

Contribution, Attribution, and Selective Lineal Amnesia in the Case of Mahāyogin dPal dbyangs

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1. Ambiguous Boundaries

*No one to bind, no binding,
Nothing to be bound!
Grasping at a conceptualized 'self',
Beings insistently tie and untie knots in the sky.
The variety of emanations are displayed in order to teach
Unbound, unliberated
Primordially spontaneously complete Buddhadharmā.
--Guhyagarbhatantra¹*

*No one to bind, no binding,
Nothing to be bound!
Unbound, unliberated,
Without desire for liberation,
free from bounds.
--Mārgavyūha²*

*No one to bind, no binding,
Nothing to be bound!
Unbound, unliberated
Primordially spontaneously
complete Buddhadharmā.
--Thugs kyi sgron ma³*

Historical depictions of Tibet's ninth century describe an escalating violent chaos, the disintegration of centralized organization systems across social, political, and economic realms. However, the ritual tantric contexts of the emergence and development of Mahāyogatantra at the end of Tibet's Dynastic Period (ca. 650-850 CE) and into the Age of Fragmentation (ca. 850-950), might be characterized as a socially "bounded" environment. By this time, the wildly diverse oral systems of tantric initiation coming north from India appear to have been adapted and codified by individual

¹ *Guhyagarbhatantra* Ch. 2.15-16: *sus kyang ma bcings bcings med de/ /bcing bar bya ba yod ma yin/ /rnam rlog bdag tu 'dzin pa yis/ /nan gyis mkha' la mdud pa 'dor/ /bcings med rnam par grol med pa'i/ /ye nas lhun rdzogs sangs rgyas chos/ bstan phyir spro ba sna tshogs mdzad/.*

² *Mārgavyūha* 470b4: *sus kyang ma bcings bcings med de/ /bcing bar bya ba yod ma yin/ /bcings med rnam par grol med pas/.*

³ *Thugs kyi sgron ma* 323: *sus kyang ma bcings bcings med de/ bcings par bya ba yod ma yin/ bcings med rnam par grol med pa'i/ ye nas lhun rdzogs sangs rgyas chos/.*

teachers into discrete practices oriented toward attendant normative texts, and the relationships binding master to disciple and practitioners to one another within a single lineage were considered crucial to the success of the technologies pursued by means of them. While political and ecclesiastical authority began to weaken in waves across the plateau beginning in the mid-ninth century, it is within these tantric communities most remarkably that the ideals of mutual obligation and regulation of loyalty and ritual protection seem to have prevailed.

For practitioners, failure to preserve the specific contractual bounds of their tantric initiation threatened to result in a wide variety of afflictions, ranging from dermatological nuisances to madness, demonic assault, and even rebirth in hell. Dunhuang treatises and liturgical manuals from the tenth century describe the horrific results of transgressing these loyalties within what appear to have been practicing yogic communities, as well as for tamed demons living on the edges of said communities, bound as the latter were via their own vows to protect. Despite the variety of restrictive vow sets, or *samaya*, described in these manuscripts, their warnings are consistent in one regard: the lineage of the teaching represented in the person of the guru, together with the associated practice community, was to be protected at threat of the integrity of body and mind. The personal nature of direct transmission of the *samaya* as *lung*, or oral teachings, lent further significance to these tantric relationships. Indeed, as van Schaik points out, the *samaya*, and the *prātimokṣa* before them, have always been definitional of discrete Buddhist communities.⁴

Within this extraordinarily bounded relational context, however, we also might observe a pervasive sense of unboundedness with regard to the ownership or authorship of texts, and to the sense of their structural integrity. However far modern Buddhist Studies may have moved beyond early efforts to identify “apocryphal” Buddhist literature, the search for original redactive moments to religious texts, whatever their native canonical status, has only recently fallen by the wayside. Tibetan Buddhist studies likewise have been slow to engage the sorts of redaction critical methods taken up in Christian biblical studies. The origins search proves to be a fruitless exercise for a few reasons. In some cases, the difficulty in discerning a text’s single origin is due most immediately to an utter lack of any internal or external indications of the text’s initial composition in the forms of a colophon, authorial attribution, or bibliographic reference to the text

⁴ Sam van Schaik, “The Limits of Transgression: The Samaya Vows of Mahāyoga,” in *Aspects of Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang: Rites and Teachings for This Life and Beyond*, ed. Matthew Kapstein and Sam van Schaik, (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 61-84.

elsewhere. In many cases, however, the historical emergence of a text cannot be identified simply because there appear to be in the development of a single text so many redactive moments. The fluidity and creativity involved in the evolution of a text as each is augmented, edited, and otherwise developed are observable throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhist authorship, but are especially prevalent during its earliest centuries before individual authorial identification was considered essential to knowing and valuing (or devaluing) a text. Recent strides in discerning the stemma of these early tantric Tibetan texts based on Dunhuang manuscripts and other material evidence has begun to have an exponentially positive effect on our understanding of the complex web of related texts from the ninth to eleventh centuries.

This paper takes up a type of textual redaction which belies a more specific type of literary fluidity and creativity, one that holds at the margins between shared texts within a particular community or lineage of transmission. In addition to the diachronic creative embellishment and accretion of individual texts of all genres, we see particularly in texts which might be characterized as representing oral traditions of *lung* or *man ngag*, passages which appear to have been borrowed wholesale from other texts with no expressed recognition by the authors of their sources via annotation, teaching title, or authorial attribution, or even of the fact of any loan whatsoever. Lines are excerpted from various sources and woven throughout scriptural commentary, treatise, and liturgy, such that the identity of a text appears to be more than malleable or augmentable—it is even porous.

This web of interactive replication between texts, together with the aforementioned process of textual evolution, makes immediate source identifications in such cases relatively rare. However, the discovery of shared passages between texts can reveal much about those texts' complicated trajectories of creation. More broadly, it also allows us to excavate a richer and more accurate history of canonical construction, transmission history, and ideological or ritual affiliation and identity. Whether the borrowed lines belonged to a bank of apophthegmatic teachings circulating among community members, or whether the chain of borrowing occurred between discrete texts transmitted orally or otherwise, identified citation patterns often seem to mirror the human relationships described by lineage histories.

Composed in the midst of this socially bounded, but bibliographically unbounded, milieu, seven texts by a ninth-century Tibetan author named dPal dbyangs exemplify this sense of ambiguous literary borders in their direct incorporation of material from three important works. These latter are the *sBas pa'i rgum chung* attributed to Bud-

dhagupta, the *Guhyagarbha tantra* (*gSang ba'i snying po*), and the *Mārgavyūha* (*Lam rnam par bkod pa*) attributed to Buddhaguhya. As I will show, the particulars of conservation and creativity that might be observed in this transfer of material from one context to another may serve to highlight the importance of the relationship of lineage affiliation to textual borrowing, including not only the use of other author's literary techniques and ideas, but also the verbatim words of certain others.

In dPal dbyangs's work we can see that the very literary culture allowing him unconstrained use of works within the sphere of what he proclaimed to be his own tradition, which borrowing in its turn fed his highly successful creative project, also appears to have had cannibalistic tendencies. A mere century after his death, the works of the once highly esteemed Tibetan authority on Mahāyoga thought, Master dPal dbyangs, were consumed and tossed aside, nearly erased entirely from the collective memory of those directly benefiting in their turn from his innovations, namely proponents of the nascent Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*).

2. dPal dbyangs's Importance

In the Mahāyoga texts of dPal dbyangs, we see one of the earliest known literary extractions of Buddhist tantric view from its ritually-oriented matrix. dPal dbyangs's pioneering contribution to Tibetan tantric development was not only to isolate these tantric views as worthy of consideration and presentation in their own right, but in fact, to prioritize them as preeminent, even to the exclusion of their former liturgical contexts. However we might parse the perspectival distinctions between philosophical discourse, philosophy, and scholasticism,⁵ it is clear that dPal dbyangs intended a sharp distinction between Mahāyoga texts' practical, ritual orientations and what he calls "view" (*lta*) or "vision" (*mthong*). This early, native division undergirds the central and explicit purpose of his works in promoting view as of foundational soteriological value.⁶

⁵ For more on these distinctions and the complications in applying them to Tibetan texts, see the following. Jose Cabezon, *Buddhism and Language: A study of Indo-Tibetan scholasticism*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994). Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, contestation and memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 85-120. Anne C. Klein, *Unbounded Wholeness: Dzogchen, Bon, and the logic of the nonconceptual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁶ The intentional differentiation of perspective from praxis, at least rhetorically, was made fully manifest only a century later in the tantric bibliographics of Mahāyoga and Atiyoga, which were held together historically in dialectic tension

In dPal dbyangs's expositions, we see both a firm rootedness in the Indian-oriented Mahāyoga tradition with references meant to establish, legitimate, and celebrate its tantric origins, and an intended departure from Mahāyoga's then-normative, ritually-oriented focus. This incipient bidirectionality presages the dual strands of the abstract and the active used by exegetes to characterize the rNying ma tradition's breadth in the eleventh century and beyond. Thus, it is apparent that dPal dbyangs acted as a pivotal figure both in the anchoring of early Mahāyoga tantra in Tibet, and in the evolution of the Tibetan hermeneutics of the rNying ma School.

A dPal dbyangs is credited with eight works in the bsTan 'gyur—a set of six poems collectively referred to as the *Six Lamps* (*sGron ma drug*), a Mahāyoga catechism called the *rDo rje sems dpa'i zhus lan*, and a letter to a Tibetan king, presumably King Khri srong sde brtsan, entitled *Letter Summarizing the Precious Teachings* (*gCes pa bsdus pa'i 'phrin yig*).⁷ The three copies of ninth-century dPal dbyangs's *Zhus lan* found among the ancient manuscripts at Dunhuang seem to evidence both the high level of dPal dbyangs's popularity at Dunhuang in the tenth century, and the long geographic reach of his exegetical authority over the course of those intervening years.

3. dPal dbyangs in the *bSam btan mig sgron*

In addition to the Dunhuang manuscripts of dPal dbyangs's texts, quotations from his works also appear in the innovative doxographical treatise the *bSam gtan mig sgron* by Tibetan author gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes. Though the age of the only extant edition is not known, gNubs's text appears to be a uniquely early,

within the rubric of the rNying ma School, a process van Schaik's recent work has done much to illuminate. See Sam van Schaik's "A Definition of Mahāyoga: Sources from the Dunhuang Manuscripts" in *Tantric Studies* 1 (2008): 45-88.

⁷ I have described this corpus in more detail in an earlier article. See Kammie Takahashi, "Ritual and Philosophical Speculation in the *rDo rje sems dpa'i zhus lan*," in *Esoteric Texts of Dunhuang* (London: Brill, 2010): 85-142. Of these, '*Phrin yig* is the most problematic as attributed to dPal dbyangs for several reasons, among them both content and colophon. In the only extended study of the text to date, Dietz argues that '*Phrin yig*'s author is most likely the Mahāyogin dPal dbyangs who also served as second abbot of bSam yas monastery, citing what she sees as a self-interested retroattribution of the sBa clan name to dPal dbyangs in the *sBa bzhed*. Siglinde Dietz, "Die buddhistische Briefliteratur Indiens: nach dem tibetischen Tanjur herausgegeben, übersetzt und erläutert" (Wesbaden; Harrassowitz, 1984), 85, fn. 242. Samten Karmay refutes that possibility on the basis of a roughly coeval Dunhuang document listing a sBa dPal dbyangs as successor to Ye shes dbang po, as well as what Karmay sees as language in '*Phrin yig* itself postdating the eighth century. See Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 68-69.

tenth-century comparison of the interpretive schemes affiliated with four Buddhist meditation programs, the Gradual and Sudden exoteric systems of India and China respectively, and the Mahāyoga and Great Perfection tantric systems.⁸ In his presentations of these four systems, gNubs eschews typically technological descriptions of ritual or cosmology, and despite the text's title, even avoids technical explanation of meditative process. Rather, he guides readers through a pastiche of ontological, epistemological, and contemplative poetic expressions of non-conceptuality representing each of the four traditions.⁹ View is presented as the paramount feature of each of the four meditative programs in the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, with the ultimately liberative enlightenment belonging to the Great Perfection tradition. This final view is described most clearly in the text's seventh chapter on Great Perfection, but its perspective is woven throughout the text. gNubs's emphasis on perspective and his eschewal of meditative technique closely resemble dPal dbyangs's own authorial tendencies. The following citation makes the point clearly.

*If one knows the body to be illusory,
There is no attachment whatsoever to the seated position with legs
crossed.
However one lives, in whatever of the three activities,
There is neither an act to be undertaken, nor any activity at all.*¹⁰

gNubs references the source of this passage as the “*rGum chung*” when he quotes it in Chapter Seven of his *bSam gtan mig sgron*, but as Karmay has shown, the lines appear to have been taken from one of dPal dbyangs's *Lamp* texts instead, now known as the *bsGom thabs sgron ma*, which in its turn appears to have borrowed from the *sBas pa'i rgum chung*, about which I will have more to say below.¹¹ In fact, almost all the works attributed to dPal dbyangs in the Peking canon—the *Zhus lan* and four of his *Lamp* texts, as well as the *Letter* (if

⁸ For analysis of the dating of this text, see Dylan Esler, “On the Life of gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas ye-shes,” in *Revue d'Études Tibétaines* 29 (2014), 5-27.

⁹ Carmen Meinert, “Structural Analysis of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*: A comparison of the fourfold correct practice in the *Āryavikalpapraveśana-madhāraṇī* and the contents of the four main chapters of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26.1 (2003): 175-195.

¹⁰ STMG 287b4: *rgum chung las/ [...] sgyu ma bzhin du lus shes na/ drang 'dug skyil krung 'cha' ba'ang med/ spyod lam gsum gyis gnas pa gang/ lches du bya med byed pa'ang med/ lces 'byung/*

¹¹ *bsGom thabs sgron ma*: *sgyu ma bzhin du lus shes na/ drang 'dug dkyil dkrung 'cha' ba med/ spyod lam gsum gyis gnas pa gang/ ched du bya med byed pa'ang med/*. Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 61, 72-73, and 85.

its attribution to our dPal dbyangs is accepted)—are quoted in four chapters of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, amounting to two dozen citations and references in total, described in the following table.

**Citations in the *bSam gtan mig sgron*
of works attributed to dPal dbyangs**

<i>STMG</i>	Source Identification in <i>STMG</i>	Root Text Title	Passage Location
Chapter 2			
30.3	“Master dPal byangs said...”	<i>Zhus lan</i>	P 20
35.4	“Ba dPal byangs taught...”	<i>gCes pa bsdus pa'i 'phrin yig</i> (P5842)*	127.1-4
Chapter 3			
49.5	<i>Khen po</i> dPal byangs’s meditational instruc- tions ¹²	<i>lTa ba yang dag sgron ma</i> (P5919)	285b4
Chapter 6			
195.3	<i>Man ngag</i>	<i>lTa ba rin po che sgron ma</i> (P5923)	287b
201.6	<i>Zhus lan</i>	<i>Zhus lan</i>	P 35
202.4	<i>Zhus lan</i>	<i>Zhus lan</i>	P 34
204.4	Nyen (gNyan) dPal byangs (in notes only)	unidentified	N/A
219.3	<i>Zhus lan</i>	<i>Zhus lan</i>	P 25
225.2	the oral instructions of Master dPal byangs ¹³	<i>Zhus lan</i> *	P 32
228.1	<i>Zhus lan</i>	<i>Zhus lan</i>	P 28
240.1	<i>Zhus lan</i>	<i>Zhus lan</i>	P 19
241.2	Master Nyen (gNyen) dPal byangs’s thought ¹⁴ (in notes only)	unidentified	N/A
255.6	<i>Zhus lan</i>	<i>Zhus lan</i>	P 13

¹² *mkhan po dpal byangs kyi bsgom lung.*

¹³ *mkhan po dpal byangs kyi man ngag.*

¹⁴ *mkhan po gnyen dpal dbyangs na re sems las.*

<i>STMG</i>	Source Identification in <i>STMG</i>	Root Text Title	Passage Location
256.2	<i>Zhus lan</i>	<i>Zhus lan</i>	P 10
269.3	<i>Rin po che'i sgro ma</i>	<i>lTa ba rin po che sgron ma</i> (P 5923)	288b2
275.1	<i>Rin po che'i sgröl ma</i>	<i>lTa ba rin po che sgron ma</i> (P 5923)	288a3
277.3	<i>Zhus lan</i>	<i>Zhus lan</i>	P 43
278.2	Master dPal dbyangs	unidentified	N/A
Chapter 7			
318.2	<i>Man ngag</i>	<i>mTha'yi mun sel sgron ma</i> (P 5920)	286b4
382.2	<i>rBum chung</i>	<i>bsGom thabs sgron ma</i> (P 5922)*	287b1
404.1	<i>rGum chung</i>	<i>bsGom thabs sgron ma</i> (P 5922)*	287b4
404.1	<i>rGum chung</i>	<i>bsGom thabs sgron ma</i> (P 5922)	287b3
404.6	<i>rGum chung</i>	<i>bsGom thabs sgron ma</i> (P 5922)*	287b4
440.5	<i>rGum chung</i>	<i>bsGom thabs sgron ma</i> (P 5922)*	287b2

* indicates identifications made by Karmay.¹⁵

Several points might be highlighted here. To begin, I would point out that not all of gNubs's many quotations of dPal dbyangs's words resonate with tantric significance or are even especially unique among Buddhist teachings. In the second and third chapters of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, which compare the methods and requirements of the four traditions generally, gNubs cites passages from dPal dbyangs's *Zhus lan*¹⁶ and *lTa ba yang dag sgron ma*,¹⁷ identifying them

¹⁵ Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 69, fn. 41.

¹⁶ STMG 30: *mkhan po dpal dbyangs kyis kyang/ blo ldan ma nor don bzhin bcos pa shin tu gces/*. "Master dPal dbyangs also says, 'One should dearly value unerring correction from the wise in accordance with reality.'" ITJ 470 and PT 837 manuscripts of the *Zhus lan* mirror this STMG citation.

¹⁷ STMG 49: *mkhan po dpal dbyangs kyi bsgom lung las/ lung dang man ngag rig pas thag bcad del/ chos kyi rang bzhin yang dag yid ches bya/*. "From the meditation instructions of Master dPal dbyangs: 'Believe in the authentic intrinsic nature of phenomena having ascertained it through knowing the teachings and oral commentary.'" This passage matches that in the Peking version of the *lTa ba yang dag sgron ma*.

merely as the teachings of “Master (*mkhan po*) dPal dbyangs.” gNubs also includes a passage resembling lines in the *‘Phrin yig*, calling it the work of “dBa’ dPal dbyangs,” though we may discount this as a reference to an earlier historical figure.¹⁸ All these quotations are general enough to be supportive of any of the four doctrines explicated in the *bSam gtan mig sgron*.

Of the nearly two dozen mentions and citations of dPal dbyangs and his works in the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, fifteen are concentrated in Chapter Six on the Mahāyoga, as might be expected of quotations drawn from the work of a self-proclaimed Mahāyoga exegete. Ten of the citations overall are drawn from the *Zhus lan*, identified by text title or as from “the oral instruction of scholar dPal dbyangs” (*mkhan po dpal dbyangs kyi man ngag*). Three more passages lacking any specific authorial attribution, said to be from the “*Rin po che’i sgro ma*,” “*Rin po che’i sgröl ma*,” or simply “*man ngag*,” are from a single *Lamp* text, the *Rin po che’i sgron ma*. That gNubs chose to include passages so commonly in his Mahāyoga chapter from these two texts in particular—the *Zhus lan* and *lTa ba rin po che’i sgron ma*—indicates that he felt them the best Mahāyoga representatives among dPal dbyangs’s texts. Unlike the passages cited in the earlier chapters of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, these two texts indeed are quite similar in their approaches, together with dPal dbyangs’s *Thugs kyi sgron ma*, including the most classically tantric references in all of dPal byangs’s works. gNubs also ventures to provide summaries in the Mahāyoga chapter of the thought of “scholar gNyan dPal byangs,”¹⁹ and twice summarizes teachings which are identified only in the interlinear notes as those of gNyan or gNyen dPal byangs.²⁰

¹⁸ STMG 35: *dba’ dpal dbyangs kyi zhal snga nas// lus la gru’i blo bzhag ste// pha mthar bde blag skyel ba bzhin// thar pa’i go ‘phangs gzigs par bya/ zhes gsungs pa [illegible] bzhin du bsam mo/* “From the words of dBa’ dPal dbyangs: ‘Settling the mind in the boat of the body, behold the citadel of liberation, like being carried smoothly to the other side.’” Only the first section of the first line (“*lus la gru yi blo zhog ste*”) appears in the extant version of the *‘Phrin yig*. The rest of the STMG passage does not resemble any further discussion in the *‘Phrin yig*.

¹⁹ STMG 278.

²⁰ STMG 204: *dge ba’i bshes gnyen [gnyan dpal dbyangs kyi bzhed la] la’i zhal nas//mahā yo ga gnyis su med par lta bar bzhed de/ chos rig pa ‘dus byas dang ‘dus ma byas la sogs pa thams cad rang gi rig pa yin pas/ ngo bo ‘di ‘dra bya ba yang med/ med bzhin du lha’i dkyil ‘khor la sogs par yang snang bas dbus su yang med de/ don de nyid ni yod med gnyis su med pa brjod pa med pa yin/* “Similarly, it is said in the oral instructions of a certain spiritual teacher [notes: the teachings of gNyan dPal dbyangs] that Mahāyoga is said to be a philosophy of nonduality. All things, compounded and un-compounded phenomena, awarenesses and so forth, are self-awareness. Likewise, entities have no function whatsoever. Accordingly, though deity maṇḍala and so forth may appear, there is no center. This means that there is neither of the two, existence nor nonexistence; [it] is inexpressible.” STMG 241: *yang*

The citations gNubs chooses from dPal dbyangs's texts in this sixth chapter fit well within gNubs's characterizations of the many methods (*thabs*) of Mahāyoga in general. There are mentions of mudra, *yabyum* pairs, maṇḍala of wrathful deities, absorptions and emanations, and empowerments and vows. Yet, they also serve the main topic of Chapter Six, and indeed of the entire text, which is explication of the view of nonconceptuality in each of the four traditions, and any cosmologies or practices which are mentioned are mere fodder for the inquiry into the traditions' respective experiences and expressions of the nature of reality. The views particularly of Chan and Atiyoga on the one hand, and of Mahāyoga and Atiyoga on the other, are in fact the bases upon which Atiyoga's universal superiority is asserted, which assertions provide the rationale for the composition of the *bSam gtan mig sgron* itself.²¹

There is evidence in the *bSam gtan mig sgron* of tantric development beyond the period in which dPal dbyangs was teaching, however. In a passage exemplifying at least one direction of that evolution as the Highest Yoga tantras emerged, gNubs explains that those who rely on the "lower teachings" practice the subtle body manipulations of the drops and winds in the channels, attaining the goal gradually through these practices. This subtle body technology is not described anywhere in dPal dbyangs's texts, and thus we have here evidence of newer Mahāyoga practices of which dPal dbyangs most likely was unaware.

Closing this passage, gNubs relates that teachings regarding the final stage of easy, spontaneous realization are provided in the orally transmitted instructions which teach freedom from specific meditations on Suchness, as in the first of the three meditative stabilizations, or *ting nge 'dzin gsum*. This ultimate stage is described

*rnam gcig tu [mkhan po gnyen dpal dbyangs na re sems las] de bzhin nyid ni gzhan ma yin pas/ [de bzhin phar mi snang/ [blo tshur mi 'jug lte/ yul shes dmigs pa med par rig pa nyid de bzhin du rang gsal bar mi rtog pa bsgom zhes bya'ol. "And according to another commentator [notes: from Master gNyen dPal dbyangs's thought] regarding Suchness, there is no 'other', and thus likewise, there is no appearance elsewhere. The mind without observing either object or subject, does not engage here. Thus that very awareness is said to be non-conceptual meditation, self-illuminating." For grammatical evidence that the interlinear notes of the *bSam gtan mig sgron* are in at least one case "grammatisch nicht schlüssig," and thus most likely of a different pen than that of the text's author, see Carmen Meinert, "Chinesische Chan- und tibetische rDzogs chen-Lehre: eine komparatistische Untersuchung im Lichte des philosophischen Heilskonzeptes „Nicht-Vorstellen“ anhand der Dunhuang-Dokumente des chinesischen Chan-Meister Wolun und des Werkes bSam gtan mig sgron des tibetischen Gelehrten gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes" (PhD diss., Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 2004), 238 fn. 599.*

²¹ Sam Van Schaik, "Dzogchen, Chan and the Question of Influence," in *Revue d'études Tibétaines* 24 (October, 2012): 5–20.

as having been set forth “particularly in the Atiyoga,” but the implication is that these teachings are also present in the Mahāyoga tradition. Finally, when the practitioner has grown familiar with primordial wisdom, there is no further need for reliance upon those methods.²² At this point of the practice, one’s perception of phenomena as external to the mind ceases, and becomes “like a *garuḍa* soaring in the sky.”²³ gNubs’s central point is that in Mahāyoga, familiarization leads to a different sort of view in which no effort is required to view the sphere of nonduality in its natural state. In this experience, the importance of the particulars of the previously performed rites and meditative generations fall away, the remainder of which is a bare awareness of the nonduality of deity and practitioner, of mind and appearances, and ultimately of Suchness and all things. The following passage demonstrates gNubs’s experientially oriented treatment of the view gained via Mahāyoga’s deity yoga:

*You might ask whether, if Body, Speech, and Mind — all three — are Buddha, would they be cultivated as one or as three during meditative practice. The answer is as follows: Such is not perceived as subject and object. Rather, that meditator’s awareness is that very Self, liberated from distinctions of Body, Speech, and Mind. Therefore, the mind, being clarified like this, cannot be conceived in any way distinct from self-luminosity. The answer is that Body, Speech, and Mind are also Suchness, free and unobstructed by things which can be counted.*²⁴

In support of this presentation, the quotations drawn from dPal dbyangs’s *Zhus lan* and *lTa ba Rin po che sgron ma* are similarly experiential and epistemological in orientation.

If we turn now to organizational structure, each topic of Chapter Six is introduced by attributing it to the sayings of an unnamed Mahāyoga master, one of whom is identified in the notes as gNyan dPal dbyangs. These topics—the two truths, nonduality, sameness, and so forth, are the same topics addressed with an equally clear format of introduction in the *Thugs kyi sgron ma*. Once again, we see

²² STMG 220-21.

²³ STMG 222.

²⁴ STMG 192-93: ‘o na de ltar sku gsung thugs su ril sangs rgyas na/ bsgom pa’i dus na gcig tu bsgom mam gsum du bsgom zhes drin/ lan btab pa de ni yul dang yul can du mi dmigs te/ bsgoms po’i rig pa nyid sku gsung thugs mtha’ las grol ba’i bdag nyid pas/ blo yang de ltar thag chod nas rang gsal ba las cir yang mi bsam ste/ grangs kyi rnam pa ma ‘gags bral bas sku gsung thugs kyang de bzhin nyid do/ zhes lan btab bo/.

dPal dbyangs's authority on the subject of Mahāyoga is uncontested for gNubs. Although obvious augmentations to the Mahāyoga practice of dPal dbyangs's day had been made by gNubs's time, dPal dbyangs's teachings are foregrounded and intact within gNubs's work.

Many of these cited passages in the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, though syntactically distinguished as citations, are identified by neither text name nor author, and thus heretofore have not been recognized as dPal dbyangs's works. Unless other previously unrecognized attributions are discovered, these new identifications make clear that in gNubs's chapter on Mahāyoga he defers to dPal dbyangs's texts more than to any other source, save for a tantra, the *rDo rje bkod pa*. Hence, on the basis of these new findings, we might surmise that gNubs considered dPal dbyangs the foremost textual authority on Mahāyoga thought at a time most likely some years into the Age of Fragmentation, roughly a full century after dPal dbyangs's life.

As noted above, however, citations from dPal dbyangs's texts also are to be found outside the Mahāyoga chapter, and six of these appear in an expected location, in Chapter Seven, devoted to exegesis of the Great Perfection. Five of these citations seem to have been taken from dPal dbyangs's *bsGom thabs sgron ma*. A sixth passage explores the nonabiding of the nonconceptual, characteristicless mind (*mi rtog mtshan med sems*). Comparison of this passage (2), which gNubs identifies only as derived from "man ngag," with lines from dPal dbyangs's *mTha'yi mun sel sgron ma* (1) reveals a remarkable similarity.

1) *mtshan ma med la mi gnas na/
mtshan mar gnas pa smos ci dgos*²⁵

2) *mtshan ma med pa la yang mi gnas na/
mtshan mar mi gnas smos ci dgos*²⁶

Though the *bSam gtan mig sgron* version includes an extra emphatic particle and has turned the grammar of the expression slightly, it is reasonable to believe that the passage was lifted from dPal dbyangs's *mTha'yi mun sel sgron ma* and inserted into the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, with no significant change in meaning. This would indicate that gNubs not only upheld dPal dbyangs's teachings as reliable Mahāyoga exegesis, but also saw passages within them as true expressions of the ultimate view of Great Perfection.

²⁵ *mTha'yi mun sel sgron ma* 279a.

²⁶ STMG 318.

One interesting distinction between the citations in the Mahāyoga and Great Perfection chapters is that gNubs commonly identifies the Mahāyoga chapter's citations as dPal dbyangs's, while those in the Great Perfection chapter are presented as anonymously voiced. What are we to make of this curious bifurcation in presentation? Why is dPal dbyangs seen fit to stand as Mahāyoga representative, but not to speak for the Great Perfection, especially if we accept that gNubs drew these lines from his text and not from Buddhagupta's?

Alas, the quickly changing fortunes of dPal dbyangs's reputation are evident from a perusal of any Tibetan dynastic history. Though his name and the names of his texts occasionally appear in bare lineage records of the transmission of the *Māyājāla* and indeed within lineages leading to gNubs, and his yogic feats receive a similarly cursory mention, Tibetan histories have nothing to offer regarding the substance of his contributions. In fact the tenth-century notations to the Dunhuang manuscripts of his texts indicate that those Mahāyoga views most characteristic of dPal dbyangs's works maintained their explicit Mahāyoga identity without significant modification or augmentation only for approximately a century, and that by the end of the tenth century, they had begun to be assimilated into, and redefined as reflective of, the new tradition of Atiyoga. These are significant findings for teasing out the links between dPal dbyangs and the later Great Perfection tradition and for explaining the lack of interest in dPal dbyangs's Mahāyoga texts as such on the part of the later rNying ma tradition. Clearly, his words and his teachings resonated with Tibetans of the tenth century and later, and his status as a Mahāyogin was sufficient for honorable preservation in some sectarian historical chronicles. However, it appears that rather quickly dPal dbyangs the author was disassociated from the most innovative aspects of his own teachings and thus from the Great Perfection as a whole.

4. Buddhagupta

Having firmly established dPal dbyangs's importance, however fleetingly recognized, we may now turn to dPal dbyangs's own sources of instruction and inspiration. As already mentioned, several passages sprinkled throughout three of dPal dbyangs's texts appear to have been borrowed from a short poem of no more than two dozen lines entitled *sBas pa'i rgum chung*, attributed to a Sangs rgyas sbas pa, or Buddhagupta. These *rGum chung* lines appear in dPal dbyangs's *mTha'i mun gsal sgron ma* and *bsGom thabs sgron ma*, both *Lamp* texts,

and in dPal dbyangs's *Zhus lan*. Some of these lines were then incorporated, apparently from dPal dbyangs's texts, into the *bSam gtan mig sgron*.

dPal dbyangs's citations from the *rGum chung* present these lines without in any way delineating them as borrowed passages and without any mention of the source or its author in any context, silently and seamlessly recycling them. In fact, gNubs may have been unaware of Buddhagupta's affiliation with these lines at all given that gNubs seems to have taken the passages he needed to support his explication of the Great Perfection from dPal dbyangs's version instead.

Despite the fact that Buddhagupta's text is quoted verbatim by dPal dbyangs, who is affiliated so clearly with Mahāyoga, Buddhagupta himself typically is not associated in any specific or exclusive way with Mahāyoga texts or teachings. In fact, what we know of this figure is extremely limited, and tends toward a posthumously ascribed affiliation with Atiyoga rather than with Mahāyoga. Though gNubs quotes dPal dbyangs quoting Buddhagupta several times, Buddhagupta is mentioned only once in gNubs's text. A 'Bu ta kug ta is mentioned in the Mahāyoga chapter of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, but in association with Vimalamitra who is commonly included in Atiyoga lineages,²⁷ and twice more in the Great Perfection chapter the interlinear notes claim passages are taken from the teachings of a 'Bu ta kug ta and a 'Bu ta kag ta.²⁸ Buddhagupta's name is also listed in a Dunhuang manuscript fragment (ITJ 1774) as a master of the "three secret classes of tantra,"²⁹ though here also in association with Shi ri man 'ju (Mañjuśrīmitra) and Hung ka ra (Humakara), both of whom are claimed by Atiyoga lineages. Four tantric commentaries attributed to Buddhagupta were considered adequately free of transgressive elements to allow for their inclusion in the ninth-century lDan dkar ma catalogue.³⁰ Finally, the Dunhuang manuscript copy of his *sBas pa'i rgum chung* is categorized in its introduction as Atiyoga, though most likely an ascription that considerably postdates the text itself.³¹

Buddhagupta's *rGum chung* does share a general perspective with dPal dbyangs's corpus as both texts celebrate a transcendent, nondual, uncontrived nature of reality in their texts, and it was this perspective that came to be codified as foundational to the later Great Perfection.

²⁷ STMG 223.

²⁸ STMG 344 and 414.

²⁹ See Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, "A Noble Noose of Methods, The Lotus Garland Synopsis: A Mahāyoga Tantra and its Commentary" (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012). 16-17.

³⁰ Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation*, 62-63.

³¹ ITJ 594.

tion tradition. Regardless of the fact that precise dating of these texts and their authors (if we may call them such, rather than ‘compilers’ or ‘editors’) has proven to be very difficult, and though there is no evidence for Buddhagupta identifying as a proponent of Mahāyoga tantra, it is reasonable to believe that dPal dbyangs availed himself of Buddhagupta’s teachings with certitude and enthusiasm given the number of citations and their relatively wide distribution throughout dPal dbyangs’s works.

Two questions arise most immediately from these observations. The first concerns the differing legacies of these two authors, for shared vision did not result in equal treatment. Whereas Buddhagupta is remembered for his contributions to the development of Atiyoga in Tibet as evidenced above, dPal dbyangs is almost entirely absent from its rosters. Here we might see the process by which dPal dbyangs’s free citation practices seem at once to have contributed to the success of his innovative prioritization of view, and simultaneously to have required the disassociation of that view from his name by historians of the Great Perfection. I would argue, in fact, that the keen perception of his crucial role in the establishment and interpretation of Mahāyoga teachings in Tibet, however strongly predictive of later Great Perfection emphases, led inevitably to dPal dbyangs’s being considered a sort of lineal albatross by the Atiyoga, his ideological heirs. Occupying the middle ground as he does between the eras of anonymous and specified authorship, dPal dbyangs is both remembered too well as a Mahāyogin proponent, and associated too tenuously with the texts he authored and the ideas within them.

The second question arising from the identification of these citations regards the reason for dPal dbyangs’ borrowing particularly from Buddhagupta. There appear to be only three sources of citations within dPal dbyangs’s works. Buddhagupta’s *rGum chung* is the first and only one to have been recognized to date. The second is the *Guhyagarbha tantra*, at which fact no one should be surprised given its place of prominence among the Mahāyoga tantras. However, the third source of citations in dPal dbyangs’s works—the *Mārgavyūha*—should now give us pause, because it is attributed to none other than Buddhaguhya, a figure identified from at least the ninth century by a variety of historians with our Buddhagupta.

5. Buddhaguhya

One of the central lineages for the Great Perfection tradition begins with Indian Mahāyoga exegete Buddhaguhya, whose teachings are described by rNying ma histories as the first descent (or *babs*) of tan-

tric traditions into Tibet.³² A Tibetan translation of his *Mārgavyūha* is included in the Peking bsTan 'gyur, the *rNying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, and the *Shin tu rgyas pa*. All three editions attribute the text, a "*man ngag*," to a Sangs rgyas gsang ba, most commonly retro-translated into Sanskrit as Buddhaguhya, beginning with the *Mahāvīyūtpatti*. The *Mārgavyūha* is a self-described Mahāyoga treatise, which both lauds the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* and cites from it without clear attribution. The colophon in the Peking canon's edition attributes the Tibetan translation to gNyags Jñānakumara, one of the lineal links connecting Buddhaguhya with dPal dbyangs in the few histories which mention him.

The greater portion of the *Mārgavyūha* describes the stages of the Mahāyoga path involving explicitly tantric practices of mudra, mantra, and maṇḍala. However, it introduces this ritually focused core of the text by means of an extended doxographical treatment of various thought systems, beginning with a brief account of the cosmological evolution of human beings. It then describes the Way of Gods and Men, the three Lower Buddhist Vehicles and the Lower Tantras of Kriyā and Yoga, and finally the Mahāyogatantra. In this introductory section of the *Mārgavyūha*, Buddhaguhya distinguishes the vehicles and tantras strictly in terms of view, without discussion of distinctions in their ritual or other forms of praxis. To my knowledge, it is the only Indian tantric doxography (albeit extant only in its Tibetan translation) from the late Imperial Period to do so.

dPal dbyangs apparently saw the *Mārgavyūha* as uniquely worthy of emulation in the drafting of his *Thugs kyi sgron ma*, the longest and most important of his *Six Lamps*. In addition to several direct quotations of Buddhaguhya's text therein, dPal dbyangs also adopts some of the *Mārgavyūha*'s unique terminology, models its structure, incorporates its doxographical template, and frequently appears to rely upon Buddhaguhya's citations of the *Guhyagarbha tantra* rather than on the tantra itself.

Some comments on the similarities between the two texts are warranted here. Both use doxography to introduce the Mahāyoga cores of the texts. Both take an evolutionary perspective in descriptions of samsaric rebirths in the Vehicle of Gods and Humans, and both rely upon analysis of distinctions in perspective rather than praxis to describe the Buddhist vehicles. dPal dbyangs begins his doxographical discussion by providing an overview of all Buddhist

³² David Germano, "The Seven Descents and the Early History of Rnying Ma Transmissions," in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, ed. Helmut Eimer and David Germano (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 229-32.

views, which like Buddaguhya he categorizes into two (presumably Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna vehicles), and then more precisely, into five common paths and five supreme paths. Though he does not list them, he is most likely following the *Mārgavyūha*'s presentation of the five sutra, or causal, paths of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*,³³ and the five tantric paths belonging exclusively to Mahāyoga tantra.³⁴ The five supreme paths are discussed in great detail in Buddhaguhya's *Mārgavyūha*, which dedicates a chapter to each.

dPal dbyangs's characterizations include many of the same terms used by Buddhaguhya, including a curious use of the term *bla na med pa'i theg pa*, or 'unsurpassed vehicle'. As Dalton has shown, this term was used by several tantric authors of both Indian and Tibetan origin in the eleventh century to refer to the highest form of tantra. *Niruttarayogatantra*, or *anuttarayogatantra* as it has more commonly been labeled in modern gSar ma scholarship, with its systems of subtle body manipulation and clear light meditations was a later development and most likely not known to Buddhaguhya or dPal dbyangs. Indeed, in the *Thugs kyi sgron ma*, dPal dbyangs gives no indication that this term references anything associated with the tantras. Instead, he uses the term to categorize those Buddhist vehicles which, ironically, are surpassed by tantra itself within his own system. dPal dbyangs uses the term twice in the *Thugs kyi sgron ma*. In the first such usage, he says:

*As for those on the unsurpassed paths,
The assertion that they purify objects of abandonment and
Past deeds through the three disciplines
Is made by the Sautrāntika [practicing] the yoga of
cognition.*³⁵

Clearly the term here is not meant to refer to a tantric system, but rather a lower form of practice in which objects are abandoned and purified, practices explicitly disparaged by dPal dbyangs. The referent of the second such usage is slightly less clear than the first:

*Thus, [for] those following the Unsurpassed Vehicle,
In the ultimate, [all] is indivisible, and
In the merely conventional, all [things]*

³³ These are the paths of Accumulation, Joining, Seeing, Cultivation, and Being Beyond Training.

³⁴ These are the Paths of Great Emptiness, Great Compassion, the Single Seal, the Elaborate Seal, and Accomplishment of the Clusters of Maṅḍala.

³⁵ *Thugs kyi sgron ma* 276b: *bla na med pa'i theg ba pa/ bslab pa gsum gyis spang bya dag/ sol spyod dag pas thob 'dod pa/ rnam rig rnal 'byor mdo sde'o.*

*Are grasped, both the pure and impure.*³⁶

This second passage appears to be a direct quotation from Buddhaguhya's *Mārgavyūha*, and we might infer from this earlier context the meaning dPal dbyangs intended in his own use. This passage is followed by lines extolling the Great Vehicle of Method (*thabs kyi theg pa chen po*) in contrast. It appears that Buddhaguhya intended the term 'Unsurpassed Vehicles' to refer to those Buddhist vehicles immediately preceding the tantric vehicles in an ascending order of correctness of view. In fact, dPal dbyangs's quotation omits two important lines from Buddhaguhya's text:

*The Great Views and Activity of Method,
Are superior to [those of] the Unsurpassed Vehicles.*³⁷

Thus, Buddhaguhya uses these two stanzas to describe the three lower sutric views or vehicles as he segues into a discussion of the three lower tantric vehicles, and dPal dbyangs's placement of these passages mirrors Buddhaguhya's exactly. It is an inexplicable choice of term, given its history, its literal meaning, and the very different usage of the term in the authoritative *Guhyagarbha tantra*, but for all this, serves as another indication of dPal dbyangs's dependence upon Buddhaguhya's text.³⁸

Though dPal dbyangs must have greatly respected and admired Buddhaguhya's teachings, and though dPal dbyangs's own characterizations of the Mahāyoga view so closely resemble those of Buddhaguhya, there are important distinctions to make between the two presentations. Buddhaguhya's *Mārgavyūha* is primarily a ritual manual prefaced by an explanatory doxography. Though it does take up a few topics central to Indian Buddhist philosophy, its speculations on view are brief and relatively few. Furthermore, the *Mārgavyūha*'s project was to advance the transmission of technological and perhaps iconographic expertise in Mahāyoga rites. dPal dbyangs differs on all these counts. His texts eschew ritual and pictorial description altogether, and are comprised in the main of poetic pronouncements regarding the Mahāyoga view he extracts from the *Mārgavyūha*'s ritual-oriented context.

³⁶ *Thugs kyi sgron ma 277b: de bas bla med theg pa pa/ don dam du ni dbyer med del kun rāzob tsam du thams cad la/ dag dang ma dag gñis kar 'dzin.*

³⁷ *Mārgavyūha 472a: thabs kyi lta spyod chen po ni/ bla med theg pa las 'phags pa.*

³⁸ Since this paper was delivered at the American Academy of Religion annual conference in 2011, Jose Cabezón has also written briefly on this passage in the *Mārgavyūha* and on dPal dbyangs's citation of it. See Jose Cabezón, *The Buddha's Doctrine and the Nine Vehicles* (Oxford: Oxford, 2013), 22-29.

The passages that dPal dbyangs cites from the *Mārgavyūha* are either explicitly doxographical in nature, or they address the more transcendent soteriological, epistemological, and ontological elements of spontaneously arisen primordial wisdom, the purity of appearances, selflessness, and so forth. Indeed the same selective referencing can be seen in the type of passages he takes from the *Guhyagarbha tantra*. These passages provide valuable evidence of dPal dbyangs's compositional intentions. These are, first, to depict and propagate a Mahāyoga movement that was at least rhetorically more concerned with view than with practice. Secondly, we might assume on the basis of his citations that dPal dbyangs also meant to draw that depiction at least in part from a classic Mahāyoga work by one of its most uncontested representatives.

6. Conflation

Despite traditional accounts of the primacy and centrality of Buddhaguhya to a variety of Tibetan tantric traditions in addition to the Great Perfection, there is little evidence to elucidate the details of his life and the transmissions of his thought in Tibet without reliance on historically-suspect and often disparate traditional hagiographical treatments. As a result of this hazy history, there long has been controversy regarding his identity. Modern scholars tend to deny traditional assertions that the many translations and exegetical texts attributed to him were accomplished by one man. My own tallying finds 27 tantric texts attributed to a Buddhaguhya in the Peking bsTan 'gyur, ranging from Kriyā to Yoga to Mahāyoga tantra exegesis. Despite common agreement on the matter of authorial conflation, however, it is still far from apparent how to draw those lines of distinction between the two (or more) figures and their works.

One result of the traditional musings regarding the many faces of Buddhaguhya is whether he might be identified with the roughly contemporaneous author Buddhagupta, given that both of these Sanskrit names were considered valid retro-translations of the name Sangs rgyas sangs ba.³⁹ Though modern historians may roll their eyes at the very question, one might do more than ask whether there has been conflation, but when and why such a fusion of identities occurred. A great deal of research remains to be done on the huge corpus attributed to Buddhaguhya and on the many historical references

³⁹ The *Mahāvīryūtpatti* seeks to resolve problems like these already in the early ninth century by associating *sbas pa* with *guptaḥ* and *sangs ba* with *guhyam*.

to the (various) Imperial Period figure(s) named Buddhaguhya before these questions can be answered fully.

Lest it be conjectured otherwise, I am not claiming that this bit of evidence supports an argument for a single identity of a man variously called Buddhaguhya and Buddhagupta. What I would like to suggest, however, is that by the ninth century Master dPal dbyangs saw the author(s) of the *Mārgavyūha* and of the *sBas pa'i rgum chung* as exclusively deserving of the era's highest and most intimate form of regard—unattributed citation. Based on this, it is not a stretch to conjecture that dPal dbyangs understood these texts to have been authored by a single person, one who was both uniquely authoritative and firmly enshrined within his own teaching lineage. Indeed, the passages dPal dbyangs chooses from both texts are remarkably similar in terminology, style, and content.

There may have been another element to dPal dbyangs's admiration for this Buddhaguhya/Buddhagupta than respect for his teachings and for his broad tantric expertise. Davidson has remarked that Yoga tantric commentator Buddhaguhya's most significant contribution to Indian tantric development was to integrate ritual and sacramental elements with mainstream philosophical systems in an attempt to define the newly emerging tantric corpus and practices, thereby making the tantras acceptable to the larger, institutionalized monastic community. It also may have been Buddhaguhya's successful merger of these elements which appealed to the Tibetan emperor as he invited Buddhaguhya to Central Tibet at a time when the national adoption and standardization of the tantric teachings was very much on the sovereign's mind. The integration of practice and thought that Buddhaguhya's collective works represented may have been uniquely attractive to dPal dbyangs as well, as the latter author sought to extract the beautiful speculative filaments of poetic musing and transcendent view from the fabric of normative Indian Mahāyoga literature without thereby rending it to pieces.

In support of this hypothesis that dPal dbyangs meant to cite from the single author (as dPal dbyangs understood him) of the *Mārgavyūha* and the *sBas pa'i rgum chung*, one might also consider two early Tibetan specimens of the well-established Buddhist epistolary tradition. These are Buddhaguhya's *rJe 'bangs dang bod btsun rnam la spring yig* and dPal dbyangs's suspiciously similar *gCes pa bsdus pa'i 'phrin yig*, mentioned previously. Both are letters addressed principally to a Tibetan monarch, expressly tantric in foundation but overwhelmingly mainstream in presentation and topic, and proceed via the highly unusual structure of addressing monarch, ministers, and monastics in turn. There have been many strong assertions that these letters differ enough from the rest of the works attributed re-

spectively to these men to justify our seeing them as misattributed, and I see no reason to contest these observations. However, in light of the many other remarkable parallels described here, one might reasonably imagine that epistler dPal dbyangs sought to emulate Buddhaguhya/Buddhagupta in this format as well, though of course, as I hope to have shown, there are other pegs on which to hang that hat.

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