Text, Act and Subject: A Proposed Approach to the Future Study of Old Tibetan Prayer[1]

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1. The Problems and Possibilities of Prayer

The question of what 'prayer' might be is a slippery subject but would be helpful to address in Buddhist studies and Tibetan studies today. The study of prayer-like activities should be a *desideratum* as part of the analysis of any large religious tradition and can be a useful tool in comparative religious studies, due to the widespread occurrence of prayer phenomena in the world. Further, a substantial portion of our written evidence for early Tibetan cultural practices contain what *seem* to be prayer, even following a shared intuitive notion of the meaning of the English word. However, scholars of Old Tibetan studies who were faced with this uncertain territory have understandably avoided making grand claims about the wider vista of prayer as a whole and instead focused on individual examples or traditions of what they have sometimes called prayer. Unfortunately, this research has often been conducted from quite limited perspectives that reflected the concern of Old Tibetan studies with theology, history or linguistics. This has meant that the term 'prayer' has been applied to a broad array of Tibetan words, genres of literature, rituals and wider actions without much critical debate taking place over the term's scope and contextual meanings.[2]

However, the study of prayer sheds light on early Tibetan Buddhism and has the potential to illuminate later traditions too. Many Tibetan-language documents dating from the Tibetan imperial period

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[2] Below, the term 'prayer' should mentally be placed in scare quotes, except when more general theories of prayer are proposed—wherein I assume that the term has been chosen deliberately.

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(c. 600–850 CE)[3] contain terminology that point to their being examples of, instructions on, or discussion of prayer. Further, later traditions defining themselves as Rnying ma Buddhism show strong signs of being dependent on, or standing in positive dialogue with, prayer-like phenomena cognate to those found in the eighth- to 11th-century documents (the situation of so-called Gsar ma Buddhist traditions is more complicated). Lastly, Tibetan studies scholarship has largely concluded that G.yung drung Bon po prayers, ritual actions and connected doctrines bear some relationship to Buddhist correlates, especially those of the Rnying ma pa-s.[4] Thus, study of the earliest extant manifestations of Tibetan prayer may uncover the foundations of an important part of the religious writings, teachings and daily life of those who define themselves as Tibetans—as well as non-Tibetan people practising Tibetan Buddhism and Bon down to the present.

Given its importance, how should we begin to study such early Tibetan prayer? Tibetan and Buddhist studies are not alone in a general lack of self-reflexivity towards the term. Addressing the wider field of religious studies, Sam Gill wrote in 1987 that "the general study of prayer is undeveloped and naive. The question of the universality of prayer has yet to be seriously addressed to the relevant materials".[5] In 2005, this analysis was not deemed worthy of amendment.[6] Gill warns that "the theories, as well as the intuitive understandings of prayer have been heavily influenced by Western religious traditions" and he instead proposes a broad working definition of prayer as "the human communication with divine and spiritual entities".[7]

This definition places prayer within a concept of 'religion' as defined by Melford Spiro: "An institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman [or supernatural] beings".[8] It also mirrors the later definition proposed by Luis Gómez from the perspective of Buddhist studies: "Thus, I would suggest that the term *prayer* be used to mean an intentional verbal act used as a way of interacting with a sacred presence. In these verbal acts—public or private, uttered or silent—the performer addresses a transcendent presence to effect a sacred transformation, express an attitude,

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3 For a recent, brief introduction to this period from a larger historical perspective, see Doney 2020a.

4 Kværne 1996: 12–13.

5 Gill 1987: 489.

6 Gill 2005: 7367.

7 Gill 2005: 7367.

8 Spiro 1966: 196. I do not advocate Spiro's definition, or for any one definition, of religion necessarily. Instead, I find this a useful oversimplification of more complex realities that may act here as a heuristic device to connect Religious studies with Tibetan speaking or writing communities (with their shared language and attendant cultural beliefs and practices) within the Old Tibetan period.

or seek a desired outcome through language".[9] As Marta Sernesi notes: "This definition applies of course to a wide array of other Buddhist genres".[10] Such a broad definition limits what we can say concretely about early Tibetan varieties of such prayer towards a future typology, and below I shall advocate for beginning such work with specific subcategories of prayer that correspond to Tibetan terms, such as *smon lam*, 'aspiration', or (*b*)*stod pa* 'eulogy'.[11] However, keeping our sights in some sense on prayer as described above, or even under the common English usage of this word, allows for more comparative work to be done in the future—beyond cataloguing Tibetan usage and perhaps linking it to the application of cognate technical terms in other languages in which Buddhist literature is written.

Gill further proposes a three-fold structuring principle for the study of prayer that would work for the early Tibetan context and for other rituals such as sacrifices and divination too. This way of approaching prayer-related data is distinct from the typology of prayer categories that I shall explore below and, although it has largely gone unnoticed since 1987, is actually more useful than a strict definition of prayer and will form the structuring principle for this article:

> First, prayer will be considered as *text*, that is, as a collection of words that cohere as a human communication directed toward a spiritual entity. Second, prayer will be considered as *act*, that is, as the human act of communicating with deities including not only or exclusively language but especially the elements of performance that constitute the act. Finally, prayer will be considered as *subject*, that is, as a dimension or aspect of religion, the articulation of whose nature constitutes a statement of belief, doctrine, instruction, philosophy, or theology.[12]

These three *foci*, fields of source material or perspectives from which to consider prayer help to split the work of analysing prayer-related data found in certain contexts into more manageable parts. Further, if followed more widely in religious studies, philology etc., this would allow for easy comparison of like with like once that context-specific analysis work is done.

In distinguishing and exploring these three ways in which prayer

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9 Gómez 2000: 1038.

10 Sernesi 2014: 144, n. 8.

11 These translations are based on Sernesi 2014: 143–44.

12 Gill 2005: 7367. Gill further points to an exemplary study of early Jewish prayer that applies the same three-fold distinction, Zahavy 1980. This approach is also taken up in Geertz 2008. Both of these works have also been of great help in my own thinking on the same topic in the Tibetan-language sphere.

can be understood, it is necessary to be open to contributions to the debate that could come from different disciplines or sub-disciplines—since linguistics, ethnology, biology and various fields of history, philology and religious studies should be involved in these discussions—and to be aware of their attendant assumptions and drawbacks.[13]

Before beginning the main discussion, it may be worth questioning the worth of a typological distinction between public and private prayer often made within older scholarly literature. Gill already intimates the overshadowing influence of Euro-American theology to the exclusion of other disciplines in the quote above, and letting this distinction dictate a future typology risk bringing the biases of Protestant-influenced religious studies scholarship into Old Tibetan studies. Gill elsewhere notes how psychology also loomed large in early comparative studies of prayer, often leading to the assumption that the intentions or interpretations of those who pray are more important than the bodily positions or gestures they adopt, prayer's textual instantiations or its connections with the society in which it is (in a double sense) performed. He goes on to describe the resulting incongruity that stymied early scholars studying prayer cross-culturally, who conceived of the highest exemplars (following their traditions) as "free and spontaneous" but who found almost exclusively rote-learned and repetitive formulas in the textual sources that they studied.[14] In our context, it is still important at the outset to make a similar distinction between what is sometimes called 'public' (formulaic) and 'personal' (extemporaneous) prayer.[15] However, making these two types the basis of a categorization promises little benefit within Old Tibetan studies. Examples of the latter, 'personal' type of prayer (that I assume existed in great number in practice) are hardly evident in the data,[16] so this distinction

[13] Zahavy 1980: 46.

[14] Gill 2005: 7368. Gill humorously notes that the *locus classicus* of prayer studies, Heiler 1932, "was a failed effort from the outset in the respect that he [Heiler] denigrated his primary source of data for his study of prayer, leaving him wistfully awaiting the rare occasion to eavesdrop on one pouring out his or her heart to God". Gill 2005: 7368. See Schopen 1997: 1–22 for an analysis of similar problems arising from privileging ideals and textual sources in the field of Buddhist studies.

[15] See, more recently, Penner 2012: 1–3. Jeremy Penner goes on to divide his "Review of Scholarship" into three sections (perhaps following Gill though in a different order), first covering scholars focused on "textual history", Penner 2012: 3 and 5–19, then those emphasising "descriptions of prayer practices and the act of praying", Penner: 4 and 19–24, and finally "non-textual aspects of praying, such as location, gesture, and times set aside for prayer". Penner 2012: 4 and 25–28.

[16] One possible exception comprises the jottings of Buddhist praises and aspirations in margins and on discarded folios, panels of manuscripts connected to the imperial copying project around Dunhuang, Dotson 2013–2014 (2015). Another source are the scribes' "writing boards" (*glegs tshas*), on which see Takeuchi 2013 (though

can only serve to remind us that we only have a partial view of the range of early Tibetan ritual acts. On a more positive note, it seems that even 'private' (spontaneous) prayer is generally dependent on social forms of ritual, rather than vice versa.[17] Thus, a study of the more formal, liturgical forms of early Tibetan prayer are a fitting starting point and offer plenty of scope for structured comparison with regions and traditions beyond the Tibetan plateau, not to mention being the subject about which we can say most!

2. *Prayer as* Text

2.1. *Texts*

'Prayer' is a term for a category, one encompassing a number of different forms. There is no single Tibetan-language equivalent of this categorical term,[18] and the terms I discuss below that could be included under this category may themselves be categorical terms. The entire history of works in Tibetan that could fall under these categories is huge, and so needs to be sectioned off into manageable corpuses. Evidence stemming from the imperial and early post-imperial period (no later than the 9th century) occurred to me to offer a bounded corpus of

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he does not mention the term "prayer"). Dotson 2015: 121 points out that such impromptu scribbles "are possibly as unguarded and authentic an expression as the written medium can produce". This is a subject to which I hope to contribute in a future study.

17 See Mauss 2003 [1909]: 34, quoted favourably in Geertz 2008: 124–25, and Gill 2005: 7368: "A person praying privately is invariably a person who is part of a religious and cultural tradition in which ritual or public prayer is practiced". The context of this quote suggests that Gill equates 'ritual' with 'social'. Although my use of 'ritual' in this article is more generic and includes ordered series of acts within a religious context that can be performed individually and alone, I concur with Gill to the extent that the order of the acts and what constitutes the religious context is usually social before it is individual (especially in the Old Tibetan evidence), and so in that sense liturgy probably influence spontaneous prayer more than vice versa. Yet, my emphasis on the social primacy of prayer should not be misinterpreted as espousing a functionalist view that all ritual (or even all social ritual) acts to only reinforce social bonds. See section 3.3. for more discussion and an example of socially determined ritual prayer.

18 Heinrich August Jäschke's Tibetan-English dictionary has added to it an English-Tibetan dictionary, which states: "Pray vb. n. *gsol-ba, źu-ba*", followed by "Prayer *gsol-ba*", Jäschke 1881: 650, col. 2; both *gsol ba* and *zhu ba* can be translated "petition/request" and *gsol ba 'debs* often connected to the Sanskrit *adhyeṣaṇā* or *yācanā*, Sernesi 2014: 144. For the modern period, Goldstein and Narkyid's English-Tibetan Dictionary privileges *smon lam* ("aspiration") as the relevant Tibetan term under the entries "pray", "prayer" and "prayer book", Goldstein and Narkyid 1984: 235, col. 2, and gives *'dod pa byed* for "aspire", Goldstein and Narkyid 1984: 22, col. 2—literally "to act [towards] one's wish/desire".

texts that could be connected with identifiable communities speaking or writing Tibetan (whether in central Tibet or around Dunhuang on the northeast edge of the Tibetan Empire). These documents include epigraphy (on stone and bronze), text on wooden slips from the southern Silk Routes and the earliest datable literary and artistic material from Mogao Cave 17 near Dunhuang.[19] However, for now I exclude 10th-century works because they are harder to connect to an identifiable contemporaneous Tibetan-speaking community of religious practitioners and are perhaps more strongly influenced by other forces than by the Tibetan Empire—not all Tibetan texts in Mogao Cave 17 reflect the practices of central Tibet, or even those of speakers of Tibetan languages or dialects.[20] Since it is difficult to refer to this eighth- to 9th-century corpus in a simple way, I have chosen the term 'Old Tibetan', despite the linguistic debate over what Old Tibetan is (especially in relation to translated literature) and the fact that a few of the prayer-related texts that I shall cover below are transliterated from Indic languages rather than translated. I rejected the term 'imperial Tibetan', referring to prayers in Tibetan (rather than, say, Chinese) from the (Tibetan) imperial period, since this could be confused with the term 'Tibetan imperial' which refers to a time span and could be misinterpreted as meaning only prayers emanating from the court of the Tibetan Empire.

Some of this Old Tibetan material contains non-Buddhist rituals and mythologies, but these undoubtedly complex and connected 'pools of tradition' were, engulfed and to some extent destroyed by a tidal wave of Buddhist literature entering Central Tibet through translation.[21] The influx of these traditions meant that many diachronically

[19] Marcelle Lalou catalogued the Pelliot tibétain collection of Mogao Cave 17 documents held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. She preferred to use Tibetan or Sanskrit terms in her categorization of the texts but does use some functional descriptions such as "*prière*", for example Lalou 1939: xi. Louis de La Vallée Poussin, in 1962, catalogued the Stein collection of documents kept in the India Office Library and did not distinguish "prayers" as a separate category.

[20] Not only did the Tibetan Empire establish/impose the use of standardized Tibetan writing across ethnic groups who spoke different Tibetan languages, Dunhuang provides a prime example that this written language became a *lingua franca* used for administration and religion after the end of Tibetan control of the region, see Doney 2020a: especially 194–95 and 213–17. Jacob Dalton and Sam van Schaik, in 2006, catalogued the tantric material from the same collection now housed in the British Library, much of which dates to the 10th century and is difficult to link to a ritual community comprising members speaking a Tibetan language as their mother tongue. Dalton and van Schaik used the term "prayer" in their catalogue, from which they appear to have excluded the term *dhāraṇī* (although the latter may just have been more a specific term, familiar to the book's audience, and so able to use without further discussion).

[21] The notion of a 'pool of tradition' drawn on by oral-literary registers of expression (including in Old Tibetan) is taken from Honko 2000 via Dotson 2013.

laid-down *strata*, comprising ritual texts created within various sects and monastic lineages of Buddhism over the centuries, became a synchronic collection in the Tibetan imperial libraries.[22] Some liturgies among this mass of texts proved more popular than others at court and in Tibetan temples, and recent trends in surrounding Buddhist regions may have had an impact on this (the situation remains unclear). Nevertheless, Tibetans continued to process the rich traditions they had inherited in numerous ways, as the literature found in Mogao Cave 17 attests.

In addition, imperial-period categorization of the newly translated texts exists today, referred to as the *Lhan kar ma* (or *Ldan dkar ma*) and *Phang thang ma* catalogues. Both of these can be considered an Old Tibetan source in my sense of the term, despite the fact that it only exists in later manuscripts, but here I shall only analyse the former. It is clear that the *Lhan kar ma* represents a library catalogue, the inventory of a literary storehouse or the official register of the imperial holdings, rather than the 'table of contents' of some 'proto-canon' whose order (say, where each item is found among the 'library shelves') is necessarily reflected in the ordering principle of the *Lhan kar ma* text. As Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt discusses in the Foreword to her presentation of this 'work' (made up of exemplars showing several changes during the imperial period and afterwards), the *Lhan kar ma* further "represents a cross-section of what was available for translation in the period from about the beginning of the eighth to the first third of the 9th century of Buddhist literature in Tibet … [and] a cross-section of the most important Buddhist literature of its time".[23] Texts that may fall within the category of prayer are provided together in the *Lhan kar ma* catalogue and in its prologue (of uncertain date). The latter describes the translation of the *dharma* in the region of Tibet (*bod khams*), specifically "*sūtra*-s of the large and small vehicles, long and short spells (*dhāraṇī*), the 'one hundred and eight names' (*nāmāṣṭaśataka*), eulogies (*stotra*), aspirations (*praṇidhāna*), benedictions (*maṅgalagāthā*), the *Vinaya-piṭaka* …" and so on.[24] Thus, the prologue introduces what Gill describes in a more general context as a "typology that contains a

[22] A similar process in Tibetan art is described in Linrothe 1999: 23.

[23] I have translated this from the German, which reads: "Zum zweiten stellt die lHan kar ma einen Querschnitt dessen dar, was in dem Zeitraum etwa vom Beginn des 8. bis zum 1. Drittel des 9. Jh. an buddhistischer Literatur in Tibet zur Übersetzung zur Verfügung stand, – in einem Land, das auf breiter Basis Interesse an allen Aspekten buddhistischer Kultur zeigte. Sie bietet damit auch einen Querschnitt durch die wichtigste buddhistische Literatur ihrer Zeit". Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: i.

[24] According to the critical edition at Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 1, the *Lhan kar ma* reads: *theg pa che chung gi mdo sde dang / gzungs* (variant: *gzugs*) *che phra dang / mtshan brgya rtsa brgyad dang / bstod pa dang / smon lam dang / bkra shis dang / 'dul ba'i sde snod dang / … la sogs pa bod khams su chos 'gyur ro*.

number of classes, all easily distinguished by their descriptive designations".[25] Between the *sūtra*-s and the *Vinaya* stand three categories of text that 'sound like prayer'—eulogy, aspiration and benediction—and two more that, we shall see below, both conform in some ways with the definitions of prayer given above but also usefully problematise these definitions—*dhāraṇī* and *nāmāṣṭaśataka*.

The classes of textual categories and the order in which they are given in the prologue reflect those of the catalogue itself.[26] The catalogue provides further information on the texts within each category, not only as physical objects consisting of words on folios with titles and extents measurable in stanzas / lines of verse (*śloka*; *tshigs*) and fascicles (*bam po*) but also as 'works' that were translated into Tibetan from other languages—in both cases discussing them as *text*.

2.2. Verbs

The three most 'natural' prayer categories described in the *Lhan kar ma* include different texts, which themselves may contain stanzas conforming to other types of communication, and these texts are described using categorical terms: eulogies (nine entries),[27] aspirations (12 entries),[28] and benedictions (seven entries).[29] The former two terms are based on verbs, *bstod pa* ('to praise') and *smon*(*d*) *pa* ('to desire') respectively.[30] These verbs occur in some form within the titles and / or bodies of the texts included in each of these sections, and so the categories

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[25] Gill 2005: 7368.

[26] See Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 181–276 and the discussion below. Paul Harrison summarises the contents of the *Lhan kar ma* thus: "The *sūtras* are followed by a small number of treatises, then by *tantras* (*gsang sngags kyi rgyud*) and *dhāraṇīs* (*gzungs*), [*nāmāṣṭaśataka*-s are not mentioned here,] hymns of praise (*stotra*, *bstod pa*), prayers (*praṇidhāna*, *smon lam*) and auspicious verses (*maṅgalagāthā*, *bkra shis tshigs su bcad pa*). Next comes the Vinaya-piṭaka…"; Harrison 1996: 73, with only the words in square brackets added. Note that Harrison splits the *tantra*-s from the *sūtra*-s and only reserves the term 'prayer' for aspirational *smon lam*-s, which may be following the modern Tibetan usage (as in Goldstein and Narkyid 1984, cited above) or a result of equating aspiration-as-petition as closest to the traditional meaning of the English term 'prayer'.

[27] Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 258–66, entries 455–463. Alexander Zorin provides a very good introduction to what he calls "hymns" (гимны; *bstod pa*) as *text*, in Zorin 2010. He usefully surveys earlier scholarship on South Asian Buddhist eulogy in Zorin 2010: 1–18, before studying in depth how the Tibetan tradition has carried on and expanded on the Indic tradition and proposing a detailed classification of hymns by theme (corresponding what I call 'addressee' below; Zorin 2010: 19–79).

[28] Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 267–72, entries 464–75.

[29] Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 267–72, entries 464–75.

[30] Geertz 2008: 137, Table 1a provides a useful classification of the content of prayers as *text* by means of nominalised verbs:

1. Petition

seem fitting. However, a cursory survey of the use of these and related verbs in Old Tibetan documents highlights the challenges involved: firstly, in identifying examples of these types outside of the *Lhan kar ma*; and secondly, in accounting for seemingly prayer-like verbs and categories not found there.

The reason for the first challenge is the use of these verbs of praise, aspiration, and so forth in contexts that are not necessarily prayer. For example, Old Tibetan private letters (mainly exchanged between officials and monks but also with kings) contain honorific praises and aspirations similar to those found in prayers,[31] while petitions to living but semi-divine Tibetan emperors that also use such verbs further blur the boundaries between a prayer to a supernatural power and a request to a human addressee following Spiro.[32] Within this grey area stands the Buddhist-oriented inscription on a bell at Bsam yas Monastery.[33] There, one of the queens of Khri Srong lde brtsan (r. 755–*circa* 800) praises his construction of Bsam yas and aspires for his enlightenment:

> Queen Rgyal mo brtsan, mother and son, made this bell as an offering to the Three Jewels of the ten directions. And [they] pray that, by the power of that merit, *Lha btsan po* Khri Srong lde brtsan, father and son, husband and wife, may be endowed with the harmony of the sixty melodious sounds, and attain supreme enlightenment.[34]

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2. Invocation
3. Supplication
4. Intercession
5. Thanksgiving
6. Adoration
7. Dedication
8. Benediction
9. Penitence
10. Confession

[31] Takeuchi 1990: 181–89, studies these documents and categorizes them into subtypes based on their literary form of greeting.

[32] See the petition found nested within the so-called Rkong po Inscription, transliterated and translated in Richardson 1985: 66–71; Li Fang-Kuei and Coblin 1987: 198–226 and transliterated in Iwao et al. 2009: 15–16, where other references to this inscription can be found.

[33] Transliterated and translated in Richardson 1985: 32–35; Li Fang-Kuei and Coblin 1987: 332–39. See Iwao et al. 2009: 70 for a further transliteration and a list of other references. This 'inscription' is actually moulded into the bell itself and the whole process reflects the aesthetics, wealth and cosmopolitanism of the Tibetan court; Doney 2020b: 126–29 contains a more recent discussion of this bell within the context of such transregional flows of material culture in Buddhist Asia.

[34] The panels around the Bsam yas bell read: *jo mo rgyal mo brtsan yum* (panel 2) *sras kyIs phyogs bcu'I* (3) *dkon mchog gsum la* (4) *mchod pa'I slad du cong* (5) *'di bgyis te // de'i bso-* (6) *-d nams kyI stobs kyis* (7) *lha btsan po khrI srong lde b-* (8) *-rtsan yab sras*

The inscription begins with a statement that the bell was commissioned as an 'offering' (*mchod pa*) to the Three Jewels (Buddha, *dharma* and *saṃgha*) of the ten directions.[35] The second part expresses an aspiration (ending in *smond to*) also found in other bell inscriptions.[36] However, the whole text could be read as a report of the commissioning and the hope that stood behind it, rather than as a prayer itself.

With regard to the second challenge, note that the term 'offering' (*mchod pa*) has no place among the categories of the *Lhan kar ma*. Yet, certain works that one may wish to place within the category of 'prayer' use this term a great deal, as well as others that could be connected together into a nexus of Old Tibetan Buddhist terminology.[37] One is the incomplete work that Sam van Schaik names "a prayer for Tibet" and that is contained in the three-folio manuscript IOL Tib J 374.[38] It invokes the *jina*-s, *bodhisattva*-s, *arhat*-s, gods of the form and desire realms, the Four Great Kings and the ten local protectors to come and clear away the obstacles of Tibet, for which they are presented unsurpassed offerings (*bla myed mchod pa 'di phul bas* /).

Another text using the term *mchod pa* and partially fitting into this nexus is the *Rgyud chags gsum* worship text that dates to the late-9th century but whose core content was perhaps first written, translated or compiled towards the end of the Tibetan imperial period.[39] This work praises a similar cast of superhuman characters, contains phrases found in the Bsam yas Bell Inscription and others contained in the "prayer for Tibet". Like the inscription, it also combines offerings with aspirations that take up its final part.[40] A different verb is also used in

stangs dbya- (9) *-l gsung dbyangs drug* (10) *cu sgra dbyangs dang ldan te* (11) *bla na myed pa'I byang chub* (12) *du grub par smond to* //.

35 This odd and rare Old Tibetan phrase is discussed in Doney 2018. The translation of *mchod pa* as "offering" follows Makransky 1996: 312.

36 If the bell described in Lha mchog skyabs 2011 and Doney 2020b: 124–26 predates this one, then perhaps the authors of the Bsam yas Bell Inscription drew on this source (which also uses a similar aspirational future construction) or wider such precedent, in writing their text.

37 Doney 2018 explores this theme in more detail.

38 For a discussion, translation and transliteration of the "prayer for Tibet" portion of the manuscript, see van Schaik's blog: https://earlytibet.com/2009/05/22/a-prayer-for-tibet/ (posted 22nd of May 2009; accessed 28th of February 2021), updating the account given in Dalton and van Schaik 2006: 108–109. IOL Tib J 374/1 ends by calling it "the chapter of collected offerings" (/ / $ / / *mchod pa bsdus pa'I le'u rdzogs+ho* /) and with a colophon attributing the "chapter of offerings" to the monk Dpal brtsegs (*dge slong dpal brtsegs gyi mchod pa'I le'u <g>lags s+ho* / / : / /), which may or may not mean the famous eighth-9th century translator, Ska ba Dpal brtsegs, Dalton and van Schaik 2006: 108.

39 On this work, see Dalton and van Schaik 2006, 209–12; van Schaik and Doney 2007, 195–96; Dalton 2016: 207–209; Doney 2018.

40 IOL Tib J 466/3, column 11, ll. 15–21; Doney 2018: 91.

this text, one of reverential petition (*gsol ba*), for example: "May all the powerful [and?] ascetics who rule/control all the world cause supreme happiness and the teachings to spread [throughout] the entire world!"[41] Apart from these final expressions of aspiration and hope, the *Rgyud chags gsum* mostly offers praise.[42] Thus, the use of the nominalised verb *mchod pa* (and *gsol ba*) is indicative of a prayer context but is not a categorical term found in the *Lhan kar ma*, whereas the term *smon lam* is used for a category of prayer in the latter work but verbs related to *smon*(*d*) *pa* show the porous borders surrounding this term.

However, in other ways this text does not fit an imperial-period nexus of terminology. For instance, the *Rgyud chags gsum* (as it is extant in IOL Tib J 466/3, column 11, ll. 1–4) praises Khri Srong lde brtsan as a "spiritual friend" (*kalyāṇamitra*)—a term that refers instead to imperial preceptors during the imperial period—and as a fully enlightened teacher. The Bsam yas Bell Inscription (above) records a prayer that Khri Srong lde brtsan will attain enlightenment. The *Rgyud chags gsum* prayer states that, like his royal Indian predecessors, Khri Srong lde brtsan has now gone to *nirvāṇa*. This raises the possibility of one way to distinguish between the various exemplars of offering (*mchod pa*) literature: focusing on the addresser, the addressee, and the person/thing that is a beneficiary of the (speech-) act of offering. Between the inscription on a bell hung in a central Tibetan temple and the slightly later *Rgyud chags gsum* found in Mogao Cave 17 on what was the edge of the empire,[43] the Tibetan emperor has tellingly shifted position from beneficiary to addressee.

Beyond 'worship' and 'reverential petition', there exist other forms of Buddhist ritual action that, for example, Gómez identifies as prayer forms: the fortnightly confession and recitation of the monastic code (or its Mahāyāna equivalent, the *bodhisattva* vow), the 'dedication of merit' of a gift (physical or mental) given without wish for reward, 'protection' rites, etc.[44] These are almost certainly buried within texts catalogued elsewhere in the *Lhan kar ma*, for example the *sūtra*-s and *śāstra*-s,[45] without any effort made on the part of the cataloguers to isolate *parts* of texts and reclassify them within a section close to the above

[41] IOL Tib J 466/3, column 11, ll. 14–15: *'jIg rten kun la 'ang mnga' mdzad pa'I / / mthu chen drang srong thams cad kyIs / / 'jig rten mtha' dag mchog tu skyid pa dang / bstan pa rgyas par mdzad du gsol /.*

[42] See section 3.4. below on the *dhāraṇī* that IOL Tib J 466 contains.

[43] See section 3.4. below and Doney 2018: 75 for a discussion of the date of IOL Tib J 466/3.

[44] Gómez 2000: 1038–39.

[45] Scherrer-Schaub 1999-2000: 220–21 describes the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama* and the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* as respective examples of each genre, though not in the context of a discussion of the *Lhan kar ma*. To these, we may add the many examples of narratives in which relate agents praising (living or departed) Buddha(s), among others,

prayer texts. Thus, the *Lhan kar ma* displays an obvious limit to what its compilers considered a single discrete data point: a single whole text. This unit is perhaps natural to librarians the world over and throughout bibliographic time.[46] For the current investigation, however, this means that the relatively bounded corpus of texts that I conceived of starts to split open and reveal a plethora of parts of single texts that could be included in any future study.

2.3. Spells

There are two *dhāraṇī* sections in the *Lhan kar ma*: one consisting of the texts of the "Five Great Spells" (*Gzungs chen po lnga*) collection and the other comprising "*dhāraṇī* [works] of various length" (*che phra sna tshogs*).[47] Perhaps the latter description alludes to the fact that the *dhāraṇī* texts in this section are arranged from longest to shortest.[48] Yet, it is interesting to note that the criterion used to order these texts again concerns a *textual* quality, one of length (rather than, say, efficacy or theme). The genre of *dhāraṇī* texts has long held a problematic position within Buddhist studies. As Paul Copp notes in his study on Tang Chinese exemplars and practice of the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī*:

> *Dhāranī*, in fact, turns out to be a term overloaded with refer-

see for example, Makransky 1996: 313–14. This is distinct from the genre of supplicating a deified figure to remain in the world (on which, see Cabezón 1996: 344–46) but both add another layer to our considerations of prayer as *subject* by raising the issue of whether conversations with superhuman beings or more formal communication with gods in human form as related in narratives count as prayer. For instance, Zorin 2010: 352 identifies the *Upāli-sūtra*, a praise of the Buddha by his disciple Upāli, as the model for the *nāmāṣṭaśataka* genre—perhaps along with "critical remarks directed towards gods of the Hindu pantheon in comparison with the Buddha". See also Newman 1999: 5–7 for a discussion of a similar issue in a non-Buddhist context.

[46] See section 4.2. below on the *Lhan kar ma* as a work that treats prayer as *subject*.

[47] Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 181–249, entries 329–436. Items 329–333 are texts of the *Gzungs chen po lnga* collection, probably an alternative name for the *Pañcarakṣa* although there is only some overlap in its parts, see Skilling 1992: 138–44. Its five texts are nonetheless catalogued as single works in descending order of length from 700 to 140 *śloka*-s, and then the next section begins with another text in 700 *śloka*-s (item 334). The collection is thus counted as a section, rather than being described as a single text or having its five works scattered among the general *dhāraṇī* section according to their individual lengths.

[48] See Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 184–249, entries 334–436. Only this section is mentioned in the prologue, quoted above, which omits the adjective *sna tshogs* and thus leaves *che phra* to be interpreted either as "long and short" or according to its secondary meaning as "of various lengths". In contrast, *sna tshogs* is used alone in the catalogue's section titles to describe eulogies, aspirations, Mahāyana *sūtra*-s and Mahāyana *śāstra*-s, Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 42, 258, 267 and 365.

> ents and complexly constructed by its uses within various traditions. The apparent unity of the word is simply an illusion. Things could hardly have been otherwise for a signifier whose history was shaped in part by the transformations attendant upon the spread of Buddhism across Asia …. Our knowledge that the Sanskrit word *dhāranī* and its cognates stand behind the range of terms used to render its various senses (incantation, grasp, *tuoluoni*) casts something of a unifying spell over our understanding.[49]

At times, *dhāranī*-s act very much like prayer, when they evoke and praise the deity with which they are associated, are consecrated by it and harness its power for the benefit of their reciters.[50] At others, they appear to require neither verbal incantation nor the presence of the deity to ensure their efficacy.[51] Gómez includes *dhāraṇī*-s within his discussion of prayer, as an example of how "the language forms of prayer themselves push the verbal act beyond its function as conveyor of meaning or instrument".[52] He also mentions the well-known similarity of *dhāraṇī*-s first to *mantra*-s (the latter tending to be shorter) and second to "the Indian tradition of invoking the sacred names of bodhisattvas and deities" (i.e. *nāmāṣṭaśataka*-s).[53]

Indeed, these forms are found either side of the *dhāraṇī* category in the *Lhan kar ma*. Immediately preceding the section on *dhāraṇī* is a subsection of the loose *sūtra* category (which also includes *śāstra*-s, *bstan bcos*)[54] that describes *tantra*-s containing secret *mantra*-s.[55] Within the subsequent *nāmāṣṭaśataka* section (19 entries),[56] we find a couple of the texts that within the imperial period are accompanied by *dhāraṇī mantra*-s (or *dhāraṇī*-s and *mantra*-s) according to their titles and some that

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[49] Copp 2014: 13. Copp proceeds to unpack the densely complex web of meanings up until the Tang, Copp 2014: 13–28, and the rest of his book describes different Tang period perspectives on the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* that in some ways also addresses it as *text*, *act* and *subject* in turn.

[50] See Copp 2014: 118–29 and 188–96, as well as the discussion of Max Müller's opinions at Copp 2014: 1–2.

[51] See the references in section 3.4. below.

[52] Gómez 2000: 1040.

[53] Gómez 2000: 1039.

[54] Note that the *śāstra* section also includes a text given the Tibetan title *Sbyin pa'i rabs* and the extended Indic title *Dānānvaya-praṇidhāna*, Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 170–71, item 313. These titles appear to make it a prayer text, but this requires further investigation.

[55] Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 172–80, entries 316–28. Tantric texts are also found within the *nāmāṣṭaśataka*, the *stotra* and most often the *dhāraṇī* category; see Herrmann-Pfandt 2002: 138–40.

[56] Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 250–57, entries 437–55.

are, at a later date, classified within *dhāraṇī* collections (*Gzungs 'dus*).[57] It does not seem to be a coincidence that *mantra*-s precede *dhāraṇī*-s just as the latter precede *nāmāṣṭaśataka*-s, followed by eulogies (seemingly closest to *nāmāṣṭaśataka*-s among the three following categories).[58] Yet, I am here moving into the territory of prayer as *subject* and it is important not to let what people say about their prayers outside of the texts themselves determine (though it may inform) our analysis of prayer as *text*, and so shall return to this categorization in section 4.2. below.

The *Lhan kar ma* is one of three catalogues of Buddhist texts translated into Tibetan by the 9th century (along with the *'Phang thang ma* and *Mchims phu ma*). In addition, we possess similar but expanded catalogues from later centuries (including those of the various collections of the *Bka' 'gyur*, *Bstan 'gyur* and *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*) and countless lists in religious and historiographical works down to the present day.[59] Matching the titles and content of the imperial catalogues with these later lists, it is clear that many of the imperial-period prayers survived.[60] Furthermore, they were joined by others—whether due to indigenous innovation or developments in surrounding Buddhist regions—that expanded not only the corpus but also the number of terms used for these communications.[61] Such later approaches to categorization could constitute a fertile field for further digging into the

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[57] The *Sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das 'khor byang chub sems dpa' brgyad dang bcas pa'i mtshan brgya rtsa brgyad pa gzungs sngags dang bcas pa* is so-named in the *Lhan kar ma* and slightly later *'Phang thang ma* catalogue, Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 250, entry 437; the *'Phags pa lha mo sgrol ma'i mtshan brgya rtsa brgyad pa* is named the *'Phags pa sgrol ma'i mtshan brgya rtsa brgyad pa gzungs sngags dang bcas pa* in the *'Phang thang ma*, see Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 253–54, entry 439. See references to the *Bka' 'gyur*'s *Gzungs 'dus* section in various places over Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 250–57, entries 437–55.

[58] In fact, this liminal status, and many Tibetan canon creators' subsequent decisions to include most *dhāraṇī*-s within their *tantra* sections led Herrmann-Pfandt 2002; Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: viii and xxxv to classify *dhāraṇī*-s under *tantra* in relation to the imperial period. In contrast, Pagel 2007 places *dhāraṇī*-s within the context of Mahāyāna texts (focused on the *bodhisattvayāna* rather than the *vajrayāna*) as they were incorporated into other Tibetan imperial sources on bibliography and translation terminology. Dalton and van Schaik 2006: xxi discusses this problem and the authors' pragmatic solution to include most *dhāraṇī* texts within their catalogue of "tantric manuscripts from Dunhuang".

[59] Herrmann-Pfandt 2002; Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: i and xiv–xxvii. See also Martin 1996 for a general introduction to Tibetan catalogues (*dkar chags*).

[60] See the excellent such comparative work evidenced in Herrmann-Pfandt 2008.

[61] Among a number of different possible directions for further study, see Schwieger 1978 and Halkias 2013 on *smon lam*-s related to the Pure Land(s); Makransky 1996 on *mchod pa*, "offering" (the description of which may not completely fit Old Tibetan usage); Cabezón 1996 on *zhabs brtan*, "supplication to remain in the world"; Zorin 2010 on *bstod pa* in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism generally; Schwieger 1978,

changing uses of these forms of ritual text.

3. Prayer as Act

3.1. Acts

The preceding section of this article has been the longest, in part because texts constitute our primary source for Old Tibetan prayer. However, even text betrays the performative power of language, and can thus shed some light on prayer as *act*. Sam Gill provides an in-depth discussion of this aspect of prayer communication in his encyclopaedia entry.[62] He describes how these acts of speech take on some performative aspects of speech acts, gestures, bodily positions and times when such communication is appropriate and not. These physical aspects accompany the speech of petition, persuasion, expressing penitence and so forth in non-religious contexts just as much as they do in the same speech acts addressed to non-supernatural beings.[63] Further, for Gill the "performative power of language" includes the power to "transform the mood of the worshipers".[64] Not only do the lexical items, literary forms or ordering principles of prayer as *text* inform the participant's doctrinal, moral and other beliefs, but they also mark entry into, journey through and release from the ritual sphere and the experience one has within it. The process brings forth the supernatural, whether as a disciplining figure (in confession) or liberative presence (in eulogy), with concomitant changes in the relationship of the participant to themselves and the other.

Such aspects of prayer as *act* have not incontrovertibly survived from the Old Tibetan period down to today. Archaeological evidence

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Sernesi 2014 and Doney 2019 on *gsol 'debs*, encompassing *inter alia* "homage" and "reverential petition".

62 Gill 2005: 7368–70.

63 Geertz 2008: 138, Table1b provides a classification of the content of prayers as *act* by means of verbs:

1. Invoke
2. Name
3. Commit
4. Promise
5. Declare
6. Affirm
7. Persuade
8. Intend
9. Command
10. Move

64 Gill 2005: 7369.

for such activities is also largely lacking and will likely grow increasingly difficult to find in the future.[65] However, they *are* available to glean (in a limited way) from textual sources.[66] Here, it helps to look first at the surface level and at obvious connections between texts and between terms, rather than attempting to chart 'the Tibetan mind' or speculating on the intention of the person who may have recited, or practised according to, the text 1000 years or more ago.[67] Here I shall set out a few of these connections.

3.2. Society

Who can and who cannot pray in certain contexts? The Bsam yas Bell Inscription is telling here, since it takes pains to state that the lord (*stangs*) is Khri Srong lde brtsan *qua* husband in relation to his queen (*dbyal*), just as he is father (*yab*) in relation to his son (*sras*). These two phrases and the tenor of the whole inscription suggest that the queen and her son are only able to pray using the royal and abiding medium of inscription on a large bronze temple bell because they stand in a privileged relation to the emperor (*btsan po*).[68]

Once one is allowed to praise, there then arises the issue of the order in which those who are praising may do so. The so-called "Prayer of De ga g.yu tshal Monastery", which commemorates the founding of De ga g.yu tshal's "Temple of the Treaty-Edict" (*gtsigs kyi gtsug lag khang*) during the reign of Khri gTsug lde brtsan, may prove instructive in this context.[69] Matthew Kapstein, who has published a series of in-depth studies on this text,[70] shows that the prayer consists of a series of "benedictions", seven of which survive (with the sources of five of these being identifiable).[71] Kapstein notes "the apparent arrangement of the collection according to descending hierarchical rank-order".[72]

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65 The novel possibilities of such an option for early Jewish prayer are explored well in Zahavy 1980: 48–52.

66 See the discussion of speech act, materiality and explication with regard to the prayers of Hopi Indians in Arizona, USA in Geertz 2008: 128–32.

67 I am guided here by the approach to the study of ritual espoused in Smith 1987: 211.

68 See Li Fang-Kuei and Coblin 1987: 338, note to panels 8–9. Compare with the similar Khra 'brug bell and its inscription discussed in Li Fang-Kuei and Coblin: 340–46 and other sources provided in Doney 2018: 129–34.

69 See Kapstein 2009: 65, n. 47. The text was written on a single *pothī* manuscript of 20 folios that is now divided into two parts, PT 16 (fols. 22-34) and IOL Tib J 751 (fols. 35-41) with 4 lines on each side. It has been the subject of many other studies within Tibetology, for references to which see Doney 2018: 79–81.

70 Kapstein 2004; Kapstein 2009; Kapstein 2014.

71 Kapstein 2009: 31–33.

72 Kapstein 2009: 32.

This important insight into the social constraints placed on these "benedictions", at least as *text*, might be taken further in future with regard to where in the order of standing, as well as geographically, these addressers stood.

3.3. Ritual

Gill also suggests that socially-acceptable, even if antinomian, physical actions performed while praying can constitute not only a natural human accompaniment to prayer speech—like body language communication while in conversation—but also a necessary part of its perceived efficacy:

> In other words, a prayer act, to have effect, to be true and empowered includes not only the utterance of words, but the active engagement of elements of the historical, cultural, and personal setting in which it is offered.[73]

In this vein, I would like to note the evidence of chanting in the *Rgyud chags gsum* text discussed in section 2.2. above. It is an important work since, unlike the two prayers just discussed, it offers a rare insight into regular monastic (and perhaps lay) ritual practice within the Tibetan Empire. The ritual contained in the text may have been practiced privately, but certain indications within the manuscript itself suggest a liturgy that was to be performed in a communal context.[74] IOL Tib J 466/3 begins: "This is the first *rgyud chags*, recite without melody".[75] The opening statement distinguishes the first section of IOL Tib J 466/3 (column 3, l. 1–19) from a middle part (*rgyud chags bar ma*; column 3, l. 19–column11, l. 15) and a final one (*rgyud chags tha ma*; column 11, ll. 15–21). The opening instruction, which is repeated at the start of the final section (column 11, l. 15), indicates that the first and last section were to be recited without melody. However, the middle section (by far the longest of the three) was to be accompanied by melody, according to the instruction that heads that part (column 3, l. 20: *dbyangs dang sbyar ba / : /*).

This sung or chanted *Rgyud chags gsum* (*pa*) work is mentioned in

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[73] Gill 2005: 7369.

[74] See Ding Yi 2020 for a recent classification of Chinese and Tibetan liturgies from Mogao Cave 17 dating to around the period under discussion in this article that I wasn't able to incorporate into this article. Ding Yi: 96, n. 1 categorizes the *Rgyud chags gsum* as a liturgy connected to the monastic and lay *poṣada* ritual (with the proposed new reconstruction **Tritantra*, "Three Essential Parts", rather than the earlier **Tridaṇḍaka* followed by most scholars including myself).

[75] IOL Tib J 466/3, column 3, l. 1 reads: *$ / : / rgyud chags dang po ste / dbyangs tang myI sbyor bar klags /*.

Buddhist canonical material, but no Indic Buddhist example has been found so far.[76] As a work set to melody, it was mentioned in the *Vinaya* as an exception to the general prohibition against monastic music-making, whether or not this held true in practice. Gregory Schopen informs us that this prayer was to be recited with a "measured intonation", but that the *Vinaya* suggests this discipline was not always adhered to.[77] It appears from IOL Tib J 466/3 that not even the whole of the *Rgyud chags gsum* was to be accompanied by music, only the middle praise part. Thus, the appropriateness of chanting held a historical social connotation among the monastic community (at least rhetorically).

Such connotations seem to have been carried over into an Old Tibetan context. The only explicit indications of subsections in IOL Tib J 466/3 are a circle at the end of the opening prayer to each of the Three Jewels (l. 11) and a rubricated vertical double circle 15 *rkang pa*-s later after the prayer to all Three Jewels together (l. 16). Perhaps the rubrication is intended as ornamentation or to mark off what should not be said out loud at all, in other words the instructions at the start (e.g. column 11, ll. 15–16), and the ending phrase: "The *Rgyud chags* is finished" (l. 21). This would indicate a text to be actually recited, rather than a text that was merely copied and stored away.

As I made clear in section 2.2., the *Rgyud chags gsum* contains mostly praise. There may be some connection between this fact and the instruction to only recite that section together with a melody. According to the *Vinaya*, the only other liturgical text (or type of oral prayer) allowed to be recited by the monastic community accompanied by music was the "Proclamation of the Qualities of the Teacher" (*śāstṛguṇasaṃkīrtta*; *ston pa'i yon tan yang dag par bsgrag pa*) praising the Buddha.[78] Linking this fact with the Old Tibetan terminology and melodious elements that the *Rgyud chags gsum* shares with the Bsam yas Bell Inscription,[79] raises the intriguing possibility that the latter's text references this rare sung prayer, which could have entered Tibet from any number or combination of Buddhist lands surrounding it during the imperial period. If so, it would be especially fitting because the epigraphy is on a sound-emitting bell and consists of sixty syllables meant to reflect the sixty melodious sounds of the Buddha mentioned

[76] See Schopen 1997: 231–33, n. 62 on the *Cīvara-vastu* and the *Vinayakṣudraka-vastu* of the Buddhist *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.

[77] Schopen 2010: 118, n. 35. See also Liu Cuilan 2013 for further historical, cultural, and personal elements of chanting in the Buddhist world.

[78] Schopen 2010: 118.

[79] See Doney 2018: 85 and again section 2.2. above.

in the inscription itself.[80] Alternatively, IOL Tib J 466/3 may refer to the Bsam yas Bell Inscription, or merely form part of the general genre of Buddhist prayer with a shared Old Tibetan vocabulary. Yet, the above discussion points towards the role that melody played in ensuring the efficacy of praise and reflecting or evoking the enlightened status of the Buddha that was part of the goal of aspirations prayer within an Old Tibetan context.

3.4. Supports

Similar ritual aspects of Old Tibetan prayer as *act* can be seen even in the material supports for prayer texts themselves—be they wood, stone, bronze, brick or paper. One example is the Yer pa bell, which probably dates to the late imperial period.[81] Its inscription includes part of a popular *smon lam*, the *Āryabhadracaryā-praṇidhana* (*'Phags pa bzang po spyod pa'i smon lam*; see section 4.1. below), along with a transcription of the famous *ye dharmā* formula in an Indic script, yet a curious feature of the epigraphy moulded into the bell opens a window on another aspect of imperial-period Buddhist practice too. The inscription is arranged in four panels and, while the script is written left to right (as normal), the epigraphy only makes sense when reading the panels from right to left. This suggests that the text of the inscription should be read, or more properly recited, while walking around the bell with one's right shoulder facing it (as Buddhist monuments are generally circumambulated).

Further, this fact offers a clue to how this bell was most likely physically situated, if we widen our focus to encompass other parts of Buddhist Asia. Contemporaneous large temple bells from East Asia are either hung close to the ground (as in Korea) where they resonate into the earth, or designed to be hit on their striking points and thus hung with their middles at around chest height (often in high towers so that the sound would travel, as in China).[82] We cannot be sure about the original hanging position of any of the imperial-period Tibetan temple bells, which rank among the earliest extant exemplars of the form in Asia, and in the 20th century they were mostly found hung above head height.[83] However, the fact that they had epigraphy moulded into them *suggests* that their prayer texts were meant to be read and/or recited, as in the case of the Yer pa bell. Given that the epigraphy tends

[80] Richardson 1985: 35, n. 3. The Prayer of De ga g.yu tshal claims that the Buddha possesses the sixty-two-melodied voice of Brahmā (PT 16, 30r2–3: *gsung tshangs pa'I dbyangs drug cu rtsa gnyIs dang ldan bas*).

[81] Richardson 1985: 144–47; Doney 2020b: 134–36.

[82] Price 1983: 36; Doney 2020b: 111–12.

[83] Doney 2020b: Figures 12–18.

to be placed towards the top of the bells—and here the Yer pa bell epigraphy is no exception—the bells would have been best placed at chest height, like Chinese exemplars (though for different reasons).

Such an attention to surface detail may help to reframe the Tibetan temple bells as not merely the bearer of a text to be mined for its historical value alone, but also as containing Old Tibetan prayer texts and partaking in imperial-period ritual practice. Further, contextualising Tibetan imperial temple bells within the wider aesthetic context of Buddhist Asia, its art and material culture, would also aid the wider study of choices made and not made in the incorporation of physical instantiations of prayer forms within Tibetans' practice.

Focusing on the *paper* supports of manuscripts can complement this analysis, for example in identifying the milieu (and perhaps the date) of each exemplar's creation, and help problematise our identification of Mogao Cave 17 documents solely with practices in central Tibet. This is true of IOL Tib J 466/3, again, whose paper apparently had been recently discarded or left over from the imperially patronised copying of the *Aparimitāyur-nāma mahāyāna-sūtra* (*Tshe dpag tu med pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*) around Dunhuang of the early 9th century, and which was found by Aurel Stein together with copies of these *sūtra*-s.[84] Such evidence (as well as its script style) closely connects this exemplar of the *Rgyud chags gsum* (and its creator) with the Sino-Tibetan scribal community during or shortly after the Tibetan imperial period rather than *necessarily* with rituals at the central Tibetan court.[85]

Before this text, someone has added another panel of paper containing an unidentified prayer (IOL Tib J 466/1) and the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* spell (*Gtsug tor rnam par rgyal ba gzungs*; IOL Tib J 466/2)—in effect broadening the ritual collection (and perhaps its practice) by the addition of a piece of paper.[86] Paul Copp has studied the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* in a contemporaneous Chinese context written on paper supports in the form of rituals, amulets and *maṇḍala*-s and on stone pillars in a manner that resembles later Tibetan prayer flags.[87] He notes there that the writing of *dhāraṇī*-s not only preserved an oral communication whose utterance was its primary form, but was also an important *act*

[84] See Doney 2018: 75.

[85] My thanks to Prof. Carmen Meinert for this suggestion. Note too, that this prayer and a number of others discussed in this article are not catalogued in the *Lhan kar ma*.

[86] See Dalton and van Schaik 2006, 209–10; Doney 2018: 82–83 on the first panel of IOL Tib J 466.

[87] See Copp 2014: 29–196; Kuo Liying 2014: 366–71 shows evidence for the popularity of pillars (under the name "banner poles") in Mogao cave paintings spanning the entire period of Tibetan rule over the area.

that was described as efficacious and gave rise to many practical traditions.[88] The truth of this statement can be seen in the thousands of imperial copies of the *Aparimitāyur-nāma mahāyāna-sūtra*, itself a *dhāraṇī-sūtra* as well as a *nāma-sūtra*, which make up a large proportion of the texts from Mogao Cave 17.[89] Comparing the details of these Sino-Tibetan modes of production may in future enrich our knowledge of the context in which such physical remnants of prayer activity were made, held, safeguarded and *perhaps* used in practice around Dunhuang during and after the period of Tibetan rule there.

4. Prayer as Subject

4.1. Subjects

Above, I argued that how prayer texts work is a different focus of study than how prayers are practised. In this section, it is just as important to distinguish those two *foci* from how prayer was perceived (rhetorically or really) in writings about it outside of the prayer texts themselves. Studied in its own right, the prayer as *subject* can be compared to and inform other studies on the same theme in the wider field of religious studies.[90]

Data on the discussion of prayer activities and texts as *subject* in Old Tibetan texts range from complex and theologically charged tantric

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[88] Copp 2014: 29–30. This insight acts as a corrective to the tendency to focus on the oral nature of Buddhist prayer, including *dhāraṇī*, as in Gómez 2000: 1039–40.

[89] See, for example, Dotson 2013–2014 (2015); Dotson and Doney Forthcoming.

[90] Sam Gill's discussion of this aspect of the study of prayer is the least satisfying part of his encyclopaedia entry, since it is largely anecdotal and focused on Europe and dependent colonial discourses; see Gill 2005: 7370–71. The classification in Geertz 2008: 137, Table 1c is also not so helpful for the field of Old Tibetan prayer, because it tends towards Christian categories and is not particularly detailed (missing narratives and catalogues of text for example and only extending to 8 types). However, I include it here for the sake of completeness:

1. Philosophical discussions
2. Theological discussions
3. Doctrinal discussions
4. Sermons
5. Devotional guides, liturgies
6. Descriptions of prayer methods
7. Prescribed ways of worship
8. Prescribed ways of life

Another important source missing here are discussions outside of the religious sphere itself, for example legal texts (identified as a useful source *within* religious traditions in Zahavy 1980: 52–55). For an important study of legal texts evidencing the recitation of *inter alia* prayer texts (as *act*, though dating after the imperial period) around Dunhuang, see Liu Cuilan 2018.

commentaries to pragmatic and simple requests for requisite items. At one extreme lie the commentaries on esoteric Buddhist rituals that contain praise, offerings and *dhāraṇī*-s.[91] At the other extreme are found some of our oldest sources on evidence of non-Buddhist rituals in Tibet, wooden slips. One of these describes a verbal ritual focused on deities called *yul lha yul bdag* (literally 'place god-place master') and *sman* (sky dwellers and probably the owners of wild animals).[92] As Sam van Schaik points out, this construction also appears in a non-Buddhist ritual manual from Mogao Cave 17, PT 1042.[93] Another *textual* corroboration of such actions comes from a Buddhist context, our old friend the *Rgyud chags gsum*. Three of the types of deity are praised in one stanza of this text, *yul bdag*, *sman* and perhaps *yul lha*.[94] In this

[91] Examples from Mogao Cave 17 are covered most thoroughly in Dalton and van Schaik 2006 (though many postdate the period under discussion here). See also Dalton 2016 for a recent discussion of the relation between *dhāraṇī and tantra* in the context of commentaries.

[92] See Thomas 1951, 395; improved in van Schaik 2013: 246. This wooden slip is pictured in van Schaik 2013: 246 and its text transliterated in van Schaik 2013: 246, n. 39: "IOL Tib N 255 (M.I.iv.121): *$//yul lha yul bdag dang/ sman gsol ba'i zhal ta pa/ sku gshen las myi*[*ng*] *b*[*sgrom*] *pa/ gy-d* [-] *zhal ta pa/ gsas chung lha bon po/ blo co* [*com*] [*rno*]*/ -m pos sug zungs/ la tong sprul sug gzungs/*". van Schaik 2013: 247 and van Schaik 2013: 247, n. 42 transliterates another, similar wooden slip: "IOL Tib N 873 (M.I.xxvii.15): *$:/./yul lha yul bdag dang sman gsol ba'i zhal ta pa/ dang sku gshen dpon yog/ /:/blon/ man gzigs blon mdo bzang*". Again, see also Thomas 1951: 395. Although Thomas was wrong to translate *sman* as physician, probably based on its similarity to the Classical term that means medicine or remedy, the etymology of the category of deity referred to on these wooden slips is still obscure. For descriptions of these deities as owners in documents from Mogao Cave 17, see Dotson 2019.

[93] van Schaik 2013: 246.

[94] IOL Tib J 466/3, column 11 ll. 4–8; Doney 2018: 89–90. This stanza praises the deities (*lha rnams*) of Tibet (*bod yul*), or perhaps the local gods (*yul gyi lha rnams*) of Tibet (*bod*)—just as the immediately preceding stanza (above) praises the "spiritual friends" of Tibet:

> Praise to the deities of Tibet, such as King of the Gandharvas [and] 'One with Five Top-Knots', father and son. To all the awesome local gods (*yul bdag gnyan po*), such as the powerful *lha* and *sman* deities who [cause to] arise the jewels of men and of treasure in the iron, silver, gold, crystal and snow mountains surrounding [Tibet] and practice the good religion and way of heaven, I grasp the method of venerating [with] respect, and offer substances of pure auspiciousness, such as good fragrance, incense (or fragrant incense, *dri spos*) and flowers.
>
> */ drI za'I rgyal po gtsug pud lnga pa* {*yab*} (SHAPE: *y+b*) *sras lastsogs pa / : / bod yul gyI lha rnams la mchod pa / / lcags rI dngul rI gser gyI ri / / shel rI gangs rI khyad kor na / / myI dang nor gyi dbyig 'byung zhIng / / chos bzang gnam lugs spyod pa yI / / mthu chen lha dang sman <ma> lastogs / / yul bdag gnyan po thams cad la / / rje sa rI mo'i tshul bzung ste / drI spos men tog bzang lastogs / / bkra shis gtsang ma'I rdzas rnams 'bul /.*

stanza, *sman* and perhaps *lha* deities seem to be subclasses of *yul bdag* rather than separate types of deity. By triangulating between prayer as *text* and as *subject* in both of these contexts, we can gain glimpses of Old Tibetan prayer as *act*, from the simple to the highly complex, that are otherwise lost to the ages.

Somewhere in the middle lies the commentarial tradition on a particularly popular *smon lam* work with deep roots in Indic Buddhism, the *Āryabhadracaryā-praṇidhāna*(*rāja*) also found on the Yer pa bell that I discussed in section 3.4.[95] Cristina Scherrer-Schaub identifies this as "la prière mahayanique par excellence", which she states provided an influential Indic Buddhist model for Tibetan *smon lam*-s, along with the **triskandhaka* (*pung po gsum pa*) prayer of the three accumulations.[96] Richard K. Payne and Charles D. Orzech provide an outline of the *Saptavidhā-anuttarapūjā*, the "sevenfold supreme worship" that apparently acted as a model for other forms in Buddhist discussions of the subject, though they are quick to add the *caveat* that not all worship texts actually strictly adhere to this structure.[97] The *Āryabhadracaryā-praṇidhāna* exerted great influence on early Tibetan Buddhist practice and literature, and commentaries on the *smon lam* are evidenced in the *Lhan kar ma* and Dunhuang library.[98]

Another mode of treating prayer as *subject* is narrative. Both during its early life in South Asia and in its continuing existence in East Asia, the virtues and benefits of the *Āryabhadracaryā-praṇidhāna* are extolled

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The translation of this stanza is tentative and may be updated in a planned study of non-Buddhist deities.

95 This text is titled *'Phags pa bzang po spyod pa'i smon lam gyi rgyal po* in the *Lhan kar ma*, Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 269–70, entry 470. Among the later canonical versions, see for example Peking 716 and Peking 1038.

96 Scherrer-Schaub 1999-2000: 218–20; Sernesi 2014: 144.

97 According to Payne and Orzech 2011: 135–36: "The seven elements of the *saptavidhā-anuttarapūjā* are praise (*vandanā*), worship (*pūjanā*), confession (*deśanā*), rejoicing (*modanā*), requesting the teaching (*adhyeṣaṇā*), begging the buddhas to remain (*yācanā*), and transfer of merit (*nāmanā*)". One example showing the later continued use of these elements to structure prayer-like practice is Yönten 1996, within the important genre of *guru yoga*.

98 Four commentaries on the *Āryabhadracaryā-praṇidhāna*, apparently translations from an Indic language, are listed in the *Lhan kar ma*, see Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 317–19, entries 559–62), together with one mnemonic (*brjed byang*) drawn from four different commentaries by Ye shes sde, Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 319, entry 563. Only the text catalogued under entry 561 was lost before it could find its way into the *Bstan 'gyur*, whereas the commentary ascribed to Bhadrapaṇa and translated by Jñānagarbha and Dpal brtsegs (entry 562) is also found among the Dunhuang documents, in IOL Tib J 146; Peking 5515. These could prove to be useful mines of information on this *smon lam*, the wider genre and approaches to these forms as *subject*.

by exemplary stories, as in the *Gaṇḍavyūha sūtra*.[99] PT 149 describes the origin, translation, proper practice (as *act*) and benefits of the *Āryabhadracaryā-praṇidhāna* by means of a compelling narrative full of miraculous events caused by the *smon lam*.[100] This genre bears comparison with narratives surrounding *dhāraṇī*-s and extolling their efficacy, both in general and in works found in Mogao Cave 17.[101] PT 149 ends by intertwining a later part of the prayer itself with an account of two of the protagonists achieving the supernatural aims that the prayer aspires (*smon*) to achieve:

> Master Dpal byams (*sic*) recited his commitments.
> *When the time of my death comes*
> When he recited this, [they all] spoke in one voice.
> *Then by purifying all my defilements*
> As they recited this, they ascended [into the sky].
> *When I directly perceive Amitābha*
> As they recited this, accomplishments such as rainbows arose, just like the signs that had [previously] arisen for the two masters, and they cast off the shackles of the body.
> *May I go to the land of Sukhāvati*
> Having arrived there, they recited these prayers and departed.[102]

Thus, this narrative treatment of a *smon lam* prayer as *subject* also contains parts of the prayer as *text* itself. The document PT 149 probably dates to the 10th century, outside the period considered in this study.

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[99] See Osto 2010 for a discussion and translation of the Sanskrit text of the *Āryabhadracaryā-praṇidhāna* and its relation to the *Gaṇḍavyūha sūtra*.

[100] van Schaik and Doney 2007: 185–86.

[101] See Copp 2014: 158–66 for generally popular Chinese narratives surrounding the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* and Copp 2014: 143 on Dunhuang manuscripts containing invocations (*qiqing wen* 啟請文) sometimes recited before that text in rituals and occasionally including narratives.

[102] Translation following van Schaik and Doney 2007: 206–207. The lines in italics are equivalent to verse 57, towards the end of the *smon lam*. PT 149, *verso* ll. 4–6 (with parenthetical indications of the received tradition of the *smon lam*), reads: *slobs dpon dpal byams thugs dam 'don pa las / bdag ni chi ba'i* [l. 5] *ba'i dus byed gyur pa na /* (Received version: *bdag ni chi ba'i dus byed gyur pa na /*) *gsung tsam na gsung lan gcig chad / de nas sgrib pa thams cad ni phyir bsal te /* (Received version: *sgrib pa thams cad dag ni phyir bsal te /*) *gsung tsam na / gcung tsam yang 'phags / mngon gsum snang ba' mtha' yas de mthong na gsung tsam na /* (Received version: *mngon sum snang ba mtha' yas de mthong nas /*) *slob dpon gnyis kyi sku ltas la byung ba bzhin du gzha' tshon la bsogs pa' dngos grub byung nas / lus gdos pa' can* [l. 6] *bor nas / bde ba can gyi zhing der rab du 'gro /* (Received version: *bde ba can gyi zhing der rab tu 'gro/*) *der song nas ni smon lam 'di dag kyang / zhes zlos shing gshegs so / de yan cad ni son gi gleng gzhi 'o // ∴//*.

Yet this later treatment of imperial-period *smon lam* practice is still instructive, since it forms a bridge between actual imperial-period discussions of prayer as *subject* and the voluminous Tibetan religious histories and biographies of the second millennium that include details of prayer occurring as Buddhism was introduced during an increasingly idealised imperial period.[103]

4.2. Categorization

The *Lhan kar ma*, discussed in section 2.2. above as an indicator of indigenous concepts of Old Tibetan prayer as *text*, is itself (in part) *about* prayer. It therefore falls into the third group of sources from which to glean information about prayer. I argued in section 2.3. that the classification of texts in the *Lhan kar ma* evidences not only a collecting principle but also a logic to the ordering of the texts that views *mantra*-s as similar to *dhāraṇī*-s, and *dhāraṇī*-s as connected to the *nāmāṣṭaśataka*-s, but the latter as closer to *dhāraṇī*-s (and eulogies) than *mantra*-s are to it. The categories of eulogy, aspiration and benediction may likewise be purposefully ordered, though here by the order in which such ritual actions should/usually occur. To return briefly to prayer as *text*, IOL Tib J 466/3 offers us evidence of a similar but not identical ordering principle. The first part of the *Rgyud chags gsum* in some ways follows the 'seven elements' described above in this section, but this praise-heavy text also includes a *dhāraṇī* near the beginning—itself described as a spell of praise.[104] It ends with a *smon lam* and so is in fact a collection of literary forms that to resemble prayer and its order seems to lead one through the stages of a ritual journey, like a liturgy. Although we cannot be certain that all of the elements of IOL Tib J 466 were performed in that order, in the spirit of comparison we may draw a parallel between at least the *Rgyud chags gsum* part and how complex

[103] See van Schaik and Doney 2007: 175–78. Of these later narratives, one immediately thinks of the *smon lam* of brothers in South Asia to be reborn as key protagonists in the spread of Buddhism in Tibet found in both Buddhist and Bon po literature from at least the 12th century, Blondeau 1994; Kværne 1996: 22.

[104] The beginning of this prayer, IOL Tib J 466/3, ll. 1–17, comprises three parts: The Three Jewels (*dkon mchog gsum*), i.e. the Buddha, *dharma* and *saṃgha*, are prayed to in the first part, all three as a whole in the second part, and in the last part is recited the *Pūjāmegha dhāraṇī* that suffuses the Buddha fields of the ten directions—addressed to the first of the Three Jewels (though perhaps synecdochically all three). Lines 16–17 describe the *Pūjāmegha dhāraṇī* as "the *dhāraṇī* for the clouds of offerings arising in all the Buddha fields of the ten directions" (*phyogs bcu'I sangs rgyas kyI zhIng thams cad du // pa'I sprIn byung ba'I gzungs*). The *Pūjāmegha dhāraṇī* is often found together with the *Āryabhadracaryā-praṇidhāna* in Dunhuang ritual collections, van Schaik and Doney 2007: 185. See Dalton 2016: 206–208 on this aspect of the *rGyud chags gsum*. As I mentioned in section 3.4. above, immediately before this text the *Uṣṇīṣavijaya-dhāraṇī* spell is added, IOL Tib J 466/2.

Christian prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer, include invocation, supplication and petition as a series of speech acts that serve to persuade the addressee to aid the addresser, among other things.[105] The categories in the *Lhan kar ma* follow a similar order—and they are not arranged simply by number of texts in each category and so merely coincidentally similar. It may be that the ritual ordering principle of doing one act before another also inspired not only the sequence in which these speech acts appear in ritual collections but also the order of the categories in the *Lhan kar ma* catalogue itself.

Yet, even here we find a complication in the fact that the *Lhan kar ma* itself begins with a 'laud' of salutation/prostration to "the omniscient one", presumably the Buddha.[106] This very short verse is both a prayer as *text* and as *act* (of salutation/prostration) within a work that addresses *inter alia* prayer as *subject*.[107] This points towards a wider truth: that prayers are not only framed as prayers but may also be used to frame other texts as religiously motivated.[108] Perhaps this prayer was never said out loud, but this should not matter for the ritual frame that it adds to the *Lhan kar ma*'s administrative catalogue.[109] The cate-

[105] See the discussion of the Lord's Prayer as *text* and as *act* in Geertz 2008: 126–28. Aspiration may also follow confession, as in Or.15000/379 that contains the title *The Prayer of Repentance and Aspiration* (*'Gyod tshangs dang smon lam*). Takeuchi 1998: 159, no. 491 describes this work and provides a list of other Dunhuang documents falling into this category: "VP [de La Vallée Poussin 1962] 208.2, 209–10, 247, 452.2; P[T] 17, 18, 24, 175–177".

[106] According to Herrmann-Pfandt's critical edition, the opening line of the *Lhan kar ma* (after the title) reads: *thams cad mkhyen pa la phyag 'tshal lo /*; Herrmann-Pfandt 2008: 1. The translation 'laud' for *phyag 'tshal ba* (*vandanā*) comes from Sernesi 2014: 144.

[107] In itself, this one-sentence speech-act raises a couple of interesting questions that future analysis should take into account. First, what is the minimal extent of a prayer as *text*? Would a laudatory declaration stating *"I prostrate to all *buddha*-s; I prostrate to all *bodhisattva*-s" (**sangs rgyas thams cad la phyag 'tshal / lo byang chub sems dpa' thams cad la phyag 'tshal lo /*) constitute two prayers, in contrast to *"I prostrate to all *buddha*-s and all *bodhisattva*-s" (**sangs rgyas thams cad dang / byang chub sems dpa' thams cad la phyag 'tshal lo /*)? Second, should the answers to the above be altered or even dictated by the action that accompanies it? At first glance, it would appear not. Yet, since these statements are speech-acts and so maintain a quasi-narrative status (narrating one's own act of obeisance), perhaps this is more complex situation to assess than I assume.

[108] See Bielefeldt 2005: 233–34 for this point made in another context. In contrast, some eulogies contain introductory lines that define the object of their praise, the addressee, and the importance or necessity of creating the eulogy itself (Zorin 2010: 354). Here, the *subject* frames the eulogy (as *text*) and may affect the way in which the addresser perceives of and performs it (as *act*).

[109] Again, see Bielefeldt 2005: 241 for a discussion of this idea. From another perspective, the extent to which texts were actually recited matters a great deal, since it can raise useful distinctions between how prayers, say, existed and functioned in

gory 'laud' is not found in the *Lhan kar ma* but was obviously considered an acceptable form of communication with the Buddha whenever it was included in the work as we now have it. Bear in mind that the *Lhan kar ma* is a text-oriented work that catalogues complete works as discrete whole rather than analysing them into their constituent parts. As such, it can be only a partial witness to categories and categorizations of Old Tibetan prayer, among other subjects.

5. Conclusion

We return to the problems and possibilities of section 1, hopefully a little more deeply enmeshed in the problems if not any closer to solutions. The reader is hopefully at least more conscious of the problems and pitfalls that we unknowingly face when either describing Old Tibetan prayer unreflectively or relying on foreign universalizing classificatory systems (which are still all too common in the study of religion today) by approaching prayer from a Euro-American scholarly perspective.

The above approach to prayer first focuses on the individual emic terms instead of simply (and artificially) reducing this multiplicity down to a singular etic concept that we then call 'prayer' or privileging one of these terms as the best correlate of the English word 'prayer'.[110] One could make a 'strong' argument for including *dhāraṇī*-s under the category of prayer, following the definitions provided by Gill or Gomez above. Yet, a 'weak' version of this argument is that including *dhāraṇī*-s helps to once again problematize the hard distinction between 'prayer' and 'spell', which is shown to be less significant than it was considered in older scholarship on Buddhism and Tibet.[111] Returning to the *Lhan kar ma* classification of spells (*dhāraṇī*), the 'one hundred and eight names' (*nāmāṣṭaśataka*), eulogies (*stotra*), aspirations (*praṇidhāna*) and benedictions (*maṅgalagāthā*), I have intended that these terms actually offer fertile ground for comparison and contrast. The *Lhan kar ma* categorizes different types of prayer as separate but related whereas, outside of this text, we have seen that similar social cues and hierarchies can be found in the practice of prayer that cut across the genres of aspiration and praise. We can begin to think of

multiple copies, in canons and in real communities. This is a theme that I hope to explore in future with regard to *dhāraṇī* literature from Mogao Cave 17 as a reflection of actual Buddhist practices around Dunhuang.

110 Sam Gill makes this point in the conclusion to his entry on prayer: "The term gains definitional precision when seen as any of dozens of terms used in specific religious traditions as articulated in practice or in doctrine"; Gill 2005: 7371.

111 Gill 2005: 7369–70 even brings Buddhism into the discussion while making a similar point.

what connects an aspiration for some specific change in the world through the mediation of a superhuman being and a spell whose efficacy is ensured through supernatural means (beyond their shared metaphysics of *karma* and merit [*puṇya*; *bsod nams*]); or how a eulogy and bringing to mind the names of a deity both evoke that being, 'in the room' as it were, and how they differ in the manner of that evocation. Unpacking such similarities and differences requires applying linguistic and semantic disciplines to a series of divergent literary contexts, and could result in a typology of addresser, addressee and beneficiary that would serve to make connections across and beyond the above categories in ways that a top-down approach could not.

Thus, there exist genres catalogued together in Tibetan-language sources of the imperial period and shortly after that could correspond to Gill's notion of "human communication with divine and spiritual entities" but also resemble mnemonics (another way of viewing *dhāraṇī*-s) or historical accounts (an alternative reading of the Bsam yas Bell Inscription). Context-specific analysis and heuristic comparison may help to identify the fuzzy borders in these examples and more. Further, there exist prayer-like actions, texts and terminology that are not contained in the above catalogues but that need to be included in the analysis and comparison of Old Tibetan prayers. The proposal of this article is to borrow a method of organising the data, which has gained some favour outside of Tibetan studies, to work towards identifying a matrix similar to prayer and therefore in future comparable with it.

Above, I structured my analysis according to the *foci* of the data, first as *text*, then *act* and finally *subject*. However, another way of addressing these sources would be to focus on eulogy as evidenced in data treating it as *text*, *act* or *subject* (and noting the fault lines between these different types of representation), before turning to do the same for benediction and so forth. This could shine a different but equally illuminating light on the subject, once a typology of prayer genres has been established. For now, following Gill's structuring principle makes the job of identifying a matrix and typology of early Tibetan prayer easier and brings Old Tibetan studies more closely into dialogue with scholars of other places and times (and their religious traditions) around the world—while shedding unnecessary baggage associated with the loaded term 'prayer'.

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