

## Reviews

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*The Cakrasamvara Tantra (The Discourse of Śrī Heruka): Study and Annotated Translation.* Translated by David B. Gray. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies (Columbia University Press), 2007. \$ 49.00 / £ 29.00. ISBN: 978-0-9753734-6-0.

Though a relatively young series, the Treasury of Buddhist Sciences has already published several valuable translations of works of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and promises many more volumes for the future. The volume under review, the publication of which was announced already several years ago, has been awaited eagerly. Everyone working within the field of Tantric Buddhism is fully aware that an undertaking such as this — a critical, annotated, translation of a very influential and highly obscure *yoginītantra* — is a groundbreaking effort.

The volume starts with an introduction to the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* (CS) in three long chapters: the first placing the scripture in a historical and cultural context (pp. 3–28), the second presenting its mythical history and traditional descriptions on the emergence of the main deity (pp. 28–54), and the third its basic and most influential teachings, never losing sight of the testimonies of the large corpus of explanatory tantras and commentaries (pp. 54–136). The fourth introductory chapter deals with the employed ‘texts’ (i.e. manuscripts, the Tibetan translations, and commentaries), translation methodology and technical notes (pp. 137–152). The bulk of the book is occupied by the following complete and richly annotated translation (pp. 154–383). The volume closes with a trilingual glossary of technical terms (pp. 385–404), a *Conspectus Siglorum* (pp. 405–408), a large bibliography (pp. 409–436) and a very welcome, though unfortunately not very thorough, index (pp. 437–447).

It might well be objected that producing a critical translation before a critical edition has been published is not dissimilar to putting the cart in front of the horse. The author is fully aware of this problem, and promises a (much awaited) critical edition in the near future. For the time being the reader is invited to consult the *editio princeps* produced at the CIHTS in Sarnath. Gray is certainly right to voice (especially p. 142. *ff.*) a common complaint among students and scholars of Tantric Buddhism, concerning the rather unreliable nature of the pioneering editions that have been published by the CIHTS. Fortunately his disagreements with the mentioned edition are scrupulously recorded in the footnotes, which thus give a preview of his forthcoming work.

The manuscript material used to check and improve on the Sarnath edition comprises the best manuscript of the tantra available at present (the incomplete palm-leaf codex Oriental Institute, Baroda, 13290), and two paper manuscripts, which Gray has rightly identified as apographs of the former (pp. 138–139). Regarding the manuscripts of the commentaries, however, there are a few regrettable omissions. Gray is aware of only two mss. of Jayabhadra’s *Pañjikā*, both paper and rather recent (p. 139). In fact, two palm-leaf mss. of the same work are extant (NAK 5-212/vi. bauddha tantra 18 Kha = NGMPP B 30/43 and NAK 3-365/vi. bauddha tantra 18 Kha = NGMPP B 30/41) which are obviously much older and more reliable; and they have even been used for an edition of the commentary by Tsunehiko SUGIKI in *The Chisan Gakuho / Journal of Chisan Studies* no. 64. March 2001,

of which Gray was evidently unaware.<sup>1</sup> Gray has also overlooked the fact that another important commentary, Kambala's *Sādhanaśādhī*, is extant in its Sanskrit original as well, though this fact could have been ascertained, not only from the work of, again, Sugiki,<sup>2</sup> but also from the brief notice by Janārdana Pāṇḍeya, published in *Dhīḥ* 28 (1999), of a palm-leaf manuscript (NAK 4-122/vi. bauddhatantra 87 = NGMPP B 31/20) of the text, or from an even older paper by Karunesha Shukla.<sup>3</sup>

Of the two commentaries surviving in Sanskrit that Gray has used, Jayabhadra's readings are of course of capital importance. As Gray is aware (p. 21), he is probably the earliest exegete, knowing what appears to be an earlier redaction of the text: he comments on the CS only up to 50.19, and knows no chapter-divisions. The other commentary drawn on in Sanskrit by Gray is that of Bhavabhaṭṭa/Bhavabhadra, who — thus Gray — “emended the text in these places [i.e. where it more or less clearly betrays Śaiva origins] to more orthodox Buddhist readings” (p. 10 and n. 26). The assumption that it is Bhavabhaṭṭa himself who is responsible for these changes may, however, be questioned. Working with the same author's commentary to the *Catuspīṭhatantra*, I have found Bhavabhaṭṭa to be the most ‘honest’ commentator, frequently preserving highly irregular and puzzling readings in places where his successors (Kalyāṇavarman and Durjayacandra in my case) clearly seem to have tweaked the text to make more sense. He also tends to report variant readings. It could well be that Bhavabhaṭṭa already received an ‘emended’ text of the CS, and that the editorial amelioration is not his work (or at least not entirely). If this is the case, then Tāranātha's list of tantric abbots at Vikramaśīla might well be right to assign a gap of one generation (i.e. that of Śrīdhara) between the two commentators. Clearly much more work needs to be done on the commentators, and the relationship between them and between the texts of the CS known to them; a part, but by no means all, of this has been done by Gray, who has with admirable industry, if not complete thoroughness, compared the different lemmata (or presumed lemmata, on the basis of the Tibetan translations) of no less than a dozen commentaries.

Let us now turn to the question of the date of the CS. In his first chapter, Gray restates his position<sup>4</sup> that the text was composed “by to” [sic] “the mid- to late eighth century” (p. 13). The only evidence that is adduced for so early a date, however, is an alleged quotation from and reference to it in Vilāsavajra's commentary on the *Nāmasaṃgīti*. The claim that Vilāsavajra provides a *terminus post quem* for the CS in the latter half of the eighth century had already been made by Davidson.<sup>5</sup> Much to his credit, Gray has noticed that ‘most of the passages in this text that are identified as quotes from the *Samvaratantra* (bde

<sup>1</sup> It is a pity that SUGIKI's not inconsiderable body of relevant work appears not to have been known to Gray. One must mention however that much of the Japanese scholarship on Vajrayāna has unfortunately long been difficult to gain access to even in the best libraries. Digital archives on the Internet have only slowly been bringing some improvement in this (cf. e.g. the following note).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Tsunehiko SUGIKI, “Five Types of Internal Maṇḍala Described in the Cakrasaṃvara Buddhist Literature” in: *Memoirs of the Institute for Oriental Culture* 144 (2003), pp. 157–231, now available online at <http://repository.dl.itc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/dspace/handle/2261/1996> (accessed on February 13, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Karunesha Shukla: ‘Vajrayāna Tradition and Karṇabala-pāda’, in: J.S. Jha (general editor): *K.P. Jayaswal Commemoration Volume*. Patna, 1981. pp. 234–241.

<sup>4</sup> Already made public in his paper ‘Eating the Heart of the Brahmin: Representations of Alterity and the Formation of Identity in Tantric Buddhist Discourse’, in: *History of Religions* 44 (2005), pp. 45–69 [henceforth Gray 2005], p. 54, with n. 38 referring to this very translation, then ‘forthcoming’, for more detailed discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald M. Davidson: ‘The Litany of Names of Mañjuśrī: Text and Translation of the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, in: Michel Strickmann (ed.): *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein*. Vol. I. Bruxelles. Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques 20. pp. 1–69, pp. 7–8.

*mchog gi rgyud*) derive not from the *Cakrasamvara/Laghusamvara* but are quotations from the *Samayoga*<sup>6</sup> (p. 13).

There is, however, according to Gray, one quote that is from the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*: *glang chen ko rlon gos su gyon // zhes pa ni dpal 'khor lo bde mchog gi rgyud las te* is a citation, he claims (p. 14 and n. 43), of '*hastīcarmaviruddhaṃ ca*' (a slip for *hastīcarmāvaruddhaṃ ca*) in CS chapter 2. But here Gray has been less than sufficiently careful. The Sanskrit of the pāda concerned is (as could have been ascertained, if Gray had consulted one of the rather numerous surviving manuscripts of the commentary) not *hastīcarmāvaruddhaṃ ca* but rather the *Nāmasaṃgī*'s *gajacarmapaṭādradhṛk*. This is, in fact, part of a larger section in which Vilāsavajra attempts to provide for each name or epithet of the *Nāmasaṃgī* a source reference to a tantra. These include instances where the tantra named is one to which no other reference has yet been found (e.g. a *Vajrakīṛṭitantra*, mentioned for *ekajaṭātopa*), or where, though the tantra is known to us, the epithet can not be found literally in it (e.g. *vajrahūṃkārahūṃkṛti*, which does not occur in the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, named by Vilāsavajra as source). The entire passage seems to require considerable further study, and just how much can be concluded from this reference to the/a CS is therefore at present rather uncertain.

As for the reference to the forty-eighth chapter of the CS which Gray finds in the same work of Vilāsavajra, it is part of the same passage, and subject to similar doubts; it concerns also solely the word *kaṅkāla*. One notes that whereas in his main text Gray asserts positively that Vilāsavajra 'makes a reference to its forty-eighth chapter' (p. 14), in the note on the very same sentence he expresses himself — rightly — with greater caution, writing only "This may" (my emphasis) "be a reference to CS ch. 48".

Gray has thus overstated the strength of the evidence for Vilāsavajra having known the CS. It must be acknowledged, however, at least that the early exegete appears to distinguish between *Samvara* (the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga*, in which, incidentally, an even approximate parallel for *gajacarmapaṭādradhṛk* has not been located) and *Cakrasamvara*, and that the two references to the latter text could conceivably be to some form of the CS, though here the case is not exactly conclusive. We may hope that further study will yet uncover more and stronger evidence that will allow a secure dating of the tantra.

More controversial than its date, perhaps, is the question of the origins of the CS. In an important article, Sanderson has tabulated some of the main Śaiva sources of this scripture, clearly showing the direction of borrowing (Sanderson 2001, pp. 41–47; cf. also Sanderson 1994, and already Sanderson 1985 p. 214 n. 106). An attempt to take issue with these findings has been made by Ronald Davidson.<sup>7</sup> Gray here appears to wish to take a cautious middle ground in this controversy (pp. 8–9 *passim*).<sup>8</sup> But Gray's characterization here of Sanderson's position as arguing "that the Śaiva versions of the textual passages are the sources for the Buddhist versions, due to the fact that the Śaiva texts provide the

<sup>6</sup> I.e. from the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinijālasamvara* root tantra. The orthography *Samayoga* (instead of *Samāyoga*), which Gray prefers, though common in Tibetan translations from Sanskrit and in indigenous Tibetan literature, does not seem to be attested in surviving Sanskrit sources.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald M. Davidson: *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002 [henceforth Davidson 2002], especially chapter 5.

<sup>8</sup> It is striking, however, that in Gray 2005, p. 54 n. 37, he had written that "my research on the CST generally confirms Sanderson's conclusions" and "Despite... uncertainty, I believe that the preponderance of evidence supports Sanderson's thesis"; and at p. 62 n. 65 of the same paper that "There is important evidence confirming that Jayabhadra's commentary is the oldest extant commentary. It is used as a source for many of the later commentators, and it also preserves a number of older readings of the CST indicating Śaiva influence, many of which were emended in later versions of the text and its commentaries."



clearer readings, while the Buddhist versions of the text are often ungrammatical”, and his assertion that “Sanderson has not, in fact, demonstrated that the more grammatical Śaiva texts are earlier; their grammaticality itself does not demonstrate this”, appear to miss the point, and certainly do not do justice to Sanderson’s detailed and nuanced discussions of the relationship between parallel passages.

In the same line, Gray raises an objection first voiced by Ronald Davidson: “Sanderson’s assumption that the clearest reading is the earliest one violates the longstanding rule in textual criticism of *difficilior lectio*” (p. 8 n. 19; cf. Davidson 2002, p. 386 n. 105). Again, stating that Sanderson ‘assumes’ that ‘the clearest reading is the earliest one’ seriously misrepresents Sanderson’s arguments; but leaving this aside, the implication made here is that since the language of the CS is more irregular (many times bordering on incomprehensibility) it should — according to a ‘longstanding rule in textual criticism’ — be the original/older, and hence that the borrowers are the Śaiva scriptures where—curiously—all these passages fit neatly into context and make sense. But this is a misunderstanding. What is in fact not a rule but a ‘rule of thumb’ (actually a simplified specialization of the more fundamental principle that the reading which is more likely to have given rise to the other reading(s), through transmissional processes that can be well-attested, be they types of scribal error or deliberate changes, is, obviously, correspondingly likely to be older), which should be applied only with considerable caution and careful weighting of probabilities, can not be mechanically invoked to justify dubious syntax or contextual incoherence.

There is no doubt that the translation is a very considerable achievement, and that there is much in it, and in the accompanying annotation, which will be very helpful to students of the text and of Tantric Buddhism. It is natural, with a pioneering work of this kind, that problems and some errors remain.

For example, in chapter II, verse 21, a significant feature of the vases is mentioned: *ka-lāśān ... mūlakālādivarjitān*. This means that the vases which play a crucial role in *abhiṣeka* where water is poured repeatedly on the initiate and which, as we are informed from other texts on initiation, should be smeared with a white substance, should not be black or have black spots on their base — presumably a sign of careless baking in a kiln. This passage is translated as follows (p. 169.): “Then make the vases, without bases, black [in color], and so forth.”

The translation of chapter 50 includes some problematic renderings. For example, verse 7 with some variants goes: *jāgratasuptakṛtōttīṣṭhabhuñjāno mithuno 'pi vā | \*mahākālo / sadā kālē\* japen mantri \*samyagvelā na vidyate / tasya mārāṃ na jāyate\**. However the verse is construed, it is impossible to arrive at the following (p. 371.): “If the mantrin always repeats [the mantra], while awake, asleep, or arising, eating, or engaging in sexual intercourse, there will be no fixed limit [to his lifespan].” First of all, Gray seems to prefer here a composite reading (I have listed first the presumably older version). While it is clear from the notes that he consulted Bhavabhaṭṭa on this matter, he omits translating *kṛta* which the exegete glosses as *kāryaṃ kurvan*, “going about one’s own business.” The forced “if” comes from misunderstanding *velā* as “fixed timespan” rather than “fixed time to undertake a ritual action.” What the verse in fact says is: “Whether awake, asleep, going about his business, getting up, eating or even in sexual intercourse, the mantrin should \* — visualizing himself as identical with] Mahākāla — / always\* recite [the hāsamantra]; \*there is no fixed time for this / no[ne of the four] Māra[s] will arise against him.\*”

Another curious mistranslation concerns 50.16d.: *ko hi nāma daridrātā* is translated as “who is deprived of a name?” This is obviously a rhetoric question as the Tibetans correctly

translated (*dbul po nyid du ga la 'gyur*): “[when one has achieved mastery in yoga] how can he be [considered] poor?” And this is the way that Bhavabhaṭṭa too understood the text, since he tells us that what should be a (feminine) abstract noun is to be taken here as equivalent with a (masculine) adjective agreeing with the interrogative pronoun (*daridra eva daridrātā*).

It adds greatly to the value of the book that in the footnotes to the translation of the tantra and in the introduction Gray has translated — from Sanskrit or from Tibetan — numerous extracts from the commentaries. Mistakes in the passages cited in Sanskrit from the commentaries are, however, rather numerous; sometimes these seem not to be merely printing errors. The bizarre-looking *ibhyaḥ ṣaṭtrimśat yoginya eva pūjā iti bhāvaḥ* (for *ity etāḥ ṣaṭtrimśad yoginya eva pūjā iti bhāvaḥ*, as is given quite correctly in Pandey’s edition) is translated rather nebulously ‘There is thus the worship of the thirty-six yoginīs’ (p. 158 n. 10). In the same note, the name of the yoginī Yamadādhī appears both in the Sanskrit passage quoted and in the translation thereof wrongly as Yamadāhī.

Indeed it seems that Gray has quite frequently ‘emended’ Pandey’s edition where he need not have. In a curious note (p. 202 n. 1) Pandey is accused of producing a nonsensical reading when in fact his text makes perfectly good sense. Pandey’s correct *taṣil*, which is of course the grammarians’ term for the *-taḥ* suffix, is first altered to *trasilā* as per the more recent ms. and then analyzed extremely implausibly as *trasiṇ* ‘possessing movement’ plus *lā* (more likely to have been an *-l* plus a *daṇḍa* with scribal omission of the *virāma*) as a ‘verbal particle “giving”’ and translated as “animating from the first to the last”.

Throughout this chapter, for which Gray quotes in more detail than usual from Bhavabhaṭṭa’s commentary, one is advised to read Pandey’s edition rather than the text given in Gray’s footnotes. Thus where Pandey quite clearly recognized quoted verses and had them typeset accordingly, there is nothing in Gray’s text or translation to indicate that he is aware that Bhavabhaṭṭa’s *tathā cāha* — a conventional exegetical formula before quotations — introduces three verses in the *sragdharā* metre, which are in fact from the *Trikāyastava/Kāyatrastava* attributed to Nāgārjuna (though neither Pandey nor Gray has identified the source). Recognizing the metrical nature of these passages — or simply making better use of Pandey’s printed text — would have allowed a number of misreadings to be avoided. Thus in p. 203 n. 2 *nirlepa-* ought to be *nirlepam* as per Pandey and the exigencies of the metre; in p. 203 n. 3 *sukṛtasatphalām* ought to read *sukṛtasaphalatām* as per Pandey’s correction and the metrical pattern (here the translation also is very implausible); and in p. 204 n. 4 *daśadigantagatam* ought to read *daśadiganugatam* as per Pandey and metre (with, incidentally, *dīpyamānaḥ* for *dīptamānaḥ*).

Even where the text of a commentary-passage is given correctly, there are occasional mistranslations: e.g. *tantrāntarokṭalakṣaṇāyām* is not ‘whose defining marks are stated within the Tantra’ (p. 159 n. 13) but ‘whose defining marks are stated in other tantras’.

There is a great deal to be said for this groundbreaking work, which is quite clearly the product of long and dedicated labour. It should certainly find a place on the bookshelf of anyone studying Tantric Buddhism. At the same time, it is of course by no means the last word on the CS; and one looks forward to the time that one will be able to put next to it on the bookshelf a revised or new translation, based on a completed critical edition of the text, and taking into account some important manuscript material (especially of the commentaries) that has not been used here, as well as the forthcoming detailed study by Sanderson of the relationship between the CS and its Śaiva parallels.

— Péter-Dániel Szántó