saṅgha*) seems to indicate that Vanaratna and the Gopicandra community made donations not just to the individual monks and *vajrācāryas* who were invited from the local monasteries, but larger donations to those institutions as well. bSod nams rgya mtsho's use of *dge 'dun re re* resonates with the phrase *bāhā-bahī* that appears in the *paubhā* inscription in connection to Vanaratna's alms distribution in 1456. Thus it seems in both 1456 and in 1467, Vanaratna and the Gopicandra community made offerings to their sister institutions in Patan, and perhaps elsewhere in the Valley. Vanaratna is also said to have given a share of the feast to the many beggars (*slongs mo*) who had gathered, a practice which is still common in Newar Buddhist *dāna* rites.

The correspondences described above allow us to establish a link, however tenuous, between the rite described in Vanaratna's biography and the commemorative *paubhā* and contemporary *dāna* rites in the Newar community, but there is one conspicuous omission from the performance of the offering festival put on by Vanaratna: the Buddha Dīpaṅkara. Though it is evident that Dīpaṅkara's mythic narrative provided the template for Vanaratna's rite, there is no evidence at all that the former buddha was given a prominent place in its execution. The centrality of Dīpaṅkara in contemporary observance is impossible to miss: the offerings made in the various *dāna* rites are traditionally arrayed around an image of Dīpaṅkara, and in the case of the *samyak mahādāna*, the oversize busts of Dīpaṅkara that are paraded through the streets of the Kathmandu Valley make for much of the pageantry of the festival.⁴⁷ Thus it is curious that, apart from the myth upon which his rite was based, Dīpaṅkara plays no identifiable role in Vanaratna's performance. From bSod nams rgya mtsho's informants we learn that the central shrine supporting the offerings did not consist of an image of Dīpaṅkara, nor of any other Buddhist deities, but rather was erected around Vanaratna's own throne in the main hall of Gopicandra. If, as might be expected, Vanaratna officiated the rite from his seat on the throne, he

⁴⁵ Karunakara Vaidya (1984: 75) states that the *pañcadāna* offerings are made up of unhusked rice, processed uncooked rice, pulses, wheat, and currency; John Locke (1980: 237) lists them as unprocessed rice, processed uncooked rice, fruit, bread, and honey; and, Mary Slusser (1985: 310) states the offering consists of four types of grain and salt

⁴⁶ This interpretation, not given in Ian Alsop's original reading, is based specifically on the readings and translation of Yogesh Raj and Punya Parajuli.

⁴⁷ Vaidya 1984: 75; Slusser 1985: 310; van den Hoek 1995: 201. It is worth noting that the foundation myth described by bSod nams rgya mtsho does include participants dressed in masks of the "three major gods" (*lha chen po gsum*), but does not indicate if they are Buddhist or Brahmanical. This feature is presumably echoed in the painting of Brahmā, Indra, and Viṣṇu used in Vanaratna's rite. Apart from that image, there is no mention of the inclusion of other deities, as masked participants or otherwise.

would have been the primary spiritual focal point for the monastics gathered to receive alms, and for the rest of the community present to witness the performance. The only other deities explicitly mentioned are the triad of Brahmanical deities arrayed in a painting that was set before the throne. In it Brahmā, Indra, and Viṣṇu are depicted performing acts of veneration, perhaps to the monastic community assembled to receive alms or perhaps to Vanaratna on his throne.⁴⁸ It would therefore appear that Vanaratna was positioned as the spiritual locus of the rite much as Dīpaṅkara is in modern iterations. It is of course possible that there was an image of Dīpaṅkara or another Buddhist deity placed on the throne and not Vanaratna, but we can assume that detail would have been considered worthy of mention.

From bSod nams rgya mtsho's description it would seem that Vanaratna conceived of his *dāna* ceremony both as a funerary rite that would secure spiritual merit for his passing, and as merit-generating rite that would benefit his patrons, the monastic community, his *saṅgha* at Gopicandra, and the wider population which he served throughout his long career in Patan and the Kathmandu Valley. Because of his status and affluence he was able to put on a rite which bSod nams rgya mtsho's informants said, perhaps hyperbolically, was unrivaled in living memory. This statement may attest to the fact that such *dāna* rites were a newly emerging feature of the Newar Buddhist ritual repertoire, and that Vanaratna was himself among the earliest patrons, and perhaps innovators, of what would become a deeply ingrained facet of communal Buddhist worship in the Newar community. The fact that all evidence points to the fifteenth century as a formative time in the history of *dāna*-based rites in Nepal makes the descriptions of Vanaratna's unique performance all the more compelling as a historical witness to the history of the diverse body of rites that include staples of the Newar Buddhist ritual life, the *pacñadāna*, *navadāna*, and *samyak mahādāna* rites. Vanaratna's rite is unique for linking the *dāna* rite's focus on merit-making with an end-of-life practice, and there are some aspects of the his rite that do not correspond precisely with any of the rites that have come down into modern times. Nonetheless, the key elements and broad strokes of established *dāna* rites are on clear display in Vanaratna's performance, leaving us once again indebted to Vanaratna's biography for a rare glimpse of what was a dynamic and productive moment in the history of Nepalese Buddhism.

The Passing of the Paṇḍita

Vanaratna performed his grand *dāna* ceremony on the eight day of the dark fortnight in the month of Śrāvaṇa in Saṃvat 588, which would have been roughly mid- to late-summer of the year 1468. The *dāna* rite served as a final celebration of his long relationship with the Buddhist community, and by distributing a lifetime of accumulated wealth, was able to make one last gift to the Buddhist *saṅgha* in Patan. Vanaratna then gathered his local students close, and spent the last months of his life giving them whatever final teachings they wished for. Thus, by the second half of 1468, Vanaratna had given away his possessions, celebrated his life and career in the Kathmandu Valley, and settled in for what would be the final months of his long and illustrious life. In typical Buddhist narrative fashion, bSod nams rgya mtsho tells us that from the time of his *dāna* rite onwards, the city of Patan witnessed the sort of miraculous displays that traditionally accompany the death of a great Buddhist master: a steady rain of flowers fell, rainbows filled the sky, the earth shook gently, and the summer crops were abundant. The

⁴⁸ May Slusser has noted (1985: 310) that Brahmā is typically present among the offering deities in contemporary performances of the *pañcaḍana* rite, but is represented by a broom, not an image of the deity.

pervasiveness and constancy of these miracles filled the local people with wonder, leading them to exclaim, “What’s happening in our kingdom!”⁴⁹

Vanaratna’s immanent passing was first signaled to the community by an odd miracle that manifested on the eighteenth day of Mārgaśīrṣa:

Then, on the morning of the eighteenth day of the eleventh month, Mārgaśīrṣa, everyone watched as a long stream of white, milk-like fluid poured like water out of vase from the cloudless autumn sky into the *vihāra*, falling to the right side of [Vanaratna’s] body as he sat on his teaching seat. It pooled onto the floor, and then nothing happened. [Everyone] wondered, “Is this an invitation offering from the gods?”⁵⁰

Vanaratna’s students understood this unique miracle to indicate he had reached the end of his life, and so began to gather at Gopicandra to perform one last *gaṇacakra* with their guru:

On the afternoon of twenty-second day all [of Vanaratna’s] close, *samaya*-holding disciples in Patan gathered together, and from dusk until midnight performed an exceedingly excellent and elaborate *gaṇacakra*. At the point [in the rite] for singing and dancing, [Vanaratna] joyfully gave encouragement, spoke his own vajra songs, elaborated on the greatness of secret mantra, and gave key points of instruction. Everyone present was satisfied and ecstatic.⁵¹

Around midnight, once the *gaṇacakra* was complete, he requested that a fresh set of *bali* offerings be prepared in his personal meditation chamber, put on a fresh set of clothes, and retired to the privacy of cell. When the time of death arrived, Vanaratna assumed the vajra posture, entered *samādhi*, and passed away.⁵² The reports that reached bSod nams rgya mtsho in Tibet stated that Vanaratna exhibited many of the signs of *thugs dam*, the post-death condition of the physical body that is said to reveal the depth of a master’s realization: his body remained pliable in the vajra posture, appeared to become youthful, did not decay, and gave off a bright glow. It is was even reported that after some time, Vanaratna’s corpse, still in meditation posture, snapped the fingers of its right hand, thereby signaling the end of the post-death meditative state.⁵³

In the evening of the following day, the twenty third day of the eleventh month, mid-winter in 1468,⁵⁴ Vanaratna’s corpse was carried to the Ramadoli cremation ground at the confluence of the Viṣṇumati and Vagmati rivers in what is now the Teku neighborhood of Kathmandu (image

⁴⁹ SG 57r.2: bal bo thams cad yul ’dir ci ’dra ’ong ba yin zer

⁵⁰ SG 57r.5-57v.1: de nas go can hor zla bcu geig pa’i tshes beo brgyad kyi zhags chos gsung ba’i gdan la phebs pa’i sku ’khris g.yas ngos kyi gtsug lag khang gi ston ka’i (*em.*; mthong ka’i ms.) nam mkha’ sprin dang bral ba las | ’o ma ltar dkar ba’i chu’i rgyun bum pa’i mchu las ’babs pa lta bu yun ring du thams cad kyi mthong bar byung | sa’i steng du ’khyil rgyu sogs ni ci yang ma byung ’dug ste | lhas spyen ’dren pa’i mchod yon gsol ba yin nam snyom mo.

⁵¹ SG 57v.1-3: nyi shu gnyis kyi phyi dro’i cha la ye rang gi zhal slob dam tshig pa thams cad bsdu | srod kyi cha nas mtshan phyed yol gyi bar tshogs kyi ’khor lo shin tu bzang zhing rgya che ba gnang | glu gar gyi gnas la gzhan bskul ba dang | zhal lnga nas rdo rje’i glu dang | gsang sngags kyi che ba dang | nges pa’i gnang du ma thugs dgyes ches par gsungs pas thams cad tshim zhing rangs pa.

⁵² SG 57v.3-6.

⁵³ SG 58v.3-4: sku gdung zhum zhing gzhon nu lta bur gyur pa las phyigs gzhen du yo ba med cing gzi ’od lhag par ’bar ba | phyag g.yon na mnyams gzhang nyid las | g.yas pa se gol gyi brda mdzad pa lta bur ’dug zer.

⁵⁴ It is possible that Vanaratna in fact died in early 1469.

25), and was cremated amidst wonderous signs before a large crowd of spectators:

On the evening of the twenty-third his body, which had not begun to decay, was taken to the great Ramadoli charnel ground for cremation, along with a vast array of offerings. As soon as [his body] was lifted [onto the pyre], there was a great quaking, a rain of flowers fell like a blizzard, and a white light, brighter than daylight, illuminated all of Nepal so that no one noticed it was nighttime. The fire of his burning corpse sent out white smoke, made no sound, and spiraled to the right as it burned. Everyone watched as five colors of light shone brightly from [the fire], merged together, and filled the boundless sky. All beings who were touched by the light experienced feelings of faith, clarity, and amazement, and were granted worldly benefit and established in the ultimate [state].⁵⁵

When the ashes from Vanaratna's funeral pyre had cooled, the king—who was not explicitly mentioned to be in attendance—decreed that Vanaratna's long-standing wish to return to Bodh Gayā, the heartland of the Buddhist tradition he served for nearly the full eighty-four years of his life, should be granted. Jayayakṣamalla entrusted the relics to the headman of the Temal people, and commanded him to take them to Bodh Gayā, and then to immerse them in the Gaṅgā River.⁵⁶ As we know, the Temal headman shared Vanaratna's relics with 'Phags pa bstan 'phel, a colleague of bSod nams rgya mtsho's who was present at the cremation, who then carried them to Tibet and gave them bSod nams rgya mtsho along with his account of Vanaratna's final months. No further mention is made of the Temal chieftain, but we can assume he adhered to the command of the king and carried Vanaratna's remains to Bodh Gayā, the place where Vanaratna's Himalayan journey began over forty years earlier.⁵⁷

Vanaratna's long and successful career in the Himalayan region began in relative obscurity, when he was merely one in a long yet slackening line of pilgrims and aspiring teachers traveling between the north Indian plains and the Tibetan plateau. Though it was not apparent to him at the time, his career as a Buddhist *paṇḍita* was transformed on the day in 1423 when he first set foot in the Kathmandu Valley, for it was then that he began his relationship with the Himalayan Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna community—first as a student and pilgrim, and eventually as a teacher and *vajrācārya*—that would define his legacy. A question that lingers in the background of this study of Vanaratna is precisely what made him such a renowned teacher in Nepal and Tibet. When Vanaratna arrived in the Himalaya from India, the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism predominant there had taken on indigenous forms that had largely supplanted the traditions inherited from India in the preceding centuries. Vanaratna's status as an Indian *paṇḍita* would thus not have given him as much cachet as it once might have, a reality compounded by the limited training available to him in Buddhism's ancient homeland. Additionally, when we survey

⁵⁵ SG 58v.4-59r.1: nyi shu gsum gyi rgongs dur khrod chen po ra ma do lir zhugs la bzhen pa'i slad du | sku gnas pa gzhen du ma 'gyur ba de nyid mchod pa'i bkod pa rgya chen po dang bcas pas do li la spyen drangs pa na sku gdung bteg pa tsam gyi mod las cher g.yo ba dang | me tog gi char kha ba 'tshubs pa lta bur 'bab pa dang | khyad par 'od dkar po'i snang bas bal yul thams cad nyin bar las myang ches gsal bar gyur pas mtshan mo'i nyams dang bral ba'i mod la | gdung gi zhugs dkar po du ba dang sgra med par g.yas 'khyil du bar ba dang kha dog lnga'i 'od kyi snang ba chen po ro gcig tu gyur pa nam mkha' la mtha' mi mgon par song ba kun gyi mthun snang ba byung snang ste | 'od gang gis reg pa'i sems can thams cad kyang dad pa dang dang ba dang ngo mtshar gyi snang bas drangs pa'i phan bde bla na med pa'a bkod par snang ngo.

⁵⁶ This is somewhat geographically illogical, as the Gaṅgā River lies well to the north of Bodh Gayā, and so would have been crossed en route. Given the spiritual resonance of both sites for Buddhists and Hindu alike, we can forgive Jayayakṣa (or perhaps bSod nams rgya mstho) this geographic imprecision.

⁵⁷ SG 59r.1-3.

Vanaratna's extant writings, they reveal him to be a capable writer and ritualist, but nothing about his oeuvre suggests he was a rare talent or especially innovative exegete. As we know from his initial reception in Tibet, he was greeted with skepticism and indifference, and that his learning was openly called into question. In both Nepal and Tibet he had to rely on local masters to augment his training, placing him in a greater debt to the traditions of his patron communities than to lineages he brought with him to the Himalaya.

If we cannot find the seeds of his renown in the training he received in India or his experiences on the subcontinent prior to reaching the Himalaya, we must instead look to the qualities of his personality, qualities that guided in him his studies, sustained him in his travels, and shaped the persona through which he engaged his disciples. In the experiences described in his biographies a number of important traits shine through. Vanaratna first and foremost possessed fearlessness, a fearlessness of body, mind, and spirit that granted him the fortitude to traverse a complex and at times dangerous path across multiple Buddhist ecumenes, learn from a plurality of Buddhist traditions, and integrate them into a body of work that served diverse spiritual communities. Vanaratna's narrative also displays his insatiable curiosity, one that not only guided his travels and pilgrimages through Buddhism's physical terrain, but led him to seek out new doctrinal and initiatory lineages wherever he went. Though he sometimes presents a gruff persona in the *rnam thars*, he combined his curiosity with a degree of humility that allowed him to set aside any pride he might take in his previous training and status as *paṇḍita* so he could continue to evolve as a Buddhist teacher by becoming a student of the very communities he hoped to serve. Vanaratna maintained two sides to his Buddhist identity assiduously throughout his career: that of teacher of course, but also as a perpetual student. He often upheld these dual roles simultaneously, and though his dual status as a student and teacher is not treated evenly by his biographers, it seems apparent that it was his constant cultivation of these two aspects of his persona that contributed to his success.

By all accounts it appears that Vanaratna was the object of devotion and veneration on both sides of the Himalaya, a fact that points to a personal charisma that perhaps outshone his abilities as a *paṇḍita*. Such charisma would have been the natural byproduct of the totality of his diverse experiences across South Asian and the Himalaya, experiences that make him one of the most unique Buddhist voices of his time. Few Indian Buddhist *paṇḍitas* of the fifteenth century had the physical endurance and strength of character to navigate such a perilous yet rewarding path, and even fewer left behind such a rich body of materials that so faithfully documents his efforts and preserves his legacy. Thus as the smoke from his funeral pyre mingled with the crisp winter air of the Kathmandu Valley, one can imagine that the many people whose lives were affected by this learned, adventurous, and generous *paṇḍita* gathered together to pay final tribute to a man who was among the last great Buddhist *paṇḍitas* India would produce.

Epilogue: Vanaratna Reborn

Among the collected letters of bSod nams rgya mtsho are four bilingual letters that he composed and sent to Vanaratna from Tibet.⁵⁸ Two of these letters were written during Vanaratna's

⁵⁸ The collected letters of bSod nams rgya mtsho have been published in Ehrhard 2002b. The letters he composed to Vanaratna have been transcribed and translated in Ehrhard 2002a: 101-11.

lifetime, and two, remarkably, were written to Vanaratna’s reincarnation, who had been discovered in Patan around 1478, the year bSod nams rgya mtsho learned of his teacher’s rebirth. The reports that reached bSod nams rgya mtsho in Tibet were of a precocious boy who had already begun teaching, picking up where his predecessor left off “as if awakening from sleep.”⁵⁹ bSod nams rgya mtsho was overjoyed at the news, and within a year had sent a letter and gift to the young reincarnation in Nepal. bSod nams rgya mtsho had hoped the boy would accept his invitation to Tibet, but it appears he was either disinclined or not granted permission to make the journey. Instead the Tibetan *bla ma* and the young reincarnation continued to exchange letters and gifts. The second of bSod nams rgya mtsho’s letters, which Ehrhard dates to 1481, notes that Vanaratna’s reincarnation had sent him “mantra thread and a pair of shoes.”⁶⁰ In return, bSod nams rgya mtsho offered the boy “a hat, four articles of clothing, a cushion, and three measures of gold.”⁶¹ We do not have the reincarnation’s replies to these letters, but we know from the NTSG that the last letter bSod nams rgya mtsho received was accompanied by a set of gifts that included Dharma robes, a sword related to the practice of Acala, and a noose perhaps connected to the *sādhana* of Amoghapāśa, all of which Chos grags ye shes states were the reincarnation’s personal possessions.⁶² bSod nams rgya mtsho letters to Vanaratna’s reincarnation are noteworthy for the insight they give into the nature of bSod nams rgya mtsho’s enduring devotion to his former teacher, but are especially remarkable for bringing our attention to a rare instance in which the direct reincarnation of an Indian Buddhist master was recognized outside Tibet and authorized to uphold his predecessor’s legacy. We unfortunately have no further information on this reincarnation, making it impossible to know what family he was born into, how he was recognized, and how that recognition was regarded by Vanaratna’s former students and the Newar Buddhist community as whole. Thus it is here, with the intriguing appearance of Vanaratna’s reincarnation in Nepal, that Vanaratna’s story comes to its truly final end.

Vanaratna’s legacy, however, lived on in Tibet, largely through the efforts of his three main disciples ’Jam dpal ye shes, gZhon nu dpal, and bSod nams rgya mtsho. Each of these men, towering literary and spiritual masters in their own right, made significant efforts through translation, composition, and teaching to ensure that the lineages and instructions they received were preserved and transmitted in Tibet for generations to come. It is only in recent years, from the end of the twentieth century onwards, that Vanaratna has begun to receive due attention from the scholarly community in Europe and America, as well as from the Buddhist and scholarly communities in his former home, Nepal. Thus, well over five hundred years after his death in Patan, Vanaratna has again been reborn among us as figure of great significance, whose life and works still have much to tell us about the history of Buddhism in South Asia and the Himalayas in the fifteenth century. Through Vanaratna’s eyes and in his words, and through the eyes and pens of some of Tibet’s most luminary figures, we are given the rarest of glimpses into a diverse array of Buddhist communities that stretched the length and breadth of South Asia and Tibet. Rather than viewing the Buddhist landscape through the rose-colored lenses of traditional hagiography, Vanaratna and his Tibetan counterparts have gifted us realistic depiction of life on the ground in the Buddhist communities that were in various states of decline and renaissance.

The study of Vanaratna’s astounding life and career presented here—perhaps overly ambitious and speculative—is offered not as the final word on that legacy, but as a synthesis and summary of the materials available to us, one that can serve as a basis for both well-deserved

⁵⁹ NTSG^b 430.4-5: mnal sad pa lta bu skye ba snga ma ji lta ba’i gsung chos stsol ba.

⁶⁰ Ehrhard 2002b: 7a. sngags kyi srab bu mchil lham dang bcas pa gnang ba.

⁶¹ Ibid: 7b: dbu zhwa | na bza’ bzhi | bzhugs stan | gser zho gsum nmam dbul bar bgyi’o.

⁶² NTSG^b 430.23-431.1.

critique and correction, but most importantly as a starting point for more focused, in-depth research. As broad as this study was, and as extensive the body of material it attempted to synthesize, this is just a scratch on the surface, and it is my fervent wish that more work may be done, by myself and others, on the life, work, and legacy of one of the last great Indian Buddhist *paṇḍitas*.



Image 1: *The Mahasiddha Vanaratna (1384-1468) Receiving Abhishekha from Sita Tara. LACMA cat. no. M.77.19.3*

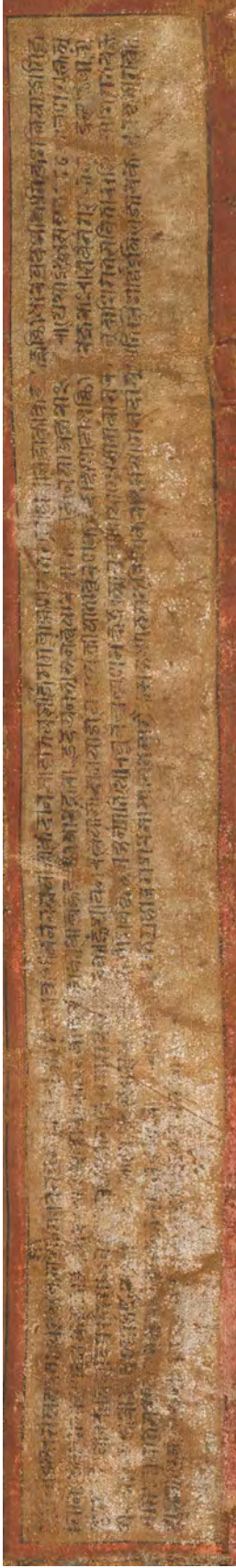


Image 1.1: “The Mahasiddha Vanaratna (1384-1468) Receiving Abhishekha from Sita Tara,” detail.



Image 1.2: Mahasiddha Vanaratna Receiving Abhisheka from White (Sita) Tara, Collection of the Bharat Kala Bhava, Benares Hindu University. Huntington and Bangdel 2003: 143

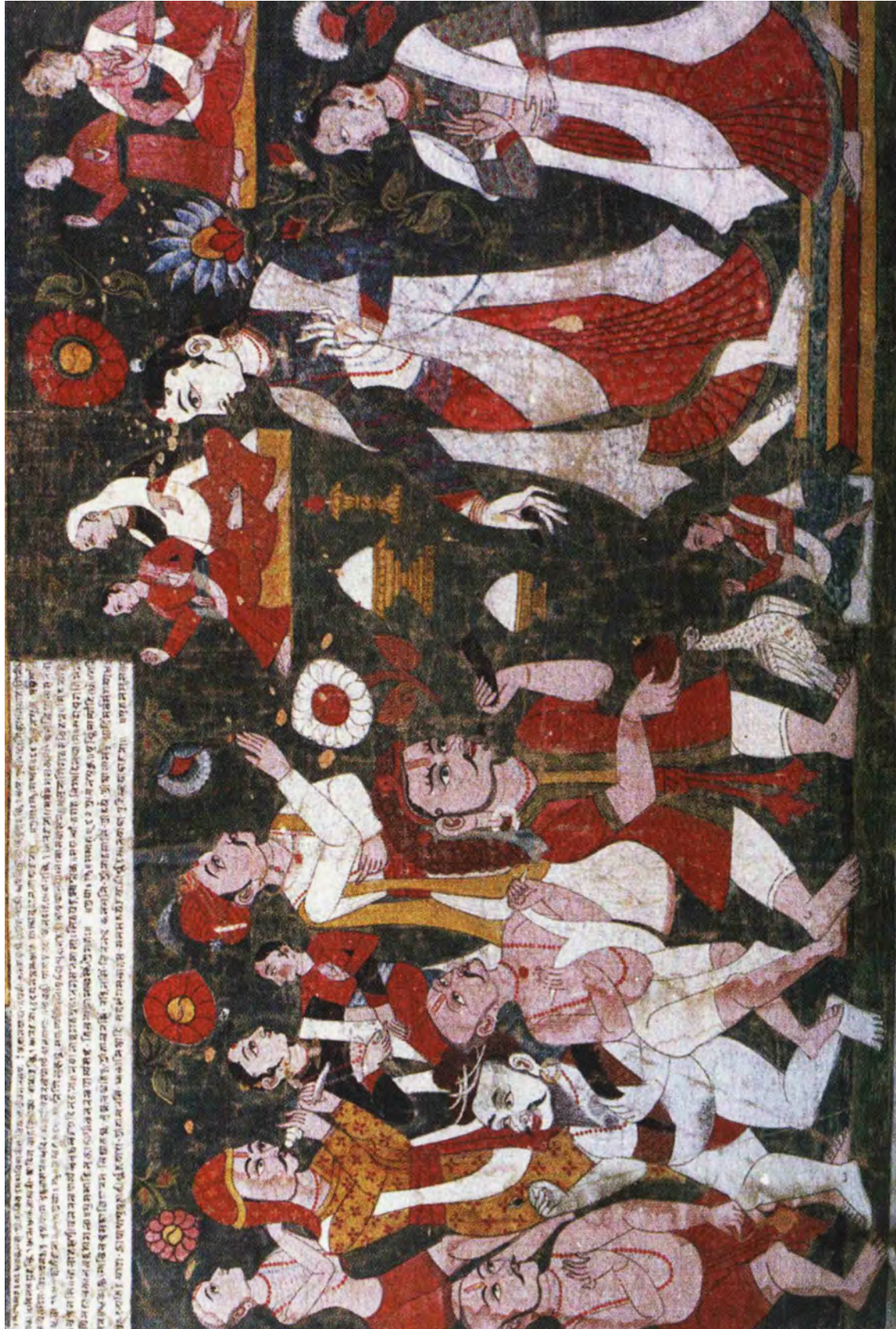


Image 1.2.1: "Mahasiddha Vanaratna Receiving Abhisheka from White (Sita) Tara" detail.



Image 2: *The Indian Pundit Vanaratna with the Vajrāvalī Lineage.* Jackson 2011, p. 95.



Image 3: *Vanaratna*. Jackson 2011: 96.



Image 4: Tomé 1944: Map insert, *Descrição do Reino de Bengalla*, detail.



Image 5: Adam's Bridge (<https://earth.esa.int/documents/257246/3374126/Adams-Bridge-Sentinel-2-17112017-full>)



Image 6: Viḍāgama Vihāra (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kotte_Raja_Maha_Vihara#/media/File:Kotte_Raja_Maha_Vihara_3.jpg)



Image 7: Gaḍalādeṇiya (https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/HUNT_58499)

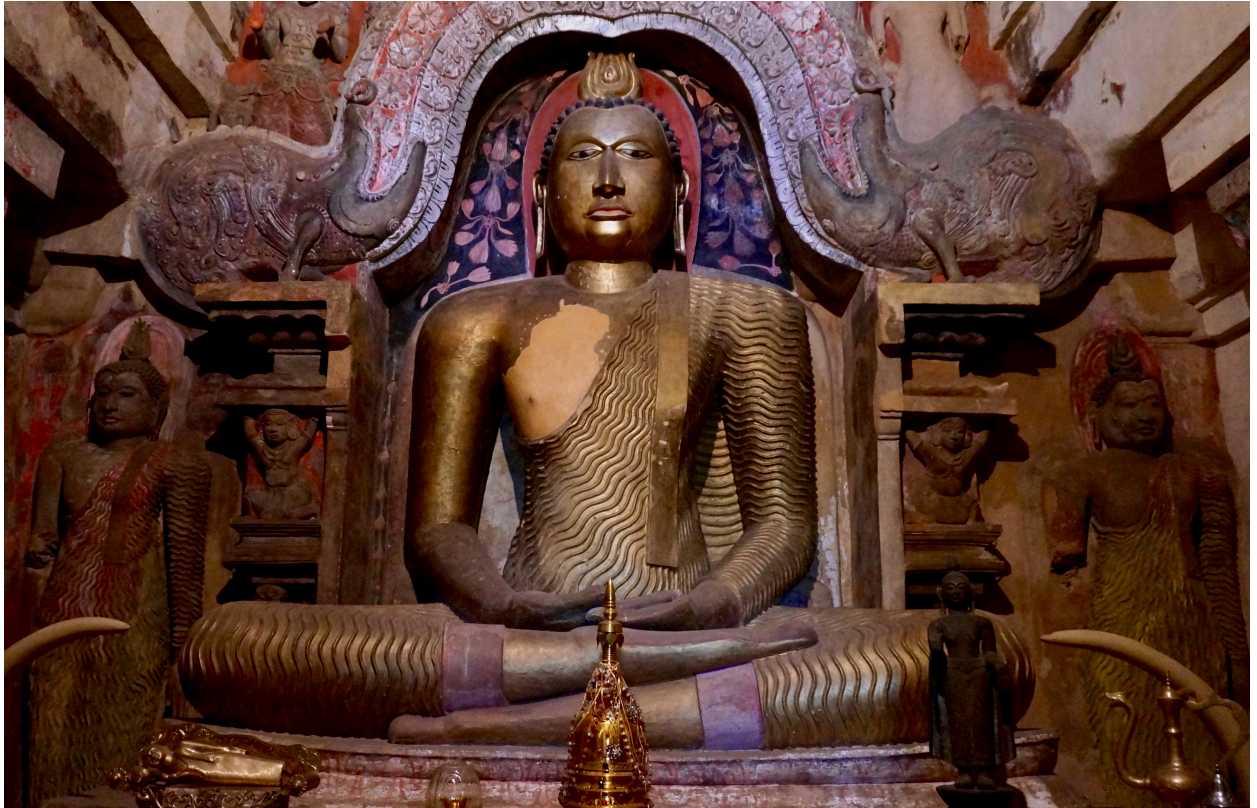


Image 8: Gaḍalādeṇiya Central Image (photo by the author, Jan. 2020)



Image 9: Sumanakūṭa/Sri Pada/Adam's Peak (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sri_Pada.JPG)



Image 10: Adam's Peak; detail of an engraving by B.M.F (? d.u.) (<https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/24854294>)



Image 11: Yāpahuva Central Staircase (photo by the author, Jan. 2020)



Image 12: Yāpahuva Tooth Relic Temple Site (photo by the author, Jan. 2020)



Image 13: Conjectural replica of the Dhānyakaṭaka *stūpa*. (Amaravati Site Museum. https://library.artstor.org/asset/ACSAA_MICHIGAN_1039621950).



Image 14: Amareśvara Image House, Dhānyakaṭaka (https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/AIISIG_10312529206).



Image 15: The summit of Grdhakūṭa (https://library.artstor.org/public/SS7730458_7730458_8654286).



Image 16: Kukkuṭapādagiri (http://www.cpreecenvis.nic.in/Database/GurpaPeak_2218.aspx).



Image 17: Exterior of the Śāntipur Temple pre-2015. https://library-artstor-org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/asset/HUNT_50209



Image 18: Interior view of the Śāntipur Temple. Photo courtesy Alexander Von Rospatt.



Image 19: Svayambhu Mahacaitya, from The John C. and Susan L. Huntington Archive of Buddhist and Related Art, The Ohio State University (https://library-artstor-org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/asset/HUNT_50199).

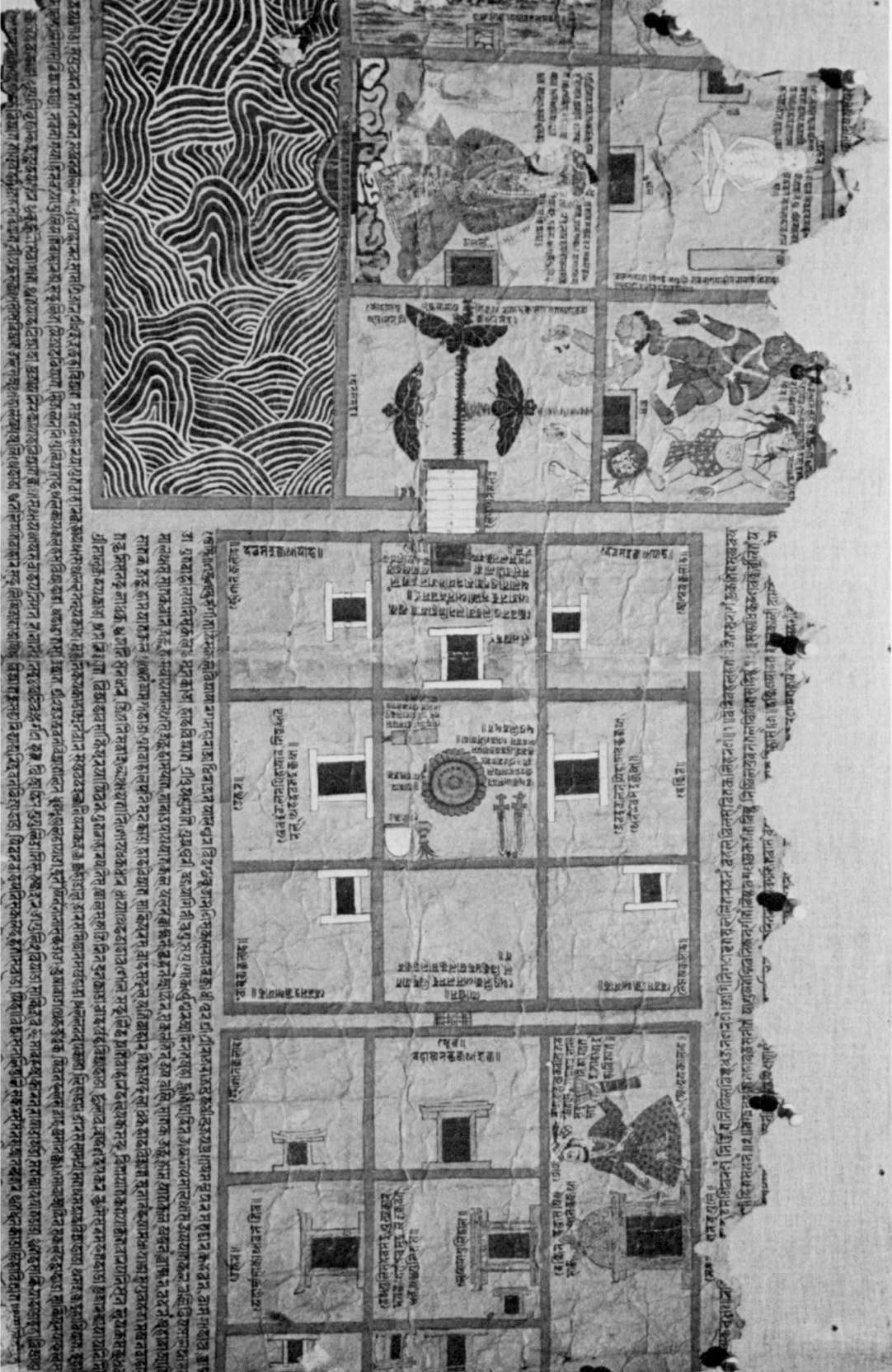


Image 20: Sântipur Temple Precincts as depicted in a 17th-century *Paubhā*. Slusser, Mary S. "Serpents, Sages, and Sorcerers in Cleveland." *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 66 (2): 80.



Image 17: Thap Bahi/Vikramaśīla Vihāra. Photo by the author.



Image 18: Pintu Bahī / Gopicandra Vihāra. Photo by the Author.



Image 19: Vajradhara Statue from Gopicandra Vihāra (conj.). Image from a Sotheby's Auction catalog taken by Hubert Decler. Date and Lot no. unknown. Photo courtesy of Hubert Decler.



Image 20: Harasiddhi. Slusser 1982, vol. 2: Plate 538.



Image 21: Harisiddhi Temple, Harisiddhi Municipality, Nepal. Photo by the author.



Image 22: Hariharivāhana. Private Collection of the Author



Image 23: Gagansim and His Wives. Vajracharya 2004: 41.



Image 24: Tundikhel Mahākāla. Wikipedia Commons: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3c/Mahankal_Temple_%E2%80%93_Kathmandu_%E2%80%93_01.jpg



Image 25: Ramadoli Cremation Ground. Courtesy of Emily Polar, 2017.



Image 26: Statue purported to be of Vanaratna in Punakha Dzong, Bhutan. Photograph courtesy of Hubert Decler.



Image 27: *The Indian Pundit Vanaratna with the Vajrāvalī Lineage*. Jackson 2011, p. 95.



Image 27.1: Detail of Grags pa 'byung gnas, right column, fourth figure from the top.



Image 27.2: Detail of the patron panel, lower left corner.

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