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Signs, Memory and History: A Tantric Buddhist Theory of Scriptural Transmission

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Within the broad group of Buddhist sacred scriptures loosely characterized as the canon of the Mahāyāna are included, by some, the scriptures of the Vajrayāna, the *tantras*. These are in turn classified into two canons by Tibetan Buddhists, the Old (*rnying ma*) and the New (*gsar ma*), the former of which spawned yet a further genus of scriptures called Treasures (*gter ma*). Not strictly to be considered a canon, and in fact not compiled into one collection until the late nineteenth century, the Treasures are nonetheless accorded the same status of "word of the Buddha" (*buddhavacana*) as are the classical texts of the *Sūtra* or *Vinaya Piṭakas*, and sometimes even bear the hallmark introductory line "Thus have I heard at one time."[1]

The Treasures are texts of mystical revelation. Tibetan visionaries, particularly of the rNying ma School, have been producing them since the tenth century A.D.[2] They are in most cases said to have been revealed to the visionary by Padmasambhava, the Indian teacher who brought Tantric Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century A.D.[3] According to tradition, Padmasambhava and others concealed in Tibet texts and other items for future "discovery." The number of texts said to have been found in a Treasure cache and attributed to Padmasambhava in this way is now considerable. The Treasure cycles preserved in the current edition of the *Rin chen gter mdzod* collection alone fill 111 volumes, and there are many others published independently.[4]

Although differing in content with regard to divinities, prac-

tices, doctrines, and many other matters, the Treasure cycles are structured in fairly constant patterns. Each cycle is made up of a group of texts, the generic labels of which are somewhat standard. There is usually a "root text," i.e., the Treasure scripture itself, along with associated commentaries, *sādhanas*, numerous rituals and liturgies, and usually a "historical" section (*lo rgyus*) describing the origin of the cycle and its subsequent revelation. The historical section will often include a biography of the Treasure's discoverer; both this narrative and the account of the cycle's origin portray the process of scripture transmission in quite typical ways, allowing us to make reliable generalizations.[5]

The following remarks are based on my reading of a representative sample of the major cycles, including some of the earliest, and on the few Tibetan works that discuss the tradition theoretically or historically.

The linkage of a Treasure with the canon of the old *Tantras* is asserted most explicitly in the Treasure's own account of its origin. Here the evolution of the Treasure is portrayed in terms of the same paradigm by which the rNying ma School describes the transmission of all Buddhist scriptures, and in particular the Old Tantras. This transmission paradigm has three phases: the Jina's Transmission of the Realized (*rgyal ba'i dgongs brgyud*); the Vidyādhara's Transmission in Symbols (*rig 'dzin brda brgyud*); and the Transmission into the Ears of People (*gang zag snyan khung du brgyud*).[6] The progression is as follows. The point of inception, or the ultimate ground of the Buddha's teaching, is the Transmission of the Realized. This is placed in the context of a *buddha*-field, and consists in the teachings of a primordial *buddha* (*ādibuddha*) such as Samantabhadra-with-consort. In the second phase, that of the Symbolic Transmission, the teaching devolves through the mediation of symbols. Here the teachers and students are the early patriarchs of the rNying ma School, somewhere on the scene of late Indian Tantric Buddhism. Finally, in the third phase, the Ear Transmission, there is a discursive and overtly verbal conveying of the text. The classical instance of the Ear Transmission is Padmasambhava's dissemination of Buddhism to King Khri srong lde btsan and the Tibetan royal court.

It is during the last cited phase that three further stages of transmission, unique to the Treasure scriptures, take place. These concern the special measures taken by Padmasmabhava to conceal certain texts in Treasure caches until the time is right for their revelation. First he conveys such texts in a Tantric Empowerment Ceremony (*smon lam dbang bskur*, Skt. *abhiṣeka-praṇidhāna?*), and appoints (*gtad rgya*), or confers upon one of the recipients the responsibility to discover the Treasure at a determined time in the future. Then he utters a Prophecy of the Revelation (*bka' babs lung bstan*) in the future. In the third phase, Appointing of *Ḍākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro gtad rgya*), he identifies the protectors who will guard the Treasure during its interment.[7] Then Padmasambhava or one of his disciples, often his consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal, commits the text to writing. Finally, the text is buried somewhere in Tibet, in a statue or *stūpa*, under the ground or in a mountain, in the elements, or even, simply, in the mind.

The story does not end here. In a second segment of the Treasure's historical section, the account of the revelation resumes, centuries later, in the biography of the visionary. Here we are given an intimate portrayal, often in poetic and candid language, of the discoverer's personal struggles in the visionary quest. There are the search for the requisite confidence that he or she is indeed the appointed individual, the search for the concealed Treasure itself, and, once it is found, there is the search for the understanding of the content of the revelation. Finally, the discoverer or a disciple codifies the Treasure as a cycle of texts to be disseminated to students, and later to be published.

Before attempting to unravel this complex account of scripture generation, a few remarks are in order concerning views on the source of scripture in Buddhism as a whole. In the Pāli tradition, the word of the Buddha is what was preached by the specific historical personality Śākyamuni Buddha (or certified by him)[8], and which was uttered during the finite period of Śākyamuni's lifetime. Traces of the idea that scripture has an historical source can still be found in the early Mahāyāna *sūtra*, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, where it is proposed that the disciples who preach the *Prajñāpāramitā* studied that very teaching with Śākyamuni in previous lives.[9] By and large, however,

the necessity of an historical origin of the word of the Buddha was discarded by the Mahāyānists. As the *Aṣṭa* itself asserts, "Whatever, Venerable Śāriputra, the Lord's disciples teach, all that is known to be the Tathāgata's work."[10] Here no stipulation is made about time, place or explicit certification. The rise of the Mahāyāna marks the dawning of such notions as the "Buddha-nature," with full Buddhahood possible for anyone, at any time.[11] Another claim, known best from the *Lotus Sūtra,* is that the Buddha remains present in the world—and therefore would theoretically always be available as a source for authentic scripture.[12] In any case, the Mahāyāna expansion of the pantheon of *buddhas* renders obsolete the necessity to ascribe a sacred text to the historical person of Śākyamuni himself, because there would be countless *buddhas* in countless realms who are constantly preaching the *Dharma.* In short, a number of doctrinal innovations of the Mahāyāna effectively demolished the old notion of a closed canon and radically reoriented the generation of the Buddhist truth to an ahistorical, atemporal dimension.

Thus, it is striking to discover that the proponents of the Treasures, late Mahāyāna Vajrayānists, were not content to call upon the timeless presence of the ubiquitous Buddha-nature as the source of revelation. The teachings of the many Tibetan masters who are said to have attained Buddhahood, even those of the closely aligned Pure Vision (*dag snang*) tradition, would, strictly speaking, be differentiated from the revelations of a Treasure discoverer.[13] The distinction consists precisely in the claim that the latter is the reincarnation of a historical person of the eighth century who was a disciple of Padmasambhava, and who was appointed to reveal the Treasure. The Treasure tradition is preoccupied with pinpointing the source of scripture in a specific historical event. It does not really matter that this event, indeed the entire story of the introduction of Buddhism during Tibet's Yarlung Dynasty, was largely recast and mythologized in the tenth to twelfth centuries, to the point where fact in the modern scientific sense of the word can barely be separated from fiction.[14] For Tibetans, regardless of education or sophistication, Padmasambhava's sojourn in Tibet is a constituting event of the national heritage. As an historical personage, significantly eulogized as "the second Buddha," Padmasambhava comes to offer the same sort of authority for the

Treasure tradition as does the historical Buddha Śākyamuni for the Pāli canon.

And so the Treasure tradition is concerned with history, the passage of text through a temporal progression of epochs, in which changing circumstances of author, place and audience are mirrored in the evolution of the text itself. For the discoverer of Treasure, the dimension of the past is anchored in the numinous moment when Buddhism was introduced into Tibet, a Golden Age. In the present time of the discoverer, which is the degenerate age, it is the connection to that previous period that makes for a weightier and more authentic revelation of truth than what is available to enlightened insight alone.

An important corollary of the emphasis on history in this tradition is that revelation comes to be understood as memory. This memory is diachronic, a recollection of times past, in this case of that significant moment when the Treasure was transmitted by Padmasambhava. This notion of memory can readily be identified with the early Buddhist view that the scriptures recited at the First Council were memorized renditions of Śākyamuni's previously delivered sermons. There are other dimensions of memory here, however. In the most general sense the Treasure tradition as a whole is seen as a commemoration of Padmasambhava's dispensation, with the lineage of discoverers characterized as a "reminder [lit. list that prevents forgetting] of that teacher from Uḍḍiyana."[15] The Treasures are also, in a very general way, reminders of the *Dharma*: it is explained that the Tibetans, new at Buddhism, tend to forget even Avalokiteśvara's *mantra*; thus their memory needs to be jogged by the periodic appearance of new Treasures.[16] Taken more individually, memory refers to the discoverer's recollection of the events of a past lifetime. It is precisely the personal memory of being an appointed discoverer that inspires sufficient confidence to proclaim a visionary revelation as genuine Treasure scripture. Furthermore, and most importantly, revelation itself is an act of memory, an event of evoking, through a set of hints and codes, the actual content of the Treasure previously received at Padmasambhava's Empowerment rite. As stated in the prophecy of the discoverer 'Jigs med gling pa: "Using the essential key, which is the six nails, the *dhāraṇī* for remembering and not forgetting, open the door to the *Klong gsal dgongs pa* Treasure."[17]

* * *

Having observed that the source of the Treasures is characterized in terms of history and memory, I will devote the rest of this essay to a factor that appears repeatedly in this literature, and is thematic of that very characterization. I am referring to the factor of *semiosis* in the Treasure tradition. The use of signs seems to be intrinsic to the process of Treasure dissemination, at virtually every step described above, be that function explicit or implicit. In the following I will consider the principal segments of the Treasure transmission where semiosis is specifically identified as such.

It must be noted that the Tibetan terms for the various kinds of signs used in the Treasure literature are not always rigorously distinguished. Drawing upon the Peircean convention that the symbol, icon, and index are the three main types of signifiers, I will use the words "sign," "semiosis" and "signify" in a general way to refer to the function as a whole.[18] The Tibetan *brda* is appropriately rendered "symbol" in the phrase Transmission in Symbols (*brda brgyud*), since here a variety of codes, utterances, or gestures convey a message not physically connected or iconically similar to the sign itself. *brDa grol,* which translates as "breaking the code," is used in a number of contexts in this literature. The phrase "symbolic script" (*brDa yig*) refers to inscriptions that signify in several ways at once, and I will also adopt the more general "literal signs" in discussing this phase of the Treasure semiosis. *rTags* is another term often employed here, and can safely be rendered simply as "sign," although it frequently has the specifically indexical function of being connected with or pointing to the indicatum. *mTshon,* which literally means pointer, has a range of senses, sometimes in fact meaning "symbol," and sometimes referring to signification more generally. *lTas* here means "portent" or "omen" in most instances, and we also come across *mtshan,* best translated as "mark." Since all of these translations are contextual, I will supply the original in parentheses whenever I am drawing a semiological term from the Tibetan texts.

Within the general setting of Tibetan Buddhism, where aspersions have often been cast upon the Treasures as authentic "words of the Buddha," the Treasure signs function most overtly

as legitimizers.[19] Even writers of the rNying ma school, the principal holders of the Treasure lineages, stress the need to subject any cycle to scrutiny, and cite instances of frauds and charlatans.[20] As I have discussed elsewhere, the primary function of the historical section of the Treasure cycle is to present evidence—precisely in the form of signs—that the Treasure is an authentic Buddhist scripture preached first by an *ādibuddha*, later concealed in Tibet by Padmasambhava, and then actually discovered by the predestined individual. These narratives are thus thought to "engender confidence" (*nges shes bskyes pa*). The sixteenth-century Tibetan historian dPa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, notably judicious in his treatment of the Treasure tradition, affirms this function: "In general, if you investigate the Treasure signs (*gter rtags*), [you can ascertain if] the Treasure has an authentic source. Even if not found today, the signs and name of the discoverer and place of the Treasure should all be fairly definitely identifiable—even if just roughly."[21] Or as the discoverer 'Jigs med gling pa recalls, "Through examples one understands meanings; through signs (*rtags*) one becomes confident."[22]

But there is a far more profound role for semiotics in the Treasure tradition than legitimation, one that is germane to the very process of textual transmission itself. For the rNying ma school, semiosis is the stage next to the first in the generation of all Buddhist scripture, not only Treasure. This stage, already named above, is the Vidyādhara's Transmission in Symbols. But here we must first take into account the very primary, or original moment, the Transmission of the Realized, which is explicitly asemioticized, i.e., deprived of all sign vehicles. The Transmission of the Realized is also, I might add, ahistorical (*dus gsum ma nges pa'i dus*).[23] This is important, because despite our initial remarks about the peculiarities of Treasure transmission, the ultimate source for these scriptures is very much in line with the Mahāyāna's pervasive and timeless ground of enlightenment.

Firstly, therefore, there is the asemioticized text. The Transmission of the Realized is set in the *buddha*-field. As gTer bdag gling pa describes it, this is "the realm of the uniformly pervasive *dharmatā* from which there is no falling away, in the center of the palace of the uncompounded *dharmadhātu*, transcending

measurement."[24] The language of nonduality is everywhere in these descriptions. The teacher is "immersed in the equanimity of neither light nor dark, staying without coming or going, beginning or ending."[25] "Taking on the guise of a body, he teaches the *Dharma.*"[26] This teaching is the "Great Speaking, in which nothing at all is said";[27] it is an "expounding by [the Buddha him]self in his own nature, to his own retinue,"[28] where the audience is but a manifestation of the teacher.[29] Of course, strict nonduality is somewhat difficult to maintain if there is discourse. There is, in some accounts, a second, sometimes the consort Samantabhadrī, at whose behest the teaching was initiated.[30] Then as the teacher devolves from the *svābhāvikakāya* and the *dharmakāya,* there appear the bodily marks (*sku mtshan*) and the exemplary form (*dpe byad*) of the *sambhogakāya.*[31] But even in the teachings of the *nirmāṇakāya* of the Transmission of the Realized, gTer bdag gling pa maintains that neither words nor symbols (*brda*) are used. Rather, there is a "speaking without speaking, in which the own-voice of primordial awareness appears effortlessly and spontaneously."[32]

The Symbolic Conveying of the Dharma

Although many of the descriptions of the Transmission of the Realized have at the end of that narrative some incursion into what we might identify as a human or a *deva* world,[33] the main thrust of the initial dissemination of scripture to human disciples occurs in the second phase, that of the Transmission in Symbols. At this point, when the self-realized Dharma is first conveyed with some duality between teacher and student, semiosis is the manner in which that takes place.

The semiosis of the Transmission in Symbols takes many forms. It can even consist in the chirping of a bird, as when Vajrasattva assumes the form of a swallow and sings to the rNying ma patriarch dGa' rab rdo rje, "*Ka la ping ka, ka la ping ka.*"[34] An exemplary narrative of the Transmission in Symbols is found in the teacher Śrī Siṁha's response to Padmasambhava's request for "an introduction to the meaning of the Letterless Teachings."[35] Here we can see how the semiotic transmission proceeds through several acts of sign production and decipher-

ing, in which both verbal and non-verbal signs are employed.

Śrī Siṁha's transmission is cryptic: "Within the fence of the four elements there is a red cow, in whose stomach there is a crystal that radiates a five-colored light. Put your hand over the cow's right eye, and say 'Come out of the left!'" It then becomes Padmasambhava's task to decipher the meaning. This is effected when he meets a woman, who points to her heart, covers her right eye with her thumb and middle finger, peers with her left eye into space, and freezes her gaze. Seeing this, Padmasambhava understands the Transmission in Symbols. Then he asks the woman to "break the code" (*brda grol*). There follows her verbal and discursive explication of her symbolic actions, called "meeting with the meaning of the symbols" (*brda don sprad pa*), which consists in a series of correspondences. The fence of the four elements symbolizes (*mtshon*) the body, the arena for wisdom and skillful means; pointing the finger at the heart symbolizes the self-born *buddha*, which is obscured by ignorance, in turn symbolized by the cow. The covering of the right eye symbolizes the cessation of attachment to skillful means.[36] The five-colored light of the crystal symbolizes the natural play of awareness (*rig pa*). Gazing into space with a frozen stare symbolizes the appearing of self-born primordial wisdom which abides in limitless space; and so on. Then when Padmasambhava returns to his teacher, Śrī Siṁha uses these "symbols (*brda*) of awareness to transmit the *Dharma* into Padmasambhava's heart." The episode ends with Padmasambhava's exalted visions and Buddhahood.

The Semiotic Reduction of Scripture

The specialized mode of Treasure dissemination begins in the next phase of the transmission paradigm, the Transmission into the Ears of People. Here, semiosis has an even more complex and finely defined function, although it remains analogous to the basic pattern of sign presentation and deciphering that we saw in the Transmission in Symbols, where both the intention of the transmitter and the interpretive response of the receiver are key.

Ironically, just when the text has entered the fully historical

and human plane, when Padmasambhava is openly teaching (at least to his circle of students) a determinant text in a discursive, exegetical manner via the Ear Transmission, there dawns the necessity to conceal the text again. Padmasambhava has in mind Tibet's future: adverse political and social conditions in which the practice of Buddhism will be difficult. Inspired by a compassionate teleology not unlike that which underlies the Vajrayāna as a whole, Padmasambhava identifies certain *tantras* whose teachings and practices will be particularly efficacious in the degenerate times that lie ahead. He proceeds to convey these texts using the three stages of transmission particular to the Treasures: the Empowerment Ceremony, the Prophecy of the Revelation, and the Appointment of *Ḍākinīs*. Among these, the Empowerment comes to the fore as the critical moment when Padmasambhava selects the individual with the appointment (*gtad rgya*), i.e., the responsibility and obligation to discover the Treasure at the prophesied time in the future.[37] And it is at this juncture that the relation between history, memory and signs becomes clear.

One of the principal acts in the Empowerment rite is the guru's ensconcing of a condensed form of the teaching (in this case the Treasure) in the student's stream of consciousness. The site of ensconcement, equated with the place where the Treasure abides (*gter gnas*), is rendered variously as "the adamantine body, the essence of enlightenment,"[38] or "own mind abiding in its own aspect of *dharmadhātu*."[39] Here, during the Empowerment, the germ of the teaching is "placed in the mind as a lot for future accomplishment."[40]

It would seem that the reduction/ensconcement of the *Dharma* conveyed in Empowerment is what facilitates the Treasure mode of transmission—it allows the text to be easily preserved in memory over time. According to rDo grub chen Rinpoche, the content of the Empowerment becomes an "indestructible point of space that is the clear light of primordial intelligence."[41] In this form the Treasure cannot be "stolen," and is impervious to the vicissitudes of the "winds of karma" during the appointed individual's series of lifetimes before discovery.[42] Thus, we can say that the Treasure is transformed into a mnemonic device of sorts. This condensed seminal teaching granted in the Empowerment becomes the basis for semiosis

(*mtshon bya don gyi man ngag*), that which is pointed to by the signifying symbols (*mtshon byed brda*) later employed by the *ḍākinīs* who conceal/reveal the Treasure.[43]

But there is also a medium that carries the semioticized Treasure over time and induces the appointed discoverer to remember the Treasure at the appropriate moment. This is usually conceived of as the "yellow paper" (*shog ser*, also called "paper scroll," *shog dril*). rDo grub chen, whose brilliant and original essay informs the following several paragraphs, refers mostly to this yellow paper in his discussion, but actually his own analysis shows that there can be many other types of media, such as the physical elements, or random mental events. However, the yellow paper is the most concrete medium; it is the manuscript, written by Padmasambhava or a disciple, that is physically buried; it is the Treasure substance itself. It is also one of the few material traces whose existence is sometimes cited as actual evidence of a Treasure discovery.[44]

The text inscribed on the yellow paper or other medium is a brief and specially coded form of the Treasure. This code corresponds to the condensed teachings granted in the Empowerment, although the precise nature of this correspondence is not specified. Somehow, however, the appointed discoverer "holds the *Dharma* of the previous period's yellow paper as marks (*mtshan ma*), so that later, depending on that (same) yellow paper, it is like a reminder (*dran pa gso ba*) of the (full Treasure) teaching."[45]

The discovery of the Treasure in its encoded form in the subsequent life is of course the climactic revelation event. However, what is considered to be a complete revelatory transmission (*gtan pheb*, lit. "definite descending") actually has more to do with the internal state of the discoverer, when he or she can reconstruct and understand the full Treasure scripture. According to rDo grub chen, the discovery of Treasure really involves a replay of all three paradigmatic stages of scripture transmission: "The Transmission of the Realized of Padmasambhava's realization of clear light descends in a sudden jump (*thod rgal*) into the heart of the discoverer; when the symbolic letters (*brda yig*) are found, there is the awakening of the propensity (*vāsanā*) to reveal Treasure that was established during the Empowerment by Padmasambhava, which constitutes the Transmission

in Symbols; and when the code written on the yellow paper is broken, the Ear Transmission is obtained."[46]

Thus, just as Śrī Siṁha's Symbolic Transmission was disclosed to Padmasambhava in stages, the semiotic Treasure revelation proceeds gradually. In the first place, the discoverer is put directly and instantaneously in mind of the Treasure in its most basic form; then follows the presentation of its symbols in the form of the discovered Treasure medium, and finally the decoding. Each of the latter two steps can involve considerable difficulty. Just to attain a clear perception of the symbolic letters can be elusive, with the text on the yellow paper changing or even disappearing before the discoverer's eyes. And once the encoded text reaches "stabilization" (*gtan khel*), there remains the complex task of deciphering it, which can require months or years of reflection.[47] It is only at the point that the encoded text can be translated into the fully remembered Treasure scripture that rDo grub chen can properly equate a medium such as the yellow paper with the discursive Ear Transmission.

The Encoded Treasure: Literal and Other Signs

The text inscribed on the yellow paper or other medium has the dual role of concealing the Treasure in code, and of revealing the Treasure by means of that same suggestive code. rDo grub chen identifies three aspects of this encoding/reminding feat of semiosis.[48]

1. The first concerns the "type of letters" (*yig rigs*), i.e., the script in which the encoded Treasure is written. This is usually some form of the "symbolic script of the *ḍākinīs*" (*mkha' 'gro brda yig*). There are many varieties, such as *thang yig, spung yig, bshur yig*, and so on, but rDo grub chen also admits that non *ḍākinī* alphabets and even some of the Tibetan scripts can be used.[49]

2. The second aspect of the encoded Treasure's semiosis concerns the means by which the discoverer breaks the cipher of the *ḍākinī* script and comes to "meet with" or be "introduced to" (*ngo sprod*) the literal encoded Treasure.[50] Three possibilities are listed:

2.a) There can be a manifest script that is encoded ac-

cording to a "key" (*lde mig can*), such that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the symbolic script and the letters of the Tibetan alphabet. In this case, access to the key would enable the discoverer to read the text given on the yellow paper.

2.b) Alternately, the discoverer can perceive the encoded Treasure text as a result of some external prompting. In this case there does not seem to be a yellow paper as such. Rather, the discoverer will see something in the environment, which serves as the encoding medium, and which presents the *ḍākinī* cipher. An example given by my consultant, mKhan po dpal ldan shes rab, is a goat nibbling grass: the discoverer sees this visual configuration as a letter of sorts, which then brings the encoded Treasure's textuality to mind.[51] This is labelled "certainty through circumstances" (*rkyen las nges*); in rDo grub chen's words, "without (reference to) an alphabet, there is a spontaneous knowing (of the encoded Treasure) as a result of some sort of circumstance in the environment involving either inanimate objects or animate beings."[52]

2.c) Thirdly, the "face value of the letters" (*yig ngo*) of the encoded Treasure text can simply become clear to the discoverer, "without regard for either (an alphabet or external circumstances)" (*gnyis la mi ltos*). Again, there would not seem to be a yellow paper involved. Rather, the medium is a spontaneous vision or some other internal prompting, which results either in a direct perception of the encoded Treasure text, or consists in a gradual process, in which repetition of the internal clue or image finally evokes a perception of the text.

3. Not only is a cipher script employed, and that script presented in a variety of media and with a variety of modes of correspondences to Tibetan, but thirdly, what is "set out" (*'god tshul*) can be semioticized. This refers to the content of the encoded text, and how that relates to the content of the *full* Treasure scripture. Again rDo grub identifies three possibilities:

3.a) In the case of "just an appearance" (*snang tsam*), there will appear a single symbol, or a character or two, not necessarily completing a phrase or even a word. We might understand this mode as a mnemonic cue of sorts; the discoverer is given the opening letters of the Treasure, which serve to evoke in his memory the full text.

3.b) In the second way of setting out, "just a support"

(*rten tsam*), there are two options: the memory of the full Treasure may be "evoked by a section of the actual text" (*dngos skul byed*), or "evoked through a recollection" (*rjes dran skul byed*).

3.b.1) The first, like the appearance mode, functions as a mnemonic cue: it consists in the presentation of the title of the actual Treasure, or a portion of the introduction, or a history of the text. This brief section is like a "tiny seed that suffices to produce a huge *nigrodha* tree"—it encourages the full flowing forth of the Treasure in the discoverer's memory.

3.b.2) The second type of support consists of a statement that causes a recollection of the full Treasure. We should note that here, the meaning (*tshig zin*) of what is written on the yellow paper is said to have determinant significance (*dan rtags*).[53] This meaning must be understood by the discoverer in order for the reminding to occur, whereas in all of the previously discussed modes, despite some ambiguity, merely the literal or phonetic value of the text of the Treasure code may be sufficient to evoke the memory of the literal surface of the Treasure text proper. There are two types of evocation of recollection:

3.b.2.1) In the first case, the determinant significance of the content of the Treasure medium is unrelated to the content of the full Treasure. Instead, the encoded text reminds the discoverer of the peripheral circumstances of the time and place in the previous life when the Treasure Empowerment was received. As rDo grub chen explains, this memory enables the discoverer to recall the Treasure itself: "For example, on the yellow paper it may be written, 'when the cuckoos first arrived, the Guru and his disciples were all at Brag dmar mtsho mo mgul. Every day in front of the canopy of the tent where they were sitting, ducks, cranes, cuckoos and all sorts of birds gathered and played—an extremely pleasing (sight).' Seeing that, the (discoverer) thinks, 'At that time Guru Rinpoche gave us disciples such and such teaching.' And then that teaching in its entirety appears (to the discoverer)."[54]

3.b.2.2) The second way in which the recollection of the Treasure is evoked is vaguer: "In the actual contents conveyed in the symbolic characters, there is nothing explicit about the past, but rather it seems to be a random statement. However, as a result of (reading that statement), it is said that (the discoverer) remembers how the (Treasure) was explained in the past,

and is able (to cause it to) come forth (lit., "descend," *'beb*) in just the way as it was previously."[55] An example of this mode offered by my consultant, mKhan po dpal ldan shes rab, is a statement containing the word "diamond," which reminds the discoverer of a Treasure concerning Vajrasattva, the "Diamond Being." In this mode, again, it is clear that the discoverer comprehends the meaning of the inscription in the Treasure medium.

3.c) Finally, there is a third type of setting out, which is not semioticized. Rather, the full Treasure text is simply "freely put forth" (*thar chags*). We might note that in such a case, the text may still be given in symbolic script, and be "introduced" to the discoverer through a semiotic medium.

If the semiotics of the encoded Treasure were not intricate enough, it is striking to realize that the process of receiving the full revelation is not limited to the reading of the yellow paper or other medium and the bringing forth of the full Treasure on its basis. There are many other acts of decoding that occur both prior and subsequent to the discovery of the Treasure. On the posterior side, there is the further task of translating the Treasure. As already noted, the scripture that the discoverer retrieves from memory as prompted by the Treasure medium may only be a literal document, i.e., something the discoverer could recite without necessarily understanding it. Indeed, Treasure texts are often said to be written in the "symbolic language of the *ḍākinīs*" (*mkha' gro brda skad*),[56] to be distinguished from the symbolic *script* of the *ḍākinīs* discussed above. Further, after the language is deciphered, there is an even more critical act of decoding: in order to be able to translate the Treasure, the discoverer must come to understand its content, its philosophy and practices. It is said that if one attempts to render the Treasure prematurely, the correct grammar, order of concepts, and appropriate style may be elusive.[57] Finally, the rendering also involves the codification of the Treasure cycle into the various ritual and doctrinal genres, the forms of which are determined by the needs of the discoverer's own followers.

All of these acts of deciphering, translating and interpreting are thought to require maturity and wisdom. A teacher often advises the discoverer to wait some time before committing the

revelation to writing or making its contents known to others.[58] The discoverer typically enters a meditative retreat, prays to Padmasambhava for inspiration, and develops spiritual insight and agility in yoga. A necessary ingredient in the decoding of Treasure is said to be the union in sexual yoga with a consort, a "secret friend" (*gsang grogs*), or "female helper" (*pho nya mo*).[59] This facilitates the breaking of codes (*brda grol*), here a metaphor for the loosening of the psychic knots that bind the *cakras,* necessary for the mature rendering of the full Treasure scripture in determinant form.

Signs Before the Signs: The Personal Signs

The active participation and spiritual development required for the work of deciphering is just as pronounced in the period prior to the discovery of the encoded Treasure text. The discoverer-to-be has a variety of experiences that seem to indicate an impending Treasure revelation, yet there is uncertainty. The location of the hidden Treasure, the way to reach that location, and the method of extraction must all be determined. Instructions received in dreams, however, are cryptic, images are blurry, and visions disappear into thin air. Most important, the young visionary is beset by doubts that he or she might not be the appointed discoverer. This last is critical, for without the requisite confidence, a Treasure cannot be found, much less deciphered.[60]

The perplexity, as might be guessed by now, is resolved by the recognition and interpretation of yet another cluster of signs. Highly diverse in form and content, these signs have not been systematically analyzed in the literature,[61] but they are labelled with the same semiological vocabulary that we found in the other portions of the Treasure narrative, and they constitute a rich dimension of the tradition's semiosis. I label this category "personal signs" because of the special significance such configurations have for the discoverer's personal development.

We read of the personal signs in two genres of the Treasure literature: the biographies of the discoverers, and the prophecies. This is in itself of interest. The biography is written after the events of the revelation, whereas the prophecy is sup-

posedly uttered by Padmasambhava before those events occur, during the transmission of the Prophecy of the Revelation. The text of the prophecy usually appears in a dream or is discovered as an antecedent Treasure text; its receipt and effect on the visionary is recounted in the biography. When the prophecy is read, what it predicts has either transpired already, such as the discoverer's birth, identity of parents, early visions, etc.; or it lies ahead in the future, such as the circumstances and location of the full revelation. Those of the predictions that have already occurred are for that very reason to be understood as signs: the corroboration confirms that Padmasambhava's intended plan for the Treasure discovery is now being fulfilled in the discoverer's own life. As for the events that have not yet occurred, they become indicative signs. The discoverer looks for the predicted places and circumstances, and when they are recognized, they thereby become confirming signs that encourage the discoverer to proceed with the quest. In this way, biography becomes a sign or confirmation of the truth of the prophecy, and the prophecy a sign that the biography is one of an authentic Treasure discoverer.

Not all of the factors that are taken semiotically in the discoverer's life appear in the prophecy, however. Events or configurations that in any case are interpreted in the Tibetan milieu as auspicious also concatenate as confirmations of the individual's identity as an appointed discoverer, or of the appropriateness of the time or place for Treasure revelation. When contiguous with overt Treasure signs, anything that is normally taken as a propitious portent tends to be appropriated as a Treasure sign as well. These signs are of such wide variety that they belie comprehensive description.

'Jigs med gling pa, pondering the significance of his own personal signs, such as his bearing of the name Padma, and the thirty red spots marked (*mtshan*) with *vajras* on his chest, recalls another Treasure text that lists the three main signs (*brda rtags*) of a genuine discoverer: "On the body, flesh marks at the heart, navel, and on moles. In speech, there should be facility in teaching and singing; and one should bear the name of Padmasambhava. The mind should be one-pointed and strong in remembering me (Padmasambhava)."[62]

In particular, the concreteness of physical marks, always

sought eagerly by Tibetans, is noted significantly on the bodies of discoverers. The biography of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer reels off numerous such marks that were visible when he was born: "As a sign (*rtags*) of being of the Padma family, his flesh had a reddish cast . . . . As a sign of possessing the qualities of an embodiment of the *tathāgatas,* there was a white flesh mark in the shape of an *oṁ* in the parting of his hair . . . . As a sign of having completed the five *mārgas* and the ten *bhūmis,* there was a picture of an eight-spoked wheel on his foot . . .," and so on.[63] Letters or *bīja* syllables on the body are especially favored; in his prophecy, 'Jigs med gling pa is predicted to be recognizable by the presence of a *hya* in his thumb print, and an *a* in the grain of a tooth.[64]

Signs not only mark the individual; equally significant is the time, which refers both to the period of the discoverer's lifetime as a whole, as well as to the precise moment of the Treasure's extraction. The major prophecies, such as those in the *Padma thang yig,* allude to events of national importance such as political, military or astronomical situations that will mark the era of the Treasure.[65] dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba cites these cryptic references, and links them with actual historical events during the period when the specified Treasures were revealed. For example, the prophecy states punningly that the sign of O rgyan gling pa's time is that "the pig (*phag*) eats up the earth (*sa*)."[66] And in fact, as the historian points out, Phag mo grus pa's defeat of Sa skya (1358) did occur during O rgyan gling pa's lifetime.[67] Again, Guru Jo rtse's discovery took place when dPan chen kun bzang was executed by the Mongols (c.1280), this event is referred to in the prophecy as "the time when Hor pa troops arrived at Bya rog rdzong in lower Myang."[68]

Signs of the time can also be local and specific. For Rig 'dzin rgod ldem can, the appearance of the star rGyal phu on the horizon was the indication to proceed with a Treasure revelation.[69] 'Ja' tshon snying po's prophecy warns of the danger in ignoring his predicted temporal signs when they appear: "There will be an epidemic in that country. You will almost die. At the site of the Treasure, a monastery with a school for Buddhist studies will be flourishing. Inside a lake there will be a burning fire that all can see during the day. When such signs (*rtags*

mtshan) appear, take out the Treasure! Without the temporal signs (*dus rtags*), it is not permissable to take it out . . . . Yet if you ignore (the signs), and the master of the Treasure flees, his powers will dissipate.[70] Therefore it is advisable to be cautious in what you do."[71]

The site of the Treasure is also recognized by signs of various sorts. The prophecies typically liken the appearance of the place to anthropomorphic or animal shapes, or to ritual objects. 'Ja' tshon snying po is instructed to seek a "mountain shaped like the swirl on a *gtor ma* for wrathful deities."[72] Nyang ral is given this description: "Here in your country there is a red mountain like a lion leaping into the sky. In the four directions are four great ministers, from the center of which the light of the shining sun radiates, and into which the rays of the setting sun collect. At that place is the Secret *Mantra* Treasure."[73]

The place where the Treasure is hidden will often be specifically pinpointed by theophanic figures or inanimate mechanisms that direct the discoverer to the site. Such phenomena are also taken as indicative signs by the discoverer: Rig 'dzin rgod ldem can writes that he sighted "a sign (*rtags*) in the form of a light ray, like the trunk of the *kalpalatika* tree, that struck Mt. bKra bzangs."[74] When he reached that spot on the mountain, a rainbow appeared in the sky as a sign of confirmation.[75]

Another sort of confirming sign is experienced in a concretely physical way. rGod ldem can, praying with his disciples for revelation, feels the cave in which they are sitting begin to shake. This shocks and frightens them, but it is interpreted as a portent (*ltas*) of the arrival of the Treasure's discoverer.[76] Decidedly somatic signs are predicted to accompany 'Ja' tshon snying po's discovery: "When you find it without mistake, you will experience a sudden rush (*'ur*). Your body will be trembling. You will start sweating, and frightened, you will lose your memory (of mundane matters)."[77] According to rDo grub chen, the feelings of rushing, heat and bliss are standard signs of the inner experience of all discoverers at the time of revelation, an experience that is also often described in specifically yogic terms.[78]

Other events of personal significance to the discoverer may not be explicitly labelled as signs. Of particular importance are the overt confirmations of being the reincarnation of the ap-

pointed individual. A theophanic figure of some sort, or even an appearance of Padmasambhava himself, will address the discoverer as such;[79] or there will be a written certificate (*byang bu*) identifying the discoverer, a certificate that is received in revelatory fashion at some point prior to the full revelation.[80] Both the visionary figure and the certificate will also convey specific information on the location of the Treasure and the procedure by which to extract it. But the connotative implication of such divine intervention is of far greater significance for the discoverer than is the specific information conveyed, critical as that is. In brief, all of these "miraculous appearances" (*cho 'phrul*) are interpreted as evidence of Padmasambhava's active agency. By recognizing the pattern of events as an instance of the paradigmatic mode of Treasure transmission, the conclusion, by a kind of abductive logic, is that a discoverer's life, and a Treasure revelation, is in progress.[81] This conclusion, in turn, supplies the critical confidence for the discoverer to label his vision and revelations as Treasure scripture.

Finally, the semiotic reading of the discoverer's life becomes so thick that, at some level, every experience becomes a sign. We have already noticed above the sense in which the discoverer's biography itself becomes a confirmation of the veracity of Padmasambhava's prophecies. On another, more general level, it might simply be a sign of being a Treasure discoverer to interpret everything as a sign. 'Jigs med gling pa, introducing his own account of his Treasure revelation in terms of the Vajrayāna path, explains, "When one assimilates the blessings and compassion of the *buddhas* into one's own discursive thought, all appearances that are reflected in the incipient great magical show are symbolic significations (*brdar btags pa*) of the circle of pure awareness."[82]

On a larger scale, the very geography of Tibet is seen as being covered with the signs of the legacy of Padmasambhava. To begin with, there is the widely held belief that Padmasambhava left footprints and handprints in the mountains and rocks of Tibet; these traces are sought eagerly by the discoverers.[83] More importantly, according to the Treasure tradition, Padmasambhava transformed the entirety of Tibet into a place for Buddhist practice, a repository of the Vajrayāna; in this view, the Treasures deposited for discovery throughout the

country are signs of Padmasambhava's pervasive blessings and guidance.[84] As the prophecy of Ratna gling pa states, "In each great valley there is a great Treasure; these also are reminders of the one from O-rgyan. In each minor place there is a minor Treasure; these also are reminders of the one from O-rgyan."[85]

Ultimately, any instance of Treasure discovery is itself a sign. For 'Jigs med gling pa, this significance is personal, as he reflects when handed the *gSol 'debs le'u bdun ma* Treasure, "The *ḍākinī* must have given me this as a sign (*brda*) of my mastery of this teaching in many past lives."[86] But especially in the case of a Treasure such as the *gSol 'debs le'u bdun ma,* which in varying rescensions was revealed by a number of discoverers,[87] its revelation also signifies the continuing vitality of the Treasure lineage as a whole. And that, as we have already seen, is a commemorative sign of Padmasambhava himself.

* * *

The Treasure discoverer's preoccupation with recognizing signs is, of course, continuous with a general Tibetan obsession. Propitious portents, omens, and signs of good *karma* (or, to use the classical Buddhist term that is commonplace in colloquial Tibetan to refer to a confluence of destiny and good timing, "a fitting interdependent origination" [*rten 'brel khrigs pa*]) are always sought as confirmations of time, place, persons, and so on, in undertakings ranging from a day's journey to a state ceremony.[88] However, it is clear that for the Treasure discoverer, signs have a dimension beyond the mere indication of a general state of auspiciousness. Rather, what is signified is a specific and determinant moment in history, a moment that is constitutive of the discoverer's very destiny and being.

Given the gravity and importance that the Treasure tradition assigns to the past historical moment, however, a critical question arises. Why are signs necessary at all? If Padmasambhava's intention is so all-determining, why doesn't he simply appear at the right time and hand the discoverer the manifest Treasure cycle in its proper form? Why does the discoverer have to wrestle with a complex series of signs in order to receive the revelation?

The answer to these questions involves a paradoxical conclu-

sion: the very signs that point to the authoritative past also undermine the authoritativeness of that past. The presence of semiosis in the transmission of scripture ensures that the discoverer's ability as interpreter is necessary to the process. Rather than being a passive conduit for a divine teleology, the discoverer is called upon to exercise his or her own talents. In recognizing bodily signs, reading the shape of landscapes and the tenor of the times, in pondering the internal signs for a clue to scripture hidden in memory, and certainly in undergoing the rigorous meditative training that is always part of the discoverer's life, the discoverer's own spiritual powers and creativity are surely essential. Thus, despite the fact that all of these signs are ultimately thought to be produced by Padmasambhava, it is precisely because the signs conceal, because they must be interpreted, that the Treasures can never be entirely determinant scriptures, frozen in content and format, or truly canonical in the classical sense.

As much as the Mahāyāna grounding in a pervasive, timeless enlightenment has been set aside in the Treasure tradition, it also remains as the very basis upon which the historical transmission can take place. This becomes clear when we consider some of the earlier stages in the Treasure's semiosis. In the Transmission in Symbols, and also in the Treasure's reduction to code in the Empowerment rite, what is being signified is indeed indeterminant and ahistorical. It is the very essence of the Buddhist teachings, which, as we know, is no essence at all. Ultimately, the nondual Transmission of the Realized stands as the ground of all scriptural transmission. In some sense every revelation is a synchronic memory of that ground. But if there were only the ubiquitous Transmission of the Realized, and never the introduction of duality or history, creativity and newness would be rendered just as impossible as they are by a totally determined revelation of an omnipotent Padmasambhava.

Signs, after all, mediate. They are the media that convey the *Dharma* of the teacher to the student. They also mediate between the discoverer and the diachronic memory of the past, and between the adept and the synchronic memory of ever-present enlightenment. As the central element in a theory of sacred scripture transmission, the presence of semiosis places the Treasure tradition in a mediate position between the completely closed

canon of the Hīnayāna and the completely open canon of the Mahāyāna.

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NOTES

1. The principal comprehensive description of the Treasure tradition in Tibetan is Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899), *Zab mo'i gter dang gter ston grub thob ji ltar byon pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus bkod pa rin chen baidurya'i phreng ba* (abbr. *gTer rnam brgya rtsa*), in *Rin chen gter mdzod,* edited by Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (Paro: Ngodrup & Sherap Drimay, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 291–759. This forms the basis for bDud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje's (1904–) account in the sixth chapter of his *Gangs ljongs rgyal bstan yongs rdzogs kyi phyi ma snga 'gyur rdo rje theg pa'i bstan pa rin po che ji ltar byung ba'i tshul dag cing gsal bar brjod pa lha dbang gyul las rgyud ba'i rnga bo che'i sgra dbyangs* (abbr. *rNying ma'i chos 'byung*) (Kalimpong, 1967). bDud 'joms Rinpoche's text has been translated into English by Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, and is to be published, along with extensive notes and indices, as *The History and Fundamentals of the Nyingma School,* by Wisdom Publications in winter 1986. Parts of the sixth chapter were translated previously by Eva Dargyay in her *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1977). An important essay on the Treasure tradition, not previously noticed by Western scholars, is rDo grub chen 'jigs med bstan pa nyi ma (1865–1926?), *Las 'phro gter brgyud kyi rnam bshad nyung gsal ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* (abbr. *gTer kyi rnam bshad*), in *The Collected Works of rDo Grub Chen 'Jigs Med Bstan Pa Nyima* (Gangtok: Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, 1975), vol. 4, pp. 377– 447. This work has been translated into English by Tulku Thondup, and will also be published by Wisdom Publications in 1986, as *Hidden Teachings of Tibet.* I have not had the opportunity to consult Tulku Thondup's translation for the purposes of the present study, although I have used certain sections of rDo grub chen's work herein.

Among the few Western studies of the Treasure tradition and related matters, the following are particularly noteworthy. By Anne-Marie Blondeau: "Le lHa-'dre bKa'-thaṅ," in *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou* (Paris 1971), pp. 29–126; "Analysis of the biographies of Padmasambhava according to Tibetan tradition: classification of sources," in *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson,* edited by Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1980); Comptes rendus de conférences,

Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes-Études, Ve section (Paris, 1975 through 1978); and her "Le 'Découvreur' Du Maṇi Bka'-'Bum Était-il Bon-po?" in *Tibetan and Buddhist Studies Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Alexander Csoma De Körös*, edited by Louis Ligeti, (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1984) pp. 77–123. Cf. also Ariane Macdonald, "Une lecture des P.T. 1286, 1287, 1038, 1047 et 1290. Essai sur la formation et l'emploi des mythes politiques dans la religion royale de Sroṅ-bcan sgam-po," in *Études tibétaines*, pp. 190–391; E. Gene Smith, Introduction to *Kongtrul's Encyclopaedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture* (New Delhi, 1970), pp. 1–87; Per Kvaerne, "The Canon of the Tibetan Bonpos," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 16 (1974) 18–56; 96–144; Matthew Kapstein: "Remarks on the Maṇi bka'-'bum and the cult of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet," to be published in the proceedings of the North American Tibetological Society; Kapstein's "A dGe-lugs-pa Defense of the Gter-ma Tradition," to be published in *Buddhist Apocryphal Literature*, edited by Robert Buswell and Lewis Lancaster (Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, No. 10, 1986), and Ramon Pratz, *Contributo Allo Studio Biografico Dei Primi Gter-Ston* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1982). My own work on these topics includes "The Internal Logic of Legitimation Within the Textual Structure of the Tibetan Treasure Cycles," to be published in *Buddhist Apocryphal Literature*; and "The Relic Text As Prophecy: Analogous Meanings of Byang(-bu), And Its Appropriation In The Treasure Tradition" to be published in *Tibet Journal* (Festschrift for Burmiok Athing), 1986.

2. Khyung po dpal dge and lDang ma lhun rgyal are identified by Pratz, *Contributo*, as belonging to the end of the tenth century.

3. The great majority of the Treasure cycles are linked to Padmasambhava; however, there are a number of other figures to whom Treasures are also attributed, most importantly Vimalamitra (eighth century), the source of the *Bi ma snying thig* cycle. The *Maṇi bka' 'bum* is said to be the teaching of Srong btsan sgam po, the seventh-century king of Tibet. There are a variety of other exceptions as well. Moreover, the Bon-po Treasures are not attributed to Padmasambhava.

4. The *Rin chen gter mdzod* was compiled by Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas in the nineteenth century. The sTod lung mtshur phu edition has been published in Paro by Ngodrup and Sherap Drimay, 1976. 111 volumes.

5. For a discussion of what I have identified as the two types of history of Treasure, the account of the origin of the cycle and the account of the revelation, see my "The Internal Logic of Legitimation."

6. The three transmissions are recounted in numerous works, and the terminology used can vary considerably. For this paper I have utilized some of the versions given in the historical sections of the Treasure cycles themselves. A fairly extensive rendition may be had from bDud 'joms Rinpoche, *rNying ma'i chos 'byung*, p. 63 ff. The tradition of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer's (1124/36–1192/1204) *bDe gshegs 'dus pa* cycle divides the same transmission sequence into five phases: *rgyal ba dgongs brgyud; rig 'dzin rig pas brgyud de dkar chags la btab pa; mkha' 'gro ma gtad rgyas brgyud de gter du ji ltar spas pa; grub thob rnal 'byor pa la brgyud de bka' rgya bkrol ba*; and *gang zag snyan du brgyud de bod du byung tshul*. See *bDe gshegs 'dus pa'i bka' byung tshul*, in Nyang ral nyi ma 'od

zer, *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor* (Gangtok: Sonam Topgay Kazi, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 231-271. This tradition is an early instance of a general tendency to recognize a Treasure transmission in India during the Vidyādhara phase. The *bDe gshegs 'dus pa* cycle explains the Treasure transmission in Tibet as being devised specially for King Khri srong lde btsan in his future incarnations. See pp. 259 and 269 of the above cited work.

7. Note that the term *gtad rgya* is being used in two instances: the appointing of the individual who will discoverer the Treasure in the future, and the appointing of the guardians of the Treasure. See rDo grub chen, *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, p. 382.

8. For a recent study of the authoritative expositors of *buddhavacana* and the sense of history in the Pāli canon and in early Mahāyāna, see Graeme MacQueen, "Inspired Speech in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism I," in *Religion* (1981) 11:4, pp. 303–319.

9. Graeme MacQueen, "Inspired Speech in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism II," in *Religion* (1982) 12:1, p. 52, citing *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* 226–229 and other passages.

10. U. Wogihara, ed., *Abhisamayālaṁkārā'lokā Prajñāpāramitāvyākhyā: The Work of Haribhadra* (Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1932), p. 28: *yat kiṃcid āyuṣman śāriputra bhagavataḥ śrāvakā bhāṣante deśayanty upadiśanty udīrayanti prakāśayanti samprakāśayanti sa sarvas tathāgatasya puruṣakāro veditavyaḥ.* Translation as by Edward Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary* (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), p. 83.

11. Although the term "Buddha-nature" seems to have been used most in East Asia (Ch. *fo-hsin*), it can be traced in early Buddhism and is a seminal Indian Mahāyāna doctrine (Skt. *buddhatā*). See entry "Buddha Nature," in *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, edited by G.P. Malalasekera (Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1973), vol. III. See also Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought In India* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), pp. 198 and 225 ff.

12. E.g., chapter 15, vs. 3: *Nirvāṇa-bhūmiṁ c'upadarśayāmi / vinayārtha sattvāna vadāmy upāyam / na cāpi nirvāmy ahu tasmin kāle / ihaiva co dharmu prakāśayāmi /" Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtram*, edited by U. Wogihara and C. Tsuchida (Toyko: The Sankibo Buddhist Book Store, 1958), p. 275.

13. The Pure Vision revelations also yield texts which are assigned a status akin to sacred scripture, and the formal distinction that I am identifying is sometimes ignored in practice. By and large, however, Pure Visions are teachings of Dharma received spontaneously from *buddhas, bodhisattvas*, or, as Kong sprul notes, birds, trees, the sky, etc. See Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas, *gTer rnam brgya rtsa*, pp. 683 and 297, where he is clear in identifying *dag snang* as a mode distinct both from *bka' ma* and *gter ma*. A classical instance of Pure Vision is Asaṅga's revelations from Maitreya.

14. With regard to the date of the development of the Avalokiteśvara cult, in which King Srong btsan sgam po is cast as an emanation of the *bodhisattva*, see Ariane Macdonald, *Une Lecture*; Yoshiro Imaeda, "Note préliminaire sur la formule Om Maṇi Padme hūṁ dans les manuscrits Tibétains de Touen-houang," in *Contributions aux études sur Touen-houang* (Genève-Paris: Droz, 1979), pp. 71-6; and Matthew Kapstein, "Remarks on the Maṇi bKa'-

'bum." Anne-Marie Blondeau, in her *Annuaire* report of 1977–1978, traces the connection between the Avalokiteśvara cult and the legend of Padmasambhava. Our earliest reference to the life of Padmasambhava seems to be Pelliot Tibétain 44. See F.A. Bischoff and Charles Hartman, "Padmasambhava's Invention of the Phur-bu: Ms. Pelliot Tibétain 44," in *Études Tibétaines*, pp. 11–28.

15. rDo grub chen, *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, p. 381. *brjed tho = mi brjed pa'i dran tho*. Gene Smith, *Introduction*, p. 12, translates this term alternately as "testimony" and "sign." For the various terms I have employed for types of memory, I am grateful to Edward Casey, whose forthcoming book *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987), is illuminating for the present topic.

16. *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, pp. 401-2.

17. *Klong chen snying gi thig le'i rtogs pa brjod pa ḍākki'i gsang gtam chen mo* (abbr. *sNying thig rtogs brjod*), p. 13, in 'Jigs med gling pa (1729–1798), *Klong chen snying thig* (New Delhi: Ngawang Sopa, 1973), vol. 1.

18. See Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 178. Symbols are arbitrarily linked with their object (e.g., letters, which signify sounds); icons are similar to their object (e.g., pictographs); and indices are physically connected with their object and point to the object as a whole (e.g., a book that represents a scholar).

19. For an example of the criticisms levelled against the Treasure scriptures, see Matthew Kapstein, "A dGe-lugs-pa Defense of the Gter-ma Tradition."

20. See my "The Logic of Legitimation."

21. dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1503-1565), *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (Delhi: Delhi Karmapai Chodhey Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1980), vol. 1, p. 633.

22. 'Jigs med gling pa, *sNying thig rtogs brjod* p. 13, quoting *sGron ma rnam pa bkod pa*.

23. Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1490), *Kun bzang bgongs pa zang thal las yid ches brgyud pa'i lo rgyus stong thun gyi spyi chings chen mo* (abbr. *dGongs pa zang thal lo rgyus*), p. 7, in his *rDzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal and Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Leh: S.W. Tashi Gangpa, 1973) (Smanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod, vol. 60).

24. gTer bdag gling pa 'gyur med rdo rje (1646–1714), *rDzogs chen a ti zab don snying po'i lo rgyus* (abbr. *A ti zab don lo rgyus*), p. 8, in his *rDzogs pa chen po a ti zab don snying po'i chos skor* (Dehra Dun: D. G. Khochhen Trulku, 1977).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

26. Rig 'dzin rgod ldem can, *dGongs pa zang thal lo rgyus*, p. 7.

27. gTer bdag gling pa, *A ti zab don lo rgyus*, p. 10: *ci yang mi gsung ba'i gsung ba chen po*.

28. *dGongs pa zang thal lo rgyus*, p. 7.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 8: *sprul pa'i 'khor . . .*

30. *A ti zab don lo rgyus*, p. 9: *'gro 'ong dang skyes 'gag 'pho 'gyur med pa bzhugs pa las gnyis su med pa'i ngo bor gnas kyang gnyis su snang ba rgyal ba thams cad skyed par byed pa'i yum . . .*

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

33. *dGongs pa zang thal lo rgyus*, p. 11. For example, Vajrasattva's granting of various boxes (*dga'u*) to the rNying ma patriarch dGa' rab rdo rje is included in the Transmission of the Realized.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 15 ff.

36. According to mKhan po dPal ldan shes rab, in an interview in May 1986, there is a greater tendency to be attached to *upāya*, which is analogous with the view of realism (*yod pa*), than to *prajñā*, analogous with the view of nihilism (*med pa*).

37. The importance of the Empowerment transmission is emphasized by rDo grub chen, *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, p. 383.

38. *sGrub thabs snying po skor lnga*, p. 452, in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 4: *rdo rje lus byang chub snying po*.

39. dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba, *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, p. 296: *gter gnas rang sems la chos nyid rang chas su gnas pa*.

40. 'Jigs med gling pa, *Klong chen snying gi thig le las dbang gi spyi don snying po don gsal*, p. 123 and throughout, in his *Klong chen snying thig*, vol. 1: . . . *'grub pa'i skal ba rgyud la bzhag*.

41. rDo grub chen, *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, p. 383.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 383.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 383. These two phrases drawn from a somewhat more complex statement by rDo grub chen concerning the three special transmissions for Treasure.

44. See, for example, mNga' ris pan chen padma dbang rgyal rdo rje's (1487–1582) account of his search for the actual paper of the Treasure (*gter shog dngos*) of Nyang ral's *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* cycle, which he finally finds in Lho brag: *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i 'chad thabs mun sel nyi zla'i 'khor lo*, p. 210 seq., in Nyang ral Nyi ma 'Od' zer, *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 1. Is it just this yellow paper that is also identified as the original "Kagye Desheg Duepa," as reproduced in Lopen Nado, "The Development of Language in a Buddhist Kingdom," *Druk Losel*, iv no. 2 (August 1982), p. 5? I am grateful to Michael Aris for bringing Lopen Nado's article to my attention.

45. *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, p. 383.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 385. Paraphrased.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 408 seq. An extended discussion of the problems involved is presented here.

48. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 403–406.

49. The following scripts are listed (explanations in parentheses are based on the comments of mKhan po dPal ldan shes rab in a conversation in February 1986): *thang yig* (letters with long ligatures, used in records and old documents); *spung yig* (abbreviated letters); *bshur yig* (an old term for Tibetan *dbu can*); *ldem yig* (cursive script); *spas yig* (an even more abbreviated script than *spung yig*); *mkhar brtsegs* (letters that resemble architectural structures); *thig le'i yi ge* (rounded letters); *'khyil chen* and *'khyil chung* (both are curved letters). rDo grub chen also mentions styles of writing the conventional Tibetan

alphabet omitting prefixes, headletters, suffixes, etc., which are also ways of encoding the text. *gTer kyi rnam bshad,* p. 404.

50. That only the literal surface of the encoded Treasure is being (un)coded in this category is clear from rDo grub chen's closing statement for this section: "All of the above is an analysis only of the *ḍākinī* letters." *gTer kyi rnam bshad,* p. 405.

51. Conversation, February 1986.

52. *gTer kyi rnam bshad,* p. 404: *ka dpe med la brtan gyo'i yul rkyen nges med la brten nas rdol thabs su shes pa.*

53. *gTer kyi rnam bshad,* p. 405. However, as pointed out below, the meaning is in this case unrelated to the actual content of the Treasure scripture.

54. *gTer kyi rnam bshad,* p. 406.

55. *Ibid., p. 406.*

56. *gTer kyi rnam bshad,* p. 406. According to rDo grub chen, this language can only be understood by the discoverer. The encoded Treasure text may also be written in other languages, such as Tibetan, Sanskrit, or the "language of Uḍḍiyana."

57. See *gTer kyi rnam bshad,* p. 408 seq.

58. See my "The Logic of Legitimation."

59. Mentioned in many of the accounts of Treasure revelation. See *gTer kyi rnam bshad,* p. 408. Referred to by 'Jigs med gling pa, *sNying thig rtogs brjod,* pp. 11 and 13. I have not seen such terms applied to the male consorts of female discoverers, however.

60. For a fuller discussion of this problem, see my "The Logic of Legitimation."

61. *gTer kyi rnam bshad,* p. 414, merely calls them the "symbols that are secondary to the symbolic script" (*brda yig gi 'khor du gyur ba'i brda*), referring briefly to the animate and inanimate forms that function as the blessings of *ḍākinīs* and *vidyādharas,* etc., which aide in the breaking of the Treasure code.

62. 'Jigs med gling pa, *gSang ba chen po nyams snang gi rtogs brjod chu zla'i gar mkhan* (abbr. *gSang chen rtogs brjod*), p. 40, in his *Klong chen snying thig,* vol. 1. He is quoting Sangs rgyas gling pa's *Bla ma dgongs 'dus.*

63. Mi 'gyur rdo rje, *sPrul sku mnga' bdag chen po'i skyes rabs rnam thar dri ma med pa'i bka' rgya can* (abbr. *mNga' bdag rnam thar*), p. 87 ff., in Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer, *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor,* vol. 1.

64. *gNad byang thugs kyi sgrom bu* p. 73, in his *Klong chen snying thig,* vol. 1.

65. See U rgyan gling pa (= O rgyan gling pa, b. 1323), *U rgyan ghuru padma 'byung gnas kyi skyes rabs rnam par thar pa rgyas par bkod pa padma bka'i thang yig* (Leh, 1968), chapter 92 (ff. 218b–225b).

66. dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba, *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston,* p. 635.

67. *Ibid.,* p. 637. See Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (repr. New York: Potala Publishing, 1985), chapter 5.

68. *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston,* pp. 634 and 636. See Shakabpa, *Tibet,* p. 69. See also Pratz, *Contributo,* pp. 57–61.

69. Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem phru can, *gTer gton pa'i lo rgys,* p. 28 in his *Byang gter rdzogs chen dgongs pa zang thal and Thugs sgrub skor* (Sumra: Orgyan Dorji, 1978), vol. 1.

70. According to mKhan po dPal ldan shes rab, conversation May 1986, this statement implies that the protectors would kill the delinquent discoverer.

71. *Yang zab nor bu'i lde mig*, pp. 20–21, in 'Ja' tshon snying po (1585–1656), *dKon mchog spyi 'dus kyi chos skor* (New Delhi: Topden Tshering, 1977).

72. *Ibid.*, p. 16. *gTor mas* are the traditional Tibetan offering cakes, generally made in elaborate shapes.

73. Mi 'gyur rdo rje, *mNga' bdag rnam thar*, p. 94.

74. Rig 'dzin rgod ldem can, *gTer gton pa'i lo rgyus*, p. 28: *rtags kyi 'od zer* . . .

75. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

77. *Yang zab nor bu'i lde mig*, p. 18.

78. See rDo grub chen, *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, p. 418. See also, for example, 'Jigs med gling pa, *gSang chen rtogs brjod*, p. 52.

79. See my "The Logic of Legitimation."

80. See my "The Relic Text as Prophecy."

81. I am following Eco's understanding of abduction as defined by Peirce. See Eco, *A Theory*, pp. 131–133. Abduction seems to be a special type of inference in which a hypothesis about a case is based on the presentation of a "rule" and a "result." Peirce's example was his sighting of a man in Turkey on horseback with four men holding a canopy over his head. Hypothesizing that this show of honour would only be given to the governor of the region, he concludes that the man is the governor. For the Treasure discoverer there is a similar progression of thought. For example, there is a dream of Padmasambhava granting his blessings; the hypothesis is then made that such a dream would be a sign that the dreamer is a Treasure discoverer; and the conclusion is that this dreamer is in fact a discoverer.

82. 'Jigs med gling pa, *gSang chen rtogs brjog*, p. 21: sangs rgyas rnams kyi thugs rje dang byin rlabs rang gi kun rtog dang 'dres nas 'jug pa'i cho 'phrul chen po la snang cha'i gzugs brnyan ci yang srid pa'i phyir / de nyid la tag pa ye shes kyi 'khor lo'i brdar btags pa ste/.

83. See *Ibid.*, pp. 23 and 27.

84. See rDo grub chen, *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, pp. 397–8.

85. Cited by Smith, *Introduction*, p. 12, quoting from Kong-sprul's *gTer rnam brgya rtsa*, f.35v. My translation.

86. 'Jigs med gling pa, *gSang chen rtogs brjod*, p. 43.

87. Originally discovered by bZang po grags pa, later inherited by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem can and others.

88. See Norbu Chophel, *Folk Culture of Tibet* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1983), for a detailed description of the many events, experiences, configurations, etc., that are interpreted as signs in Tibetan life, from birth to death, and beyond.