

# Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books



Volume I ◉ ELEMENTS

Edited by Matthew T. Kapstein

# Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books, Volume 1



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VOLUME I · ◊ · ELEMENTS



*Edited by Matthew T. Kapstein*

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Frontispiece: The bodhisattva Maitreya, detail from a ca. fourteenth-century *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript. Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, manuscript no. 23475/23476. Photo: Matthew T. Kapstein.



ཆེད་བརྗོད།

དཔེ་རྒྱུ་ལོ་གྱི་ཁྱེད་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ལ།      དཔེ་མེད་བཤེས་གཞིན་ཐུབ་བསྟན་ཉི་མ་ཁྱེད།  
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Dedicated to  
 Alak Zenkar Rinpoche Thubten Nyima  
 in honor of his lifelong commitment to the preservation and diffusion  
 of the Tibetan literary heritage



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## Preface

This is the first of two volumes devoted to traditional Tibetan books, both manuscripts and books printed by hand using engraved wooden blocks. In volume I our chief concern is to introduce the material and technical features of Tibetan books, their scribal conventions and aesthetic dimensions, together with similarly broad topics that inform research on them; volume II turns to specific classes of Tibetan writings and their characteristics, together with case studies of particular works.

Until just over a half century ago, Tibetan studies was a distinctly recondite field, within the purview of only a handful of dedicated scholars. By the late 1960s, this began to change as the effects of China's absorption of Tibet and the resulting exile of numerous Tibetans, including many accomplished experts and artisans, became widely known. Their presence in South Asia and beyond attracted the interest of researchers in several disciplines, including history, linguistics, anthropology, art history, and religion. A key concern that knowledgeable Tibetans often emphasized to their interlocutors was the need to preserve and make available the many books that they had laboriously carried into exile. Thanks to their initiatives and those of their non-Tibetan collaborators, and notably to the brilliant contributions of the late E. Gene Smith of the US Library of Congress, a thriving Tibetan publication industry took root in India. The widespread distribution of facsimile editions of Tibetan manuscripts and xylographic prints produced there, together with a renewed appreciation of collections that had been amassed by past explorers and were now conserved in museums and libraries throughout the world, engendered an expanding exploration of the Tibetan literary heritage that is still far from running its course. The partial relaxation of Chinese policies in respect to Tibetan culture, following reforms initiated

after 1978, considerably amplified these developments by permitting access to much material that was formerly unavailable and allowing a new generation of Tibetan and other scholars in China to enter and contribute to this area of study.

Understandably, the growing community of interested specialists and translators saw the first challenge facing them to be posed by the content of Tibetan texts: what was the message harbored within these impressive but often mysterious tomes? Gradually, however, some turned their attention to the tomes themselves: How were we to understand the Tibetan book as a medium for the transmission of information and knowledge, its forms and materiality, aesthetics and conventions, sociology and history? During the past two decades, a growing stream of publications and academic events has signaled the emergence of the study of the Tibetan book as a distinct and dynamic subfield, often in dialogue with similar research on the history of the book in China, India, and throughout the Buddhist civilizational sphere. As our understanding and appreciation of old Tibetan manuscripts and prints continues to grow and to deepen, we find that, in their contents, forms, functions, and methods of fabrication, they offer us a wondrous mirror of the social universe from which they were born.

Given the great quantity and variety of Tibetan documents preserved today, both within and beyond the Tibetan cultural regions of Asia, as well as the still imperfect state of our knowledge of them, it is not yet possible to offer encyclopedic coverage of the Tibetan book. We may hope, nevertheless, that readers will find here a useful introduction to and overview of this rich domain, reflecting the present state of the field. There remains still much to accomplish in order to enhance the picture we have drawn here, to correct inadvertent errors, and to fill in the inevitable gaps.

## Acknowledgments

This book is the fruit of a decade, and its roots reach back much further; it draws on many contributions—intellectual, administrative, material, and amicable—from numerous individuals and institutions. A great debt of gratitude is due to all.

In the first instance, to the many Tibetan teachers, friends, and colleagues who with infinite patience guided me on this path: two of the greatest modern masters, Dudjom Rinpoche Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje (1904–1987) and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche Tashi Dawa (1910–1991), with kindness and generosity far surpassing what a young and naive foreign student could have possibly merited, marked up my copies of the *pechas* from which they taught me with strikeouts and corrections in red and thereby initiated me not only into the contents of the books in question, but into aspects of Tibetan editorial practice as well. I had the good fortune, too, of poring over old Tibetan books with other leading Tibetan teachers—including Khenpo Kalu Rinpoche Rangjung Kunkhyab (1905–1987), Dezhung Rinpoche Kunga Tenpai Nyima (1906–1987), Ngakchang Gonpo Tsetan (1906–1990), Drukpa Thuksey Ngawang Gyurme Palzang (1916–1983), Minyak Khenchen Tsara Thubten Chodrak (1916–2005), Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche (1920–1996), Trülshik Rinpoche Dharmamati (1923–2011), Serlo Khenpo Sangye Tenzin (1924–1990), Dorje Lopon Kunga Thukje-pel (1925–2000), Bardok Chusang Rinpoche Mipham Thuthop (1927–2021), Dodrupchen Rinpoche Tubten Trinlé (1927–2022), Lama Dampa Yonten Zangpo (1928–2002), Lama Tsedrup Tharchin (1936–2013), Lama Norlha (1938–2018), Khenpo Palden Sherab (1942–2010), Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche (1933–2023), and the forty-first Sakya Trizin Rinpoche Ngawang Kunga (1945–)—all of whom contributed bountifully to an ongoing discovery of the rich literary traditions of Tibet and the traditional means of their preservation and transmission.

Those who work on Tibetan books share a special debt to Alak Zenkar Rinpoche Thubten Nyima, to whom this book is dedicated, for his herculean efforts to ensure the discovery, identification, preservation, and diffusion in facsimile of important manuscripts and prints that survive throughout the Tibetan regions of China. I am grateful as well to many of the scholars who have joined him in his efforts, in particular Karma Delek in Lhasa and Akhu Butruk in Chengdu and Kangding. For their help with my fieldwork in Sichuan, I thank the Sichuan Academy of Social Science, Tsenlha Ngawang Tsultrim and Thupten Phuntsok of the Southwest Nationalities University, Horbugyal in Markham, and Tulku Jamyang Lodro in Dzamtang. In Lhasa, I have benefited from the collegiality of scholars at the Tibet Academy of Social Science—in particular Pasang Wangdu, the late Ngari Tsering Gyalpo, and the late Drongbu Tsering Dorje—and, at Tibet University, the late president Tsewang Gyurme and the scholars Tseyang Changngopa and Kawa Sherab Sangpo. The late Parpa Palden, his son Dawa, and his daughter Dekyi, heirs to a family of traditional printers stretching back to the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama, freely shared their vast knowledge of Central Tibetan printeries, those of the past and those that were revived following the Cultural Revolution.

Throughout the course of my study of Tibetan books, from my struggles as a beginner in the early 1970s until his passing in 2010, E. Gene Smith, whose role in opening up the Tibetan literary legacy to international scholarship and preserving it for Tibetans themselves is legendary, was a sure guide and steady friend. His achievements are everywhere in the background to this work.

In realizing this book, I extend particular thanks to my collaborators, whose abundant resources of learning, patience, and good humor made this project both



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A preliminary meeting of the project was convened as a workshop at the Thirteenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS) held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in July 2013. This followed a conference at the University of Hamburg, Germany, in May of that year, “Manuscript and Xylograph Traditions within the Tibetan Cultural Sphere,” organized by Orna Almogi and Dorji Wangchuk, which several of the contributors to this project attended (see Almogi 2016). Orna and Dorji and all those they assembled at that event have our deep gratitude for the impetus they gave to this work.

The broad form of the project was solidified by two important developments in 2014. The Henry Luce Foundation, New York, extended its generous support to our work, permitting us to organize subsequent meetings, visit collections, and acquire research materials, and it provided a subvention for publication. At the foundation, I am indebted in particular to the ever-attentive guidance of Helena Kolenda, program director extraordinaire. Helena’s wisdom and commitment to our project have been fundamental to its success.

At the same time, Peter J. Potter, then director of the Cornell University Press, encouraged my proposing this work to CUP and personally shepherded it through the submission process. Peter’s interest and enthusiasm, sustained in full by his successor, Mahinder Kingra, have been essential supports throughout.

These favorable circumstances resulted in a series of productive meetings. The first was a conference on Buddhist book cultures, “Merits of the Book: Buddhist Manuscript Traditions across Asia,” organized at the Martin Marty Center of the University of Chicago Divinity School in February 2015, with the additional support of the Franke Institute of the University of Chicago, to which eight of the participants in this project contributed. We are indebted also to the participants outside Tibetan studies—Gregory Heyworth (on multispectral imaging of manuscripts), Jinah Kim (on Pāla-period illuminated manuscripts), Bryan Lowe (on early Japanese Buddhist manuscripts), Richard Salomon (on Gandhārī manuscripts), and Stephen F. Teiser (on Chinese ritual manuscripts from Dunhuang)—who helped us see our work from the broader perspective they introduced into our conversations. We additionally thank Stephen Teiser for his kind invitation to several of those who met on that occasion to renew our discussions at the January 2017 “Buddhist Manuscript Cultures Conference” organized at Princeton University.

“Merits of the Book” was followed, in autumn 2015, by a seminar in Thimphu, Bhutan, and a workshop in Paris titled “Towards a Manual of Tibetan Manuscript Studies.” At the first of these events, thanks to the efforts of Karma Phuntsho—whose many valuable projects have included the thorough digital documentation of the abundant manuscript collections of the monasteries and administrative centers of the Kingdom of Bhutan—we were able to share aspects of our work with Bhutanese scholars pursuing similar studies, including Dorji Gyaltshen, Ugyen Dorji, Deki Pelden, Rinchen Chozang, and Yeshe Lhendup. For institutional support, we must thank the National Library of Bhutan, the Shejun Agency, the Institute of Cultural Language Studies, and the Central Monastic Body. We are additionally grateful for the assistance accorded us by Gangtey (Gangteng) Monastery, whose manuscript holdings rank among the great cultural treasures of Bhutan, and by Lopon Tseten in Bumthang.

The Paris workshop, bringing together the contributors to *Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books*, was hosted by the University of Chicago Paris Center with additional sponsorship provided by the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) and the Centre de Recherche sur les Civilisations de l’Asie-Orientale (CRCAO). We are indebted to Sebastien Greppo, administrative director of the UC Paris Center, Hubert Bost, then president of the EPHE, and Nicolas Fiévé and Rainier Lanselle, then directors of the CRCAO,

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In the course of the elaboration of this project, we have been aided by major museum and library collections and, above all, their dedicated officers who have helped us examine their unique holdings and reproduce selections from them here:

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Among digital archives, the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC, formerly the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center), founded by E. Gene Smith, has vigorously collaborated with this project since its inception. The BDRC (<https://www.bdrc.io/>) will also host the webpage, now in development, that is designed to complement the printed work. Thanks are due to its past and present executive directors, Jeff Wallman and Jan Ronis, and their associates.

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## Transcription Conventions

This book is addressed both to those specializing in Tibetan studies and to non-Tibetanists who are broadly interested in the history of the book. The approach to the transcription of Tibetan adopted here is, accordingly, a hybrid one. In footnotes and parentheses, in transcriptions of blocks of Tibetan text, and in other contexts in which the precise orthography of Tibetan is at issue, the Wylie system of Tibetan transliteration, with some modifications for special characters, is used. (See <http://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/#!essay=/thl/ewts> for full details of the Wylie system and Imaeda 2011 for discussion of some variants, particularly for the transcription of archaic Tibetan texts.) In the main body of this book, however, proper names of persons and places, as well as some Tibetan words that are frequently used, are given in approximate phonetic spellings, in some cases with the exact transliteration following in parentheses on first occurrence: for example, *tingshok* (*mthing shog*). In cases in which there are conventional spellings of Tibetan words and names in English—for instance, Shigatse, Reting—these are used here. The sections “Spellings of Tibetan Names and Terms” included in both volumes list all Tibetan expressions written phonetically in the text together with their proper transliterations.

For Sanskrit words, we generally use the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST).

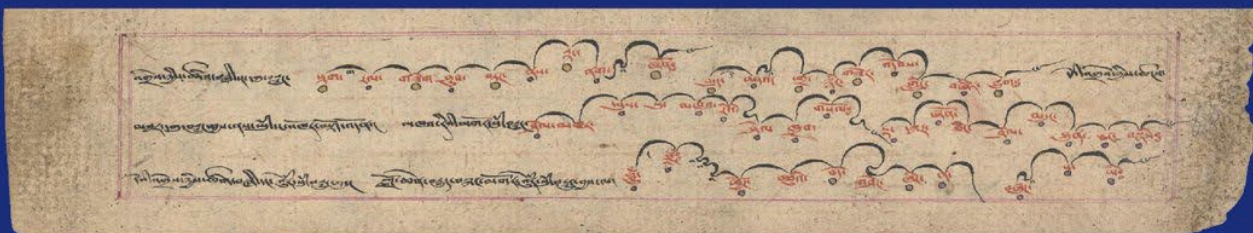
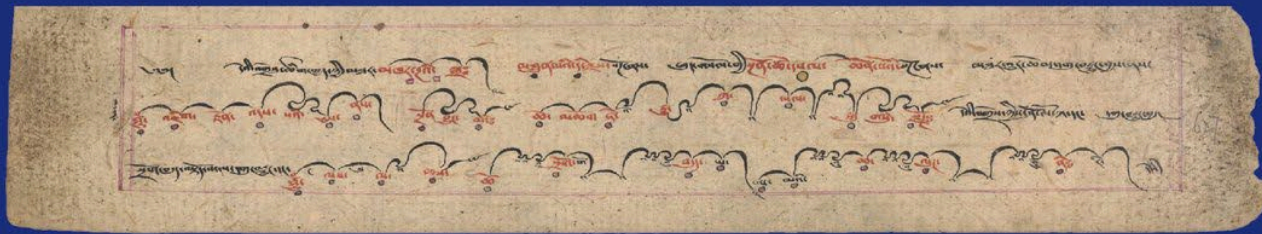
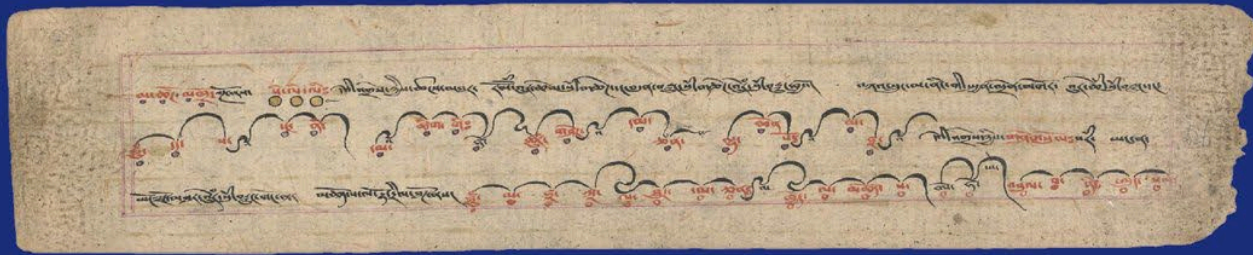
It should be noted, however, that this results in some peculiarities in the treatment of Sanskrit words in Tibetan text. For instance, the Sanskrit long vowels are represented in IAST using a macron:  $\bar{a}$ ,  $\bar{i}$ ,  $\bar{u}$ , for example. They are transliterated in Tibetan, however, by adding a special character, called *'a chung*, as a subscript to the short vowel. Several different transcriptions have been proposed to represent this; Imaeda 2011, for instance, suggests adopting  $\wedge a$ ,  $\wedge i$ ,  $\wedge u$  for the long vowels just given, while in “extended Wylie” they are rendered *A*, *I*, and *U*. Similarly, the Tibetan representations of the Sanskrit retroflex consonants—such as *t*, *d*, *n*—are to be written in majuscule in the other systems to which we refer: *T*, *D*, *N*. Because the alternatives are in most cases unambiguously equivalent— $\bar{a} = \wedge a = A$ ,  $t = T$ , for instance—both systems are used at various points in these volumes, though IAST is generally favored to facilitate use of the book by readers focusing primarily on Indological studies.

For Chinese, we use the now-standard Pinyin transcriptions throughout, though for a small number of proper nouns, such as Peking (for Beijing in some contexts), older forms that will nonetheless be widely recognized by anglophone readers have been sometimes retained.

In references and citations, of course, the usage of the original work cited is followed without regard to these stipulations.



# Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books



## Volume II ◊ ELABORATIONS

Edited by Matthew T. Kapstein

## Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books, Volume II





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# Tibetan Manuscripts and Early Printed Books

VOLUME II · ◊ · ELABORATIONS



*Edited by Matthew T. Kapstein*

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Frontispiece: Guru Rinpoché and consorts, from the Rikdzin Tsewang Norbu manuscript of the *Nyingma Gyübum*.  
Fig. 11.23.

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## Preface

In this volume, we turn from broad topics in the study of the Tibetan book to examine particular genres and types of books and documents, together with two concluding case studies. As in the first volume, however, our key concerns continue to be the codicological, paleographical, and other formal features of Tibetan manuscripts and prints. As this volume emerged from the same project and thus shares much in the way of

background with the preceding one, the acknowledgments, contributors, transcription conventions, and glossary of selected terms are not repeated here; readers are asked to consult the first volume for the relevant details. On the other hand, we have included here a “Glossary of Tibetan Terms Relating to Manuscripts, Xylographic Prints, and Their Manufacture” that bears on the content of both this volume and its predecessor.

## Divination Manuals and Almanacs

*Matthew T. Kapstein*



Techniques of divination and astrology, together with methods of calendrical and astronomical calculation, occupied positions of considerable importance in the management of Tibetan affairs of all kinds.<sup>1</sup> Religious rituals, marriages, funerals, decisions of government, construction work, business dealings, travel, and even such common matters as scheduling a haircut could seldom proceed without at least a passing glance at the year's almanac (*lo tho*, see §18.2.3). Though the vast field of divinatory sciences was dominated by the refined and prestigious systems of astral calculation (*skar rtsis*) and elemental calculation (*'byung rtsis*), methods based on throwing dice (*sho mo*), counting rosaries (*'phreng rtsis*), casting tangled yarn (*'ju thig*), interpreting dreams (*rmi lam brtags pa*), consulting oracular mediums (*lha babs*), scapulimancy, and examining all sorts of natural phenomena, including reflections, animal calls, features of landscape, and much more, were widely practiced and considered to offer reliable guides for activity.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, an enormous literature in Tibetan devoted to these topics is preserved in manuscripts and, from later times, printed books as well. Depending on the specific methods described, works in this area may be highly technical and are sometimes accompanied by diagrams, tables, and detailed illustrations; their use often requires specialized training. This rich store of visual data lends a particular interest to many manuscripts and xylographic

prints in this field. In the short space of this chapter, it will not be possible to explore this rich subject matter in depth; it must suffice instead to present some examples, described in general terms, to introduce an area of research that has been but modestly explored to date.

### 18.1. TWO DIVINATION TEXTS FROM DUNHUANG

Like many other types of documents we have examined, our earliest Tibetan divination texts are among the documents from Dunhuang, which include descriptions of various methods of prognostication using, among other means, dice, coins, astrological charts, burnt sheep scapulae, dream interpretation, and bird calls. The Dunhuang Tibetan corpus in this area draws on diverse sources, most prominently on Chinese mantic traditions, but others as well; one such work, reflecting the influence of Nestorian Christianity, includes an augury of heavenly birth in the company of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Although most of these documents rely on text alone—IOL Tib J 742 on coin divination is a case in point (fig. 18.1)<sup>4</sup>—some manuscripts illustrated with charts and diagrams are also known.<sup>5</sup> Examples include scrolls describing divination by bird calls that include distinctive charts detailing the signs to be observed and their interpretation (fig. 18.2).<sup>6</sup>



Handwritten Chinese text on a scroll, organized into paragraphs separated by vertical lines. The text is written in vertical columns from right to left. Each paragraph begins with a distinct character, likely a head letter for divination. The script is clear and consistent throughout the document.

FIG. 18.1. On coin divination. The text is written on the blank back of a recuperated Chinese scroll. Note the clearly marked division of paragraphs, each one, after the initial preamble, explaining a different throw of the coins. © The British Library Board, IOL Tib J 742.

All the Tibetan texts on coin divination found at Dunhuang are recorded on vertical scrolls. IOL Tib J 742, the only one that is complete, includes forty-nine lines of text written on a scroll of 95 × 27 cm. The method, which is attributed to Confucius (Tibetan Kong tse), employs twelve coins, called *dong tse*, a transcription of Chinese *tongzi* 銅子, “copper coin.” The coins, when cast, are counted by the number of those with the obverse face, or, as we might say, “heads,” turned upward, so that there are thirteen possibilities (all reverse [“tails”], or from one to twelve obverse). After a brief preamble, describing the accoutrements with which one who performs the divination should be equipped (such as offerings of incense and turquoise),

The table is structured as follows:

- Horizontal Rows:**
  - Row 1: Offerings to be scattered for crows.
  - Row 2: Directions for placing the offerings.
- Vertical Columns:**
  - Column 1: Lists the periods into which the day is divided.
  - Columns 2-13: Represent different directions.
- Table Body:**
  - Each cell contains a prognostication based on the direction and time.
  - Cells are organized into vertical columns, with the first column on the left containing the most detailed prognostications.

FIG. 18.2. The divination table from Pelliot tibétain 1045. The first horizontal row describes the offerings that are to be scattered for the crows, and the second row gives the direction in which they are to be placed. The first vertical column lists the periods into which the day is divided. Depending, then, on the direction in which and time at which the crows’ calls are observed, the prognostication may be read in the cell at the intersection of the column and row concerned. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

the interpretations of the possible throws are given in thirteen paragraphs. Although there is no graphic representation of the coin throws, the use of the text is facilitated by the clear division of the paragraphs, both by beginning each new paragraph with a head letter (*mgoyig*) and by the addition of drawings of small flowers or elaborated *shé* (*shad*) at the conclusion of each, a visual convention that makes it easy to locate the paragraph that pertains to the result one has obtained. As an example of the type of prognostication we find here, the interpretation of the first possible throw reads:

If one coin is obverse, it is the prognostic of the sun rising in the valley.

If [this divination is] cast for home-luck and prosperity-luck, [the result is] good.  
 If [cast] for lost property, [it will be] regained.  
 If cast for a sick person, [he will] recover.  
 If cast for the person you are waiting for, [he will] soon come.  
 This divination, for whatever it is cast, [the result will be] very [good].<sup>7</sup>

Bird divination is, like coin divination, represented in the corpus by vertical scrolls, of which Pelliot tibétain (PT) 1045 (88 × 32 cm) and IOL Tib J 747 (104 × 29.5 cm) are the best preserved and are closely similar in content. The work begins with a preliminary section explaining general directives for the performance of the divination, which requires observing the time and place in which the calls of the crow (or “raven” in Laufer’s translation of PT 1045) are heard, as well as their quality:

The Raven is the protector of men,  
 And the officiating priest (carries out) the order of the gods.  
 (Sending him, the Raven) into the middle of the country,  
 Where he has occasion for feeding on yak-flesh in the out-lying pasture-lands,  
 The Venerable of the Gods conveys (his will) by means of the sound-language (of the Raven).  
 When in the eight quarters, making nine with the addition of the zenith,  
 He (the Raven) sounds his notes, the three means (to be observed) are explained as follows:  
 The offering must be presented to the bird (the Raven),  
 And it should be a complete feeding in each instance.  
 (In this manner, the offering) is given into the hands of the god (or gods).  
 As to the omens, they are not drawn from the mere cries (of the Raven),  
 But in the announcement of the omens a distinction is made between good and evil cries.  
 The officiating priest is in possession of the knowledge of the gods,  
 He teaches (the orders of) the gods, and it is the bird who is his helpmate (in this task).  
 The remedies for warding off the demons are announced by the helpmate.  
 Trustful in his speech, he proves trustworthy,  
 For the Raven is a bird of Heaven;

He is possessed of six wings and six pinions.  
 Thanks to his visits above in the land of the gods,  
 His sense of sight is keen, and his hearing is sharp.  
 (Hence he is able) to teach (mankind) the directions of the gods.  
 There is for man but one method of examining (the sounds of the Raven),  
 And may you hence have faith and confidence (in his auguries)!  
 In the eight quarters, making nine with the addition of the zenith, (the following sounds of the Raven occur):  
 The sound *thoñ thoñ* foretells a lucky omen.  
 The sound *t’ag t’ag* forebodes an omen of middle quality.  
 The sound *krag krag* foretells the coming of a person from a distance.  
 The sound *krog krog* announces the arrival of a friend.  
 The sound, *iu, iu* is an augury of any future event (as indicated in the Table).<sup>8</sup>

Depending on the time of day when and the quarter where the crow partakes of the offering and caws, the significance of the augury may be determined by referring to the table. For instance, the bird’s cry in the east at sunset signifies the coming of demons (*’dre gdon ’ong bar ston*), whereas if the site is the northeast at noon, a white woman will arrive (*bud myed dkar mo ’ong bar ston*).<sup>9</sup> A final textual passage following the table and preserved in IOL Tib J 747 but not PT 1045 summarizes some additional prognostications ensuing from observations of crows while one is on a journey.<sup>10</sup> The tabular form we see first emerging here would be deployed with increasing intricacy in the manuals of divination and astrology that appeared in later times.

## 18.2. CLASSICAL SYSTEMS OF DIVINATION AND ASTROLOGY

The preeminent mantic sciences in Tibet were the Chinese-derived system of elemental calculation (*nag rtsis, ’byung rtsis*) and the Indian methods of astral calculation (*skar rtsis*). The latter term is often also used as a general designation for the entire domain. As in the medical traditions (see chap. 15), which synthesized aspects of Indian, Chinese, and indigenous lore, a distinctive Tibetan contribution in this area was the creation of an original synthesis, whose diverse sources are clearly in evidence in the annual Tibetan almanac (see §18.2.3), the indispensable device required for planning



and undertaking activities of all kinds. Although the main components of the astral and divinatory systems employed here were established in Tibet by the first centuries of the second millennium, they continued to be amplified and refined at least through the eighteenth century, when improved calendrical calculations introduced in China by Jesuit missionaries found their way into some Tibetan traditions as well.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from such late modifications, however, it appears that, in most aspects of their form and content, Tibetan books in the areas that concern us here were standardized during the seventeenth century, when, as in many other fields, the newly founded regime of the Ganden Podrang sought to establish clear models in all areas impinging on official and administrative practice. The effort to trace out the evolution of Tibetan mantic books with precision, however, is impeded by the paucity of documented exemplars dating to the centuries preceding the establishment of the Ganden Podrang.<sup>12</sup> As we will see in the case of the rich visual traditions of the *Svarodayatantra* (see §18.2.2), we do have definite evidence that their representation under the Ganden Podrang closely followed models created at least two centuries before. If this can be generalized, we may assume that the standards adopted during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were for the most part conservative, adhering closely to earlier precedents.

In the wide field of astral and elemental calculation taken as a whole, the great work of synthesis was the *White Beryl* (*Bai dūrya dkar po*) written by the Fifth Dalai Lama's protégé and regent, Sanggyé Gyamtso (1653–1705).<sup>13</sup> With the exception of those materials introduced into Tibetan astral sciences during the eighteenth century, this encyclopedic compendium draws together all the essential threads that are woven into the composition of the annual calendars and almanacs, together with the essentials of horoscopy, geomancy, and other mantic methods. The subject matter, which is notably technical and specialized, was accompanied by an elaborate corpus of illustrations, appearing in more or less detailed form in both xylographic prints and manuscripts. An outstanding example of the place of this material in Tibetan visual culture is a manuscript created for the court of Sakya during the early eighteenth century, whose intricate miniature paintings and diagrams originally described most parts of the *White Beryl*. The portion of the manuscript preserved today covers primarily the chapters pertaining to elemental calculation.<sup>14</sup>

The examples of manuscripts of the astral and divinatory sciences that follow relate to Sanggyé Gyamtso's

*White Beryl* in various ways. In the first, on geomancy, the relation is clear and explicit, for in this case the *White Beryl* is precisely cited. The second, an undated manuscript of the charts of the *Svarodayatantra*, concerns subject matter of importance to and surveyed in the *White Beryl*, though the manuscript seems otherwise not directly connected to it. Finally, the almanacs examined in the last section illustrate the practical application of the eclectic astrological system that was promulgated by the regent.

### 18.2.1. A Book of Geomantic Signs

Chapter 32 of the *White Beryl*, on geomancy (*sa dpyad*), is not at all represented in the illuminated manuscript from Sakya.<sup>15</sup> Two manuscripts illustrating this chapter are now known, however, both from Mongolia and bearing the title “All-Clarifying Mirror of Exemplary Illustrations for the Examination of Inimical Earth Forces as Valued Everywhere for Construction, Agriculture, Graves, and So On” (*khang sa zhing sa dur sa sogs | kun la gces pa'i sa dgra rim | brtag tshul'dra ba'i dpe ri mo | kun gsal me long*). One of these manuscripts is catalogued in three parts in the collection of the Bavarian State Library in Munich (Cod.tibet. 895–897) and appears to be disordered; the second is known from the archive of the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC; work W3JT13627) and covers almost the whole of the chapter but is also sometimes out of order (fig. 18.3). In respect to their iconography, the two manuscripts are substantially identical, and both similarly include extracts from the *White Beryl* as captions to the illustrations. The artwork and calligraphy in the exemplar from Munich appear to have been more finely executed than they were in the latter, which may well have originated as a copy of the Munich manuscript.<sup>16</sup>

The illustrations, while resembling the Sakya *White Beryl* manuscript in elements of style and iconography, nonetheless do on occasion include details reflecting their Mongolian provenance, though the careful *uchen* handwriting and generally high standard of orthography point to a thoroughly Tibetanized milieu. One interesting indication that this manuscript was prepared by persons intimately familiar with the Tibetan divinatory and astral arts is seen in the manuscript's foliation, which uses, instead of numerals, the symbolic references to the numbers taught in connection with the astral sciences, such as “moon” (*zla ba* = 1), “eyes” (*mig* = 2), and “fire” (*me* = 3).<sup>17</sup>

The first two folio sides reproduced here (fol. 2a [fig. 18.3a]; fol. 1b [fig. 18.3b]) include, in the text blocks to

A



B



C



D



E



FIG. 18.3A–E. The first five illustrated folio sides from the “All-Clarifying Mirror of Exemplary Illustrations for the Examination of Inimical Earth Forces.” Mongolia, ca. nineteenth century. Courtesy of the Buddhist Digital Resource Center, W3JT13627.



the left and right of fol. 2a and to the left of 1b, selections from the beginning of the *White Beryl*, chapter 32, which summarize the procedures and rituals to be undertaken at the beginning of a geomantic examination of a given place.<sup>18</sup> These rituals include establishing a pure and auspicious dwelling (fol. 1b [fig. 18.3b], left-most illustration), before which one burns incense in a brazier or pit and observes the dispersal of the smoke. The five examples on fol. 1b and six on fol. 2a (fig. 18.3a) depict the manner in which the *White Beryl* then interprets the wafting smoke: incense smoke circling to the right and then turning left is “good” (*bzang*), as is the movement to the right of smoke from burnt flour, or that of burnt cane. The last two vessels to the right on fol. 1b illustrate the general principle that the smoke’s movement to the east is good and to the south, “bad” (*ngan*). Folio 2a then completes the series, designating movement to the west as good and to the north, southeast, southwest, northwest, and northeast as “mediocre” (*bring*). The text of the *White Beryl*, however, holds both south and west to be “bad” (*ngan*). This and other occasional discrepancies, given the manuscript’s general fidelity to Sanggyé Gyamtso’s work, remain to be explained, though they may well have originated as simple copyist’s errors.

Following the preliminary rites, one undertakes an assessment of the features of the terrain being considered. The *White Beryl* divides this into three main topics: ascertaining and rejecting evil omens, the identification of positive features, and the initiation of construction projects. Each of these is presented through many subtopics, the numerous signs and omens mentioned there being detailed in the illuminations of the “All-Clarifying Mirror.” The three remaining folio sides (fig. 18.3c–e) presented here exemplify its treatment of this material.

The third folio side (fol. 2b [fig. 18.3c]) illustrates the first six and the eighth of the eight signs of “ruinous demons of the earth” (*sa yi ’phung sri*): the first resembles a brown bear’s tangled mane; the second, a demon’s gaping mouth; the third, streams that flow like tears; the fourth, a *yakṣa*’s lance; the fifth, the ruins of a haunted house; the sixth, a wolf rushing forward; the eighth (here numbered seven), the marks left by claws. (The seventh sign, missing here, resembles a *rākṣasa*’s lance.) The folio that follows, numbered 3 (*me*, “fire”), in fact illustrates passages that occur much later in the text, in its seventeenth section, on “inimical terrain” (*sa dgra*, literally “earth enemy”). It probably should be the third folio of a later section but has been inserted in its present position in the first section by error. The

eight images recto and the first two verso represent signs in cliffs and rocky outcroppings that are associated with ailments that afflict the sense organs and cause pus secretions to those inhabiting these places: signs resembling the beaks and claws of birds, camels’ muzzles, the faces of lions, frogs, and turtles, and the heads of tigers.<sup>19</sup> The remaining omens illustrated on the page relate to the passages of the *White Beryl* that immediately follow: a wildcat with gaping mouth betokens land from which settled people will flee; formations resembling jawbones or the scorpion’s telson, earth that has lost its luster, remains of landslides, the foot of an eroded mountain, the place where the plain vanishes in the hills, a plain resembling a flayed human skin—these are locations in which neither monasteries nor towns can prosper.<sup>20</sup>

Learning to detect the signs that are described here in the landscape no doubt required the guidance of a skilled diviner. As it seems unlikely that the illustrations are to be taken as providing practical guidance in this regard, the precise role of these delightfully illuminated books remains uncertain. The situation resembles that which we saw in the manuscripts on hippiatry studied in chapter 16; the book, in these cases, fulfills the requirement, for the subject matter concerned, that there be a book, even if in practice its use is restrained. In this instance, however, these manuals of geomancy were very richly and carefully illustrated and were therefore costly objects. Though they bear a clear relation to the contents of the *White Beryl*, their employment in connection with it would seem to have been limited to a possible function as aide-mémoires. It is equally possible that, like some European illuminated manuscripts devoted to secular matters, they were intended primarily for the edification and amusement of wealthy persons who were probably not geomancers themselves.

### 18.2.2. *Svarodaya*, the “Emergence of Vocalic Sound”

One of the least studied aspects of the composite system of Tibetan astral calculation, the “Tantra of the Emergence of Vocalic Sound” (*Svarodayatantra*, Tibetan *dbyangs ’char gyi rgyud*), presents us with entirely different circumstances, for here the pictorial matter is an essential element of the tradition, without which it cannot be transmitted or practiced at all.<sup>21</sup> This work and the methods of prognostication it describes, which were derived from Śivāite antecedents and assimilated into later Indian Buddhism under the aegis of the



*Kālacakratantra*, reached Tibet during the thirteenth century via its transmission in the Khaśa Malla Kingdom at Jumla in western Nepal. It was translated into Tibetan by Lowo Lotsawa Sherap Rinchen, a native of Mustang (*Glo Smon thang*) and teacher of Chögyel Pakpa.<sup>22</sup> The *Svarodaya*'s close relationship with the Śivaïte milieu from which it emerged is seen in the lineage through which it was taught, which includes the renowned Kashmiri tantric master Abhinavagupta (ca. 950–1016) and other teachers who can probably be identified among his immediate predecessors.<sup>23</sup>

Among the distinctive features of the *Svarodayatantra* is its employment of a complex program of roughly two hundred charts and diagrams, called “wheels” (Sanskrit *cakra*, Tibetan *'khor lo* or *tsakra*), representing methods of calculation, positions of planets and constellations, and divinations pertaining to numerous activities and circumstances, including military campaigns, illness and death, construction work, travel, and marriage. Activities relating to kingship, governance, public works, and war receive much emphasis, reflecting the first part of the tantra's title, “Martial Conquest” (*gyul las rgyal ba*). Although the *White Beryl* manuscript is missing most of the folios in which an abbreviated version of this program as given there was depicted, a number of other manuscript sources for the diagrams of the *Svarodayatantra* are now known. These include two long vertical scrolls, one probably from the fifteenth and the other from the eighteenth century, and a manuscript, considered below, that was found in far eastern Tibet and that perhaps dates to the seventeenth century, although this remains uncertain.<sup>24</sup>

The study and employment of the *Svarodayatantra* was one of the specialties of the Pukpa school of the astral sciences, and through this became one of the currents informing the formation of the Tibetan almanac, as we will see below.<sup>25</sup> Although it came to be, in this respect, an ubiquitous aspect of Tibetan astral and divinatory lore, it appears not to have been widely diffused as an independent work, for which reason manuscripts devoted to it appear to be exceedingly rare.<sup>26</sup>

The sole example of a *poti* illustrating the *Svarodayatantra* that we have so far identified bears the title “Enticing Clarification of the ‘Wheels’ of the Glorious Martial Conquest, the Emergence of Vocalic Sound” (*Dpal gyul las rgyal ba dbangs 'char ba'i 'khor lo rnam kyid dag gsal yid 'phrogs*, figs. 18.4a–e) and occupies images 249–290 in twenty-one folios of a manuscript (originally numbered 227–247) of miscellaneous astrological texts.<sup>27</sup> Both the calligraphy and the style of illustration seem rough and naive, which contributes to the

difficulty in assigning an approximate date to this manuscript. As it is available to us only through scanned digital images, so that the physical examination of the book itself is not possible, no precise estimation can be proposed.

While some of the “wheels” of the *Svarodayatantra* guide methods of astral calculation, many apply the results of such calculations, mapping positions of the planets and lunar mansions onto a variety of diagrams for prognostication in the domains to which they are related. Thus, for example, the first three illustrations to the left of the first folio side (fig. 18.4a) are variations of the “trident wheel” (*trisūlacakra*) used for agriculture prognostication, which appears to be the basis for the “agricultural wheel” (*so nam 'khor lo*) found in many Tibetan almanacs.<sup>28</sup> The image of the warrior at the center is the “wheel for examining military victory or defeat” (*gyul du rgyal 'pham brtag pa'i 'khor lo*). In these and other diagrams of the *Svarodayatantra*, the numeral figures inscribed on or around the images represent the twenty-eight lunar mansions. In the chart to the right, in which fourteen animals are seen, each one governs two of the lunar mansions, the whole being organized to facilitate prognostications for military operations.

The next page side seen here (fig. 18.4b) begins to the left with the “wheel of Brahmā” (*tshangs pa'i 'khor lo*), a guide for auguries of auspicious and inauspicious circumstances in minor undertakings, followed by the “wheel of the Nāga” (*klu'i 'khor lo*) to examine disease, and the “wheel of Saturn” (*spen pa'i 'khor lo*) for prognostications concerning construction projects. Below this, the “wheel of Garuḍa” (fig. 18.4c, left) relates to the actions of kings, and the “wheel adorning the three channels” (*rtsa gsum rgyan gyi 'khor lo*), in the form of a serpent to its right, reveals planetary influences on the energies of the subtle body. In folio 244a (fig. 18.4d), the “wheel of the parasol” (*gdugs kyi 'khor lo*), which is often included in annual almanacs (as in fig. 18.14), is a template for the interpretation of the lunar mansions' governance of favorable and unfavorable outcomes in general during the course of the year. To its right are the wheels “of the lion throne” (*seng ge gdan gyi 'khor lo*), “of the bow and arrow” (*mda' gzhu'i 'khor lo*), and “of the sword” (*ral gri'i 'khor lo*), all used in divinations concerning kingship and war. In the last folio seen here (fig. 18.4e), the “wheel of Rāhu's face” (*rā hu gdong gi 'khor lo*), employed in auguries for minor activities, is accompanied by charts used in the calculation of the course of the “planet” Rāhu (the north lunar node), the cause of the solar eclipse.



FIG. 18.4A–E. Five folio sides (241b, 243a, 243b, 244a, 246a) from a compilation of the diagrams (Sanskrit *cakra*, Tibetan *'khor lo* or *tsakra*) accompanying the *Svarodayatantra*. Courtesy of the Buddhist Digital Resource Center, W4PD971.

With its extensive repertoire of “wheels,” the *Svarodayatantra* presented the Tibetans with a remarkable astrological system, applicable for guiding activities of many kinds, but whose intricacies were mirrored in its recondite character. For this reason, in the *White Beryl* of *desi* Sanggyé Gyamtso and other comprehensive works on astral calculation, the *Svarodaya* was treated selectively and only parts of its repertoire were chosen for inclusion in the eclectic synthesis on which the Tibetan annual almanac is based.

### 18.2.3. Early Almanacs

The technicalities of Tibetan calendrics and astrology greatly surpass the scope of this book. Interested readers may refer to the publications of Schuh, Petri, Henning, and others for fuller explanations.<sup>29</sup> It will be worthwhile, however, to say something about the general structure and form of Tibetan almanacs, the kinds of information they contain, and how this is organized on the page. While the formal development of the Tibetan almanac has not yet been documented,<sup>30</sup> it appears likely that it was more or less standardized, as was





FIG. 18.5. An almanac for the fire mouse year (1696) exemplifies the stitched binding one often finds in practical manuals, including medical handbooks and books of divination. Because the pages are turned horizontally, as in most Western codices, the writing recto and verso is similarly oriented, not flipped as it must be in *poti*-style volumes, including volumes bound along the upper edge, such as the 1782 almanac in fig. 18.6. Note that the title page has been lost; the text begins with the opening verses of homage. Purchase 1936, Carter D. Holton Collection, Collection of the Newark Museum of Art, acc. no. 36.283. Photos: Matthew T. Kapstein.

much else, under the Ganden Podrang administration during the seventeenth century, largely thanks to the great influence of *desi* Sanggyé Gyamtso in this area.<sup>31</sup> Old block-printed and manuscript almanacs are sometimes found in library and museum collections, though pre-twentieth-century almanacs are quite rare.<sup>32</sup>

The earliest example of a complete almanac that we have so far located, which is preserved in the collection of the Newark Museum of Art, dates to the fire mouse year, 1696, during the lifetime of *desi* Sanggyé Gyamtso. As it is very attractively executed and includes the major parts of the standard almanac, as still seen in printed versions today,<sup>33</sup> it may be used to illustrate the introductory narratives and chronologies, and the annual charts and tables for the months and days that make up a Tibetan almanac, these constituents having been stipulated in the *White Beryl* of *desi* Sanggyé Gyamtso.<sup>34</sup> Note that its format, as an oblong volume with a stitched binding to the left (fig. 18.5), is, with few exceptions, the enduring standard, followed in modern printed almanacs as well (though the stitched binding is now usually replaced by an adhesive binding). A second early example that we have located, in the collection of Bodleian Library, Oxford Univer-

sity, is for the water tiger year, equivalent to 1782. It was most likely acquired by Samuel Turner, the East India Company's envoy to Tibet in 1783.<sup>35</sup> The information it contains is simplified in comparison to the 1696 almanac, and it is also somewhat unusual in being stitched at the long edge on top and not at the left-hand margin (fig. 18.6). This also characterizes the 1763 printed almanac (figs. 0.4, 18.7), also in the collection of the Newark Museum, whose several exceptional features remain to be carefully studied.<sup>36</sup>

In general, the year to which a given almanac pertains may be readily identified by an indication in the title of the sexagenary cycle (*rab byung*, Sanskrit *prabhava*) and year concerned. This is the case in the 1763 printed almanac (fig. 18.7), whose title states that it provides calculations for the year called *nyi ma* "sun" (Sanskrit *bhānu*) in the thirteenth cycle (*rab byung bcu gsum pa'i nyi ma zhes bya ba'i lo'i skar rtsis*).<sup>37</sup> In the manuscript of 1696, however, the title page is no longer extant (see fig. 18.5, top), and in the 1782 almanac, although the year is designated, the cycle is not (see fig. 18.6, top). The complete designation of the cycle and year in the almanac's title, when it occurs, permits one to readily determine the equivalent year of the West-



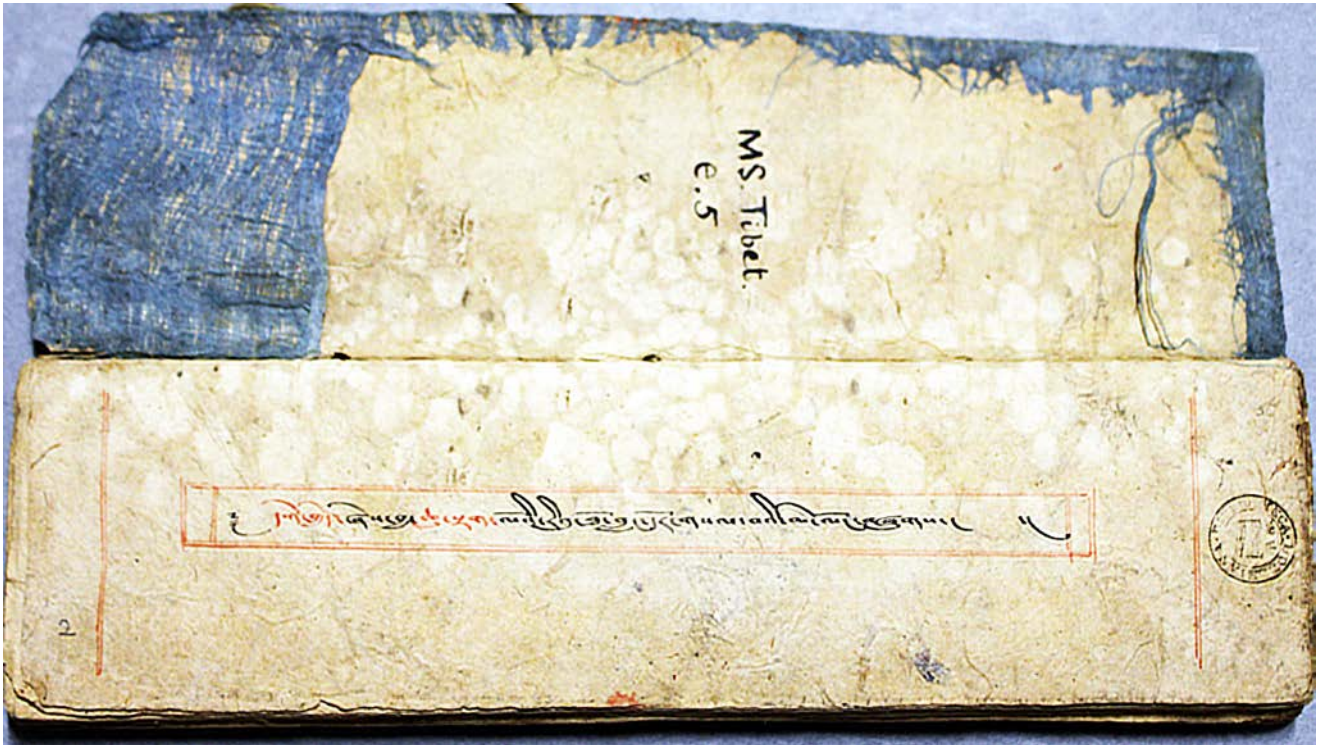


FIG. 18.6. The cover and title page of a 1782 almanac, with the tag “A Tibet Almanack,” perhaps written by Samuel Turner, pasted in the rear cover. The title page names the year—“the water tiger year called *subhakṛta* [in the Indian system]” (*dge byed zhes bya chu stag lo*)—but not the number of the Prabhava cycle (*rab byung*) and uses the unusual spelling *ri’u tho* to designate the almanac. MS Tibet.e.5. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. Photos: Matthew T. Kapstein.

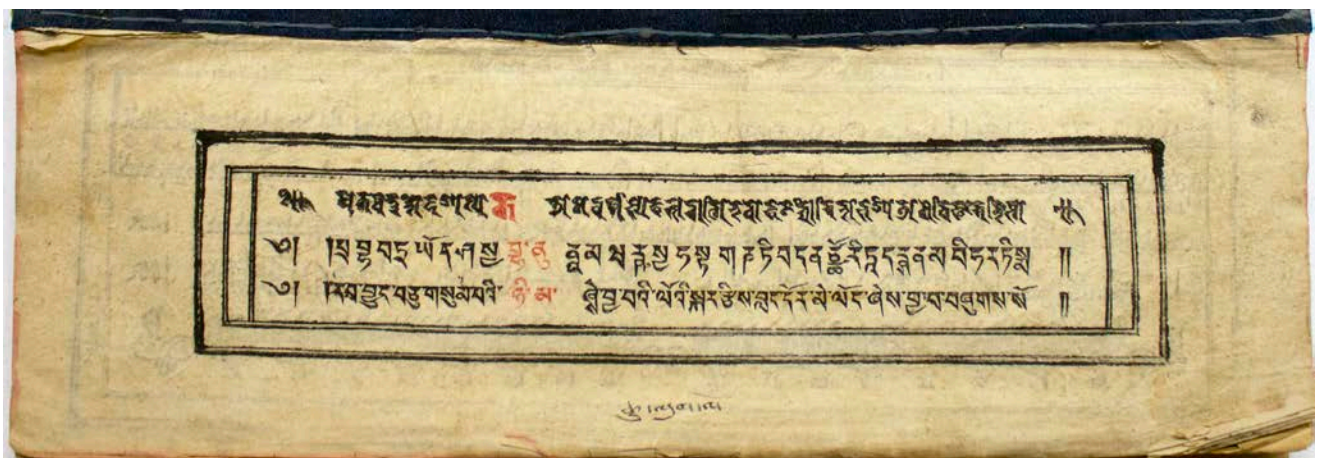


FIG. 18.7. Title page of a 1763 printed almanac from northeastern Tibet. The print served as a template that could be filled in with required information, here in red, in different years. On this page, the thirteenth Prabhava cycle is named in the print, but a space was left to insert the year, in this case *nyi ma* “sun” (Sanskrit *bhānu*), according to the Indian Prabhava system, equivalent to the water sheep year. Purchase 1936, Carter D. Holton Collection, Collection of the Newark Museum of Art 36.440A-C.



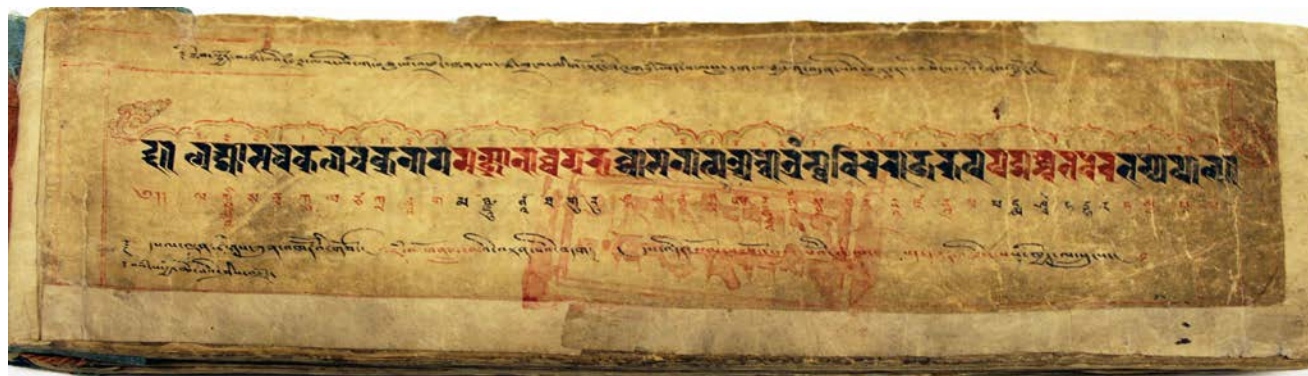


FIG. 18.8. Opening verse of the 1696 almanac honoring the “Holder of the White Lotus” (*pad dkar ’dzin pa*), in this case probably an epithet of the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyamtso (1683–1706). Purchase 1936, Carter D. Holton Collection, Collection of the Newark Museum of Art, acc. no. 36.283. Photo: Matthew T. Kapstein.

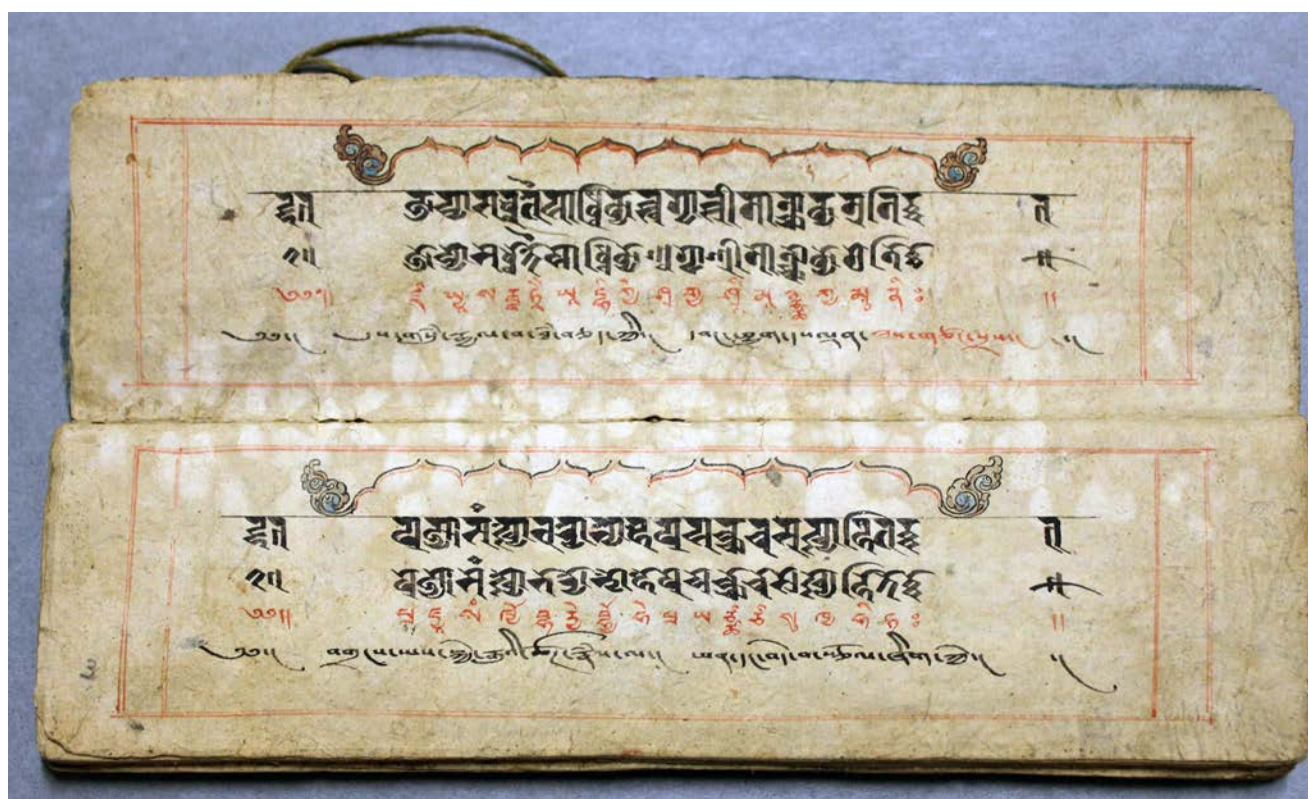


FIG. 18.9. In the 1782 almanac the introductory homage is directed to the Buddha Śākyamuni, addressed here as “Sūdhodana’s son” (*zas gtsang sras*). MS Tibet.e.5. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. Photo: Matthew T. Kapstein.

ern calendar. As we will see, however, even where this information is incomplete or missing, other indications within the almanac usually facilitate the exact determination of its date.

Following the title page, *desi* Sanggyé Gyamtso specifies that the almanac must include opening verses of homage in both Tibetan and Sanskrit, following the metrical conventions used for poetic composition in the latter.<sup>38</sup> In the 1696 almanac, the Sanskrit text appears, as is customary, in the *lantsa* (*rañjana*) orna-

mental script; the scansion of the verses is indicated both by the use of brackets (*sgo khyim*) and, in fine handwriting at the top of the page, by a citation of the relevant metrical rule (fig. 18.8). In the 1782 exemplar (fig. 18.9), a second calligraphic script, known in Tibet as *vartula* (see also fig. 3.23), has been added, and the Sanskrit scansion is suggested by brackets alone, without the detailed citation of the metrical rule.

In most almanacs a series of praises addressed to important figures in the lineage of the astral sciences



and perhaps also the religious lineage in which the almanac is composed are included; in the 1696 almanac this amounts to some thirty verses, but in the abridged 1782 version only about ten. This is then followed by a section devoted to the chronology of the teaching (*bstan rtsis*), which, because each date is calculated in terms of years before the present (b.p.) and not assigned an absolute value, must be adjusted for the new almanac in each passing year. Main events in the history of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, and sometimes Chinese and Mongolian as well, are recounted with key names and terms often rubricated and, for each event whose date is determined, the number of years b.p. noted in superscript numeral figures. In the 1696 almanac (fig. 18.10), for instance, the year of Buddha Śākyamuni's birth carries the notation 2656. As the Pukpa tradition calculates the year in question as the iron monkey year, equivalent to 961 BCE, the year *before* the present year is determined to be 1695, so that the almanac is for 1696. In the 1782 almanac (fig. 18.11) the number of years elapsed is given as 2742, so that 1781 was the year preceding the almanac's composition, a figure that perfectly coheres with the water tiger year (1782) named in the title. As was the case with the opening verses, the chronology of the teaching may be expanded or condensed in lengthy or abridged almanacs, as it is in the two surveyed here, the former devoting roughly three times more space to this than the latter. A similar relation holds between the extent of the content of the other sections of these two almanacs as well.

After the chronology of the teaching, the almanac provides summaries of the important calculations for the year given in the various systems employed: *Kālacakra* (*dus 'khor*), *Svarodaya* (*dbyangs 'char*), Chinese elemental calculation (*rgya nag 'byung rtsis*), and so on. These are given in separate sections and are intended to guide the astrologer's use of the charts, diagrams, and tables for the year, months, and days that occupy the remainder of the almanac. Only a fraction of the contents of an extensive almanac, such as our manuscript of 1696, can be presented here to introduce in a general fashion their appearance and layout.

A peculiarity of the Tibetan calendar is its use of two overlapping systems for counting the months of the lunar year, the Indian system of the *Kālacakratantra* and the Chinese annual cycle. What is commonly celebrated as the Tibetan New Year (*lo gsar*) represents the latter (though discrepancies that have arisen in the course of the centuries have resulted in the Tibetan and Chinese years often beginning a month apart).<sup>39</sup> The New Year of the *Kālacakra* cycle, however, begins

with the third month of the Chinese year (as this is calculated in Tibet) and, because the astronomical calculations of the Tibetan calendar primarily follow the Indian system, the almanac runs from the third month of the designated year through the second month of the year that follows.<sup>40</sup> For this reason, the almanac, in addition to detailed information concerning the Chinese year it primarily concerns, must also include certain general data for the year that follows, together with fully detailed tables for the first two months of that year, corresponding to the last two months of the *Kālacakra* year. This requirement, that the almanac cover important aspects of two years, is graphically seen in two pairs of diagrams found in it.

The "magic square" known as the "nine marks" (*sme ba dgu*) in Tibetan, derived from the Chinese *luoshu* (洛書) square, is an essential component of the system of elemental divination (figs. 18.12, middle, and 18.13, middle): the nine digits, each associated with a particular color, are arranged in nine "palaces" (*pho brang dgu*, after Chinese *jiugong* 九宮) or "islands" (*gling dgu*), and each year in the calendrical cycle is associated with one of the nine resulting squares. These associations may then figure in the determination of numerologically based auguries.<sup>41</sup> The almanac therefore includes the charts of the nine marks for both years with which it overlaps. In the two almanacs examined here, intervening between these charts is the "wheel of Rāhu" (*sgra gcan 'khor lo*), a movable dial that is rotated to calculate the appropriate time and direction for the performance of rituals devoted to the expulsion of malefic influences.<sup>42</sup>

The second pair illustrates, in the two years covered, the placement of the "earth lords" (*sa bdag*), possibly troublesome chthonic spirits with whom one must act in harmony in all undertakings, such as construction work, digging irrigation canals, and the like, that might interfere with the primal forces of the earth. In these charts the animals representing the present and following year are each placed in the center of a square whose outer periphery is divided into twelve directional segments with the name of the earth lord governing that quarter inscribed within it. (Some of these segments may be left blank, indicating a "pure quarter" [*phyogs gtsang*] in which no earth lord is active.)<sup>43</sup> In the 1696 almanac (fig. 18.12, bottom), we therefore see the diagrams of the earth lords surrounding the mouse (1696) and ox (1697), whereas in the 1782 manuscript (fig. 18.13, top) we find the tiger (1782) and rabbit (1783). One important feature of the manuscript almanacs that we do not find in print versions is, of course, the use of



FIG. 18.10. The section on Indian Buddhist chronology in the 1696 almanac. The figure 2656 is inscribed in red above the passage in the second line reading, “Time arrow time eyes have passed before” (*dus mda’ dus mig sngon du ’das*). In this cryptic phrase, the symbolic names for the numerals are used: time = 6, arrow = 5, eyes = 2. The number is to be read from right to left: 6–5–6–2. Purchase 1936, Carter D. Holton Collection, collection of the Newark Museum of Art, acc. no. 36.283. Photo: Matthew T. Kapstein.

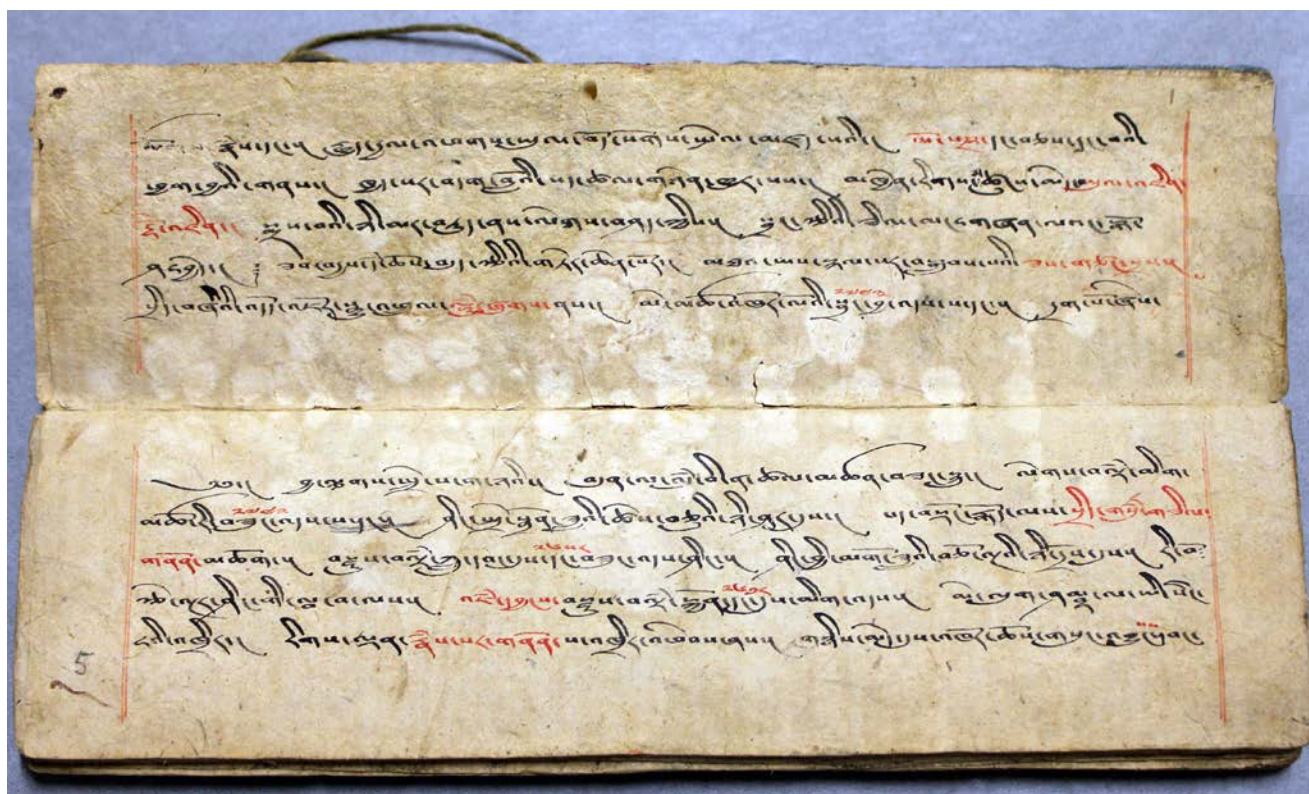


FIG. 18.11. In the 1782 exemplar, the years elapsed since the Buddha’s birth, 2742, are given in the second line of the second folio side shown, above the line reading (beginning at the end of line 1): “[Since he was] well born, eyes ocean mountain pair have passed” (*legs btam mig mtsho ri bzung [sic = zung] ’das pa dang*). Here, ocean = 4, mountain = 7, and pair, like eyes = 2. Hence, 2–4–7–2, also to be read from right to left. MS Tibet.e.5. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. Photo: Matthew T. Kapstein.





FIG. 18.12. Pages in the 1696 almanac with the charts of the “nine marks” (*sme ba dgu*) and positions of the earth lords (*sa bdag*) for the years 1696 (fire mouse) and 1697 (fire ox). The “wheel of Rāhu” (*rā hu 'khor lo*) is placed between the charts of the “nine marks,” and a diagram used in calculations involving the lunar node Rāhu is between portrayals of the earth lords. Purchase 1936, Carter D. Holton Collection, collection of the Newark Museum of Art, acc. no. 36.283. Photos: Matthew T. Kapstein.

color. This is not merely decorative, for the colors are symbolically coded; the red robes that garb the mouse and ox, for instance, signify that these are fire years.<sup>44</sup>

In more elaborate almanacs, like the 1696 manuscript (fig. 18.14), a considerable repertoire of additional charts and diagrams is found. *Desi Sanggyé Gyamtsö*, in the *White Beryl*, lists in summary those that should figure here, drawing above all on the traditions of the *Kālacakratantra* and *Svarodayatantra*.<sup>45</sup> In most cases, the diagrams themselves are illustrated and explained in other parts of the *White Beryl* or other astrological treatises, and this knowledge is presupposed among those consulting the almanac. Substantial parts of the

Tibetan almanac, therefore, can be employed only by relatively advanced students of the astral sciences. For this reason, even well-educated persons will often seek the aid of an expert to conduct a reading.

In the treatment of the respective months, a general explanation of the characteristics of the month overall (called the *zla bshad*) is followed by tables detailing the astrological features of each day. In the manuscript of 1696, which closely follows Indian conventions, we see (in fig. 18.15) facing pages with, on the left, the last days of the month of Jyestha (Tibetan *snron*), corresponding to the fifth “Mongolian” month, followed by the first page of the general explanation of the month of



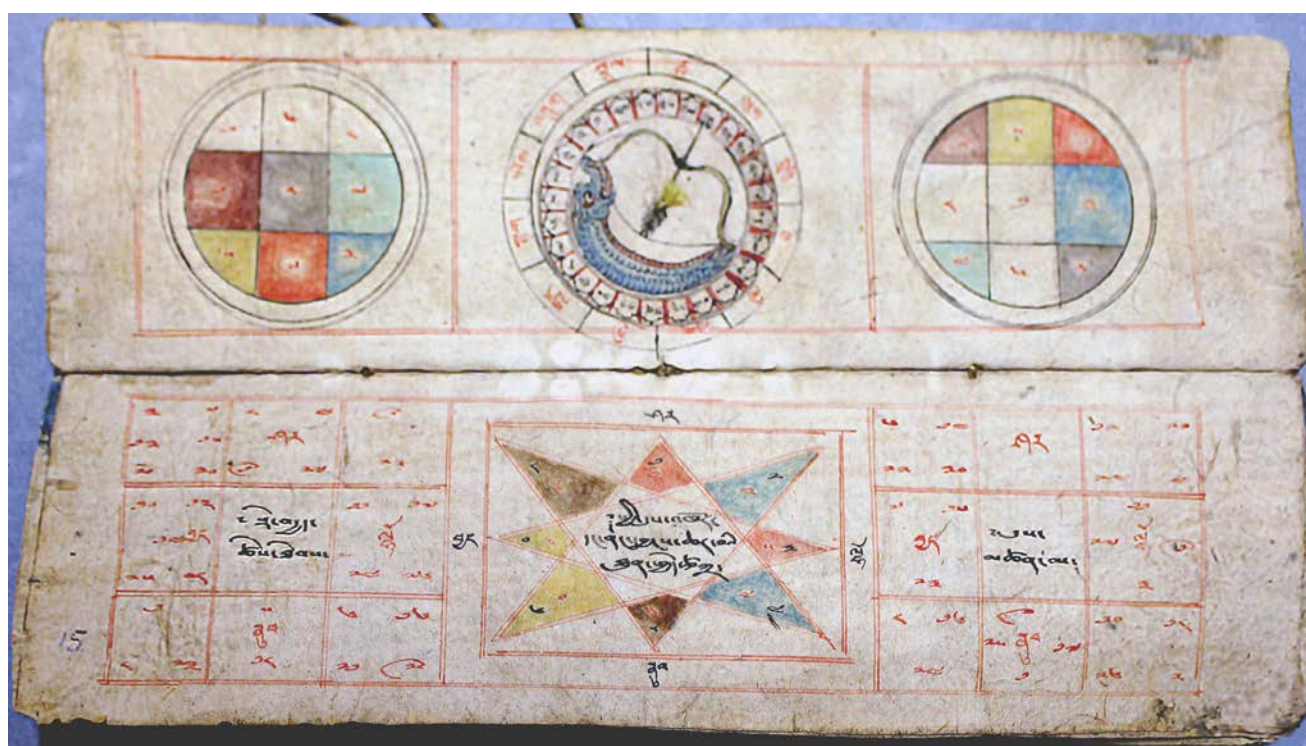


FIG. 18.13. In the 1782 almanac, the diagrams showing the positions of the earth lords in the water tiger (1782) and water rabbit (1783) years occupy one folio side, followed by the charts of the “nine marks” for both years surrounding the “wheel of Rāhu.” The diagram for the calculations of Rāhu is here placed on the next folio, with charts pertaining to determining important dates for the rites of “eightfold group of spirits” (*sde bryad*) and the goddess Kālī (*dus mtsban ma*) to the left and right. MS Tibet.e.5. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. Photos: Matthew T. Kapstein.

Āṣāḍha (Tibetan *chu stod*), which begins, in this case, with an illustrative diagram of associations specific to the month (fig. 18.15 bottom, left).<sup>46</sup> To the right is a miniature of the god Īśvara (Śiva) meeting with his consort, Umādevī. The accompanying text states that their meeting while standing signifies general well-being, good harvests, timely rain, kingly virtue, absence of famine, and the return to peace after war.<sup>47</sup> Many almanacs do not include such richly illustrated introductions to each month, however, and, like the 1782 exemplar, begin with a verbal summary of the month’s chief features alone.

Following the explanation of the month, the requisite information for the days is tabulated by numeral order (1–30), each day represented by a “date cell” (*tshes khongs*) containing, in its upper part, a list of abbreviated expressions that include such information as the name of the day of the week and associated lunar mansion, element, trigram, link in the Buddhist twelvefold scheme of dependent origination (*pratīyasamutpāda*, Tibetan *rtēn ’brel*), earth lord, and so on. Planetary positions and other pertinent astral calculations are listed numerically in the lower part of each cell (figs. 8.15 middle, 8.16 top).<sup>48</sup>



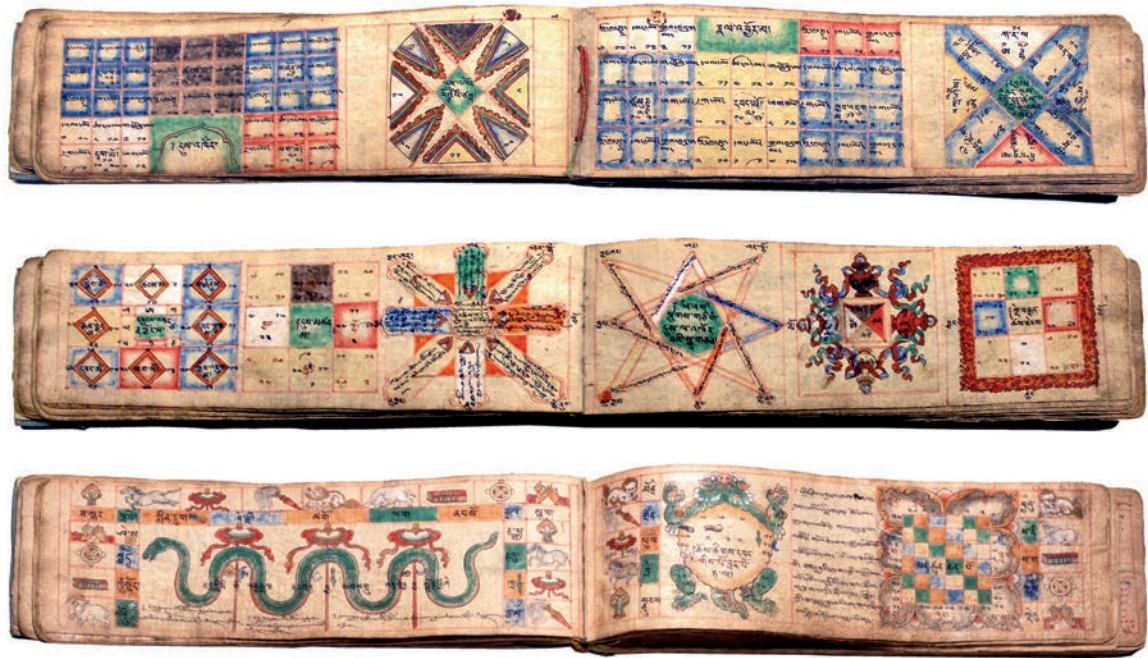


FIG. 18.14. Diagrams (“wheels,” *cakra*) derived from the *Kālacakrantra* and the *Svarodayatantra* in the 1696 manuscript. To the left on the last folio shown here is the “wheel of the parasol,” seen in fig. 18.4D, in a manuscript of the *Svarodaya* diagrams. Note, too, the “tortoise wheel,” also derived from the *Svarodaya* and not to confused with the well-known Chinese tortoise diagram mentioned in n. 5. Purchase 1936, Carter D. Holton Collection, collection of the Newark Museum of Art, acc. no. 36.283. Photos: Matthew T. Kapstein.

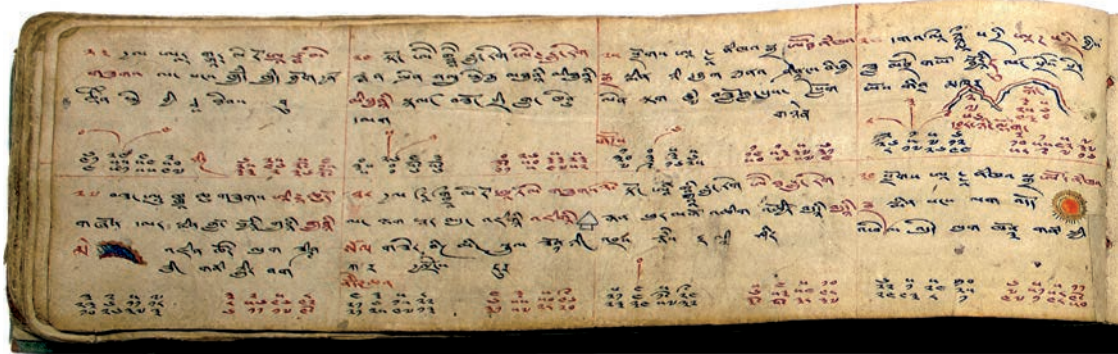


FIG. 18.15. The concluding days of the month of Jyēṣṭha and the introduction to the month of Āṣāḍha in the almanac of 1696. The last eight days of Jyēṣṭha (23–30) are each detailed in a compartment (*tsbes khongs*) listing significant associations and, in the lower part of each compartment in numeral figures, the most important astronomical coordinates. Purchase 1936, Carter D. Holton Collection, collection of the Newark Museum of Art, acc. no. 36.283. Photos: Matthew T. Kapstein.



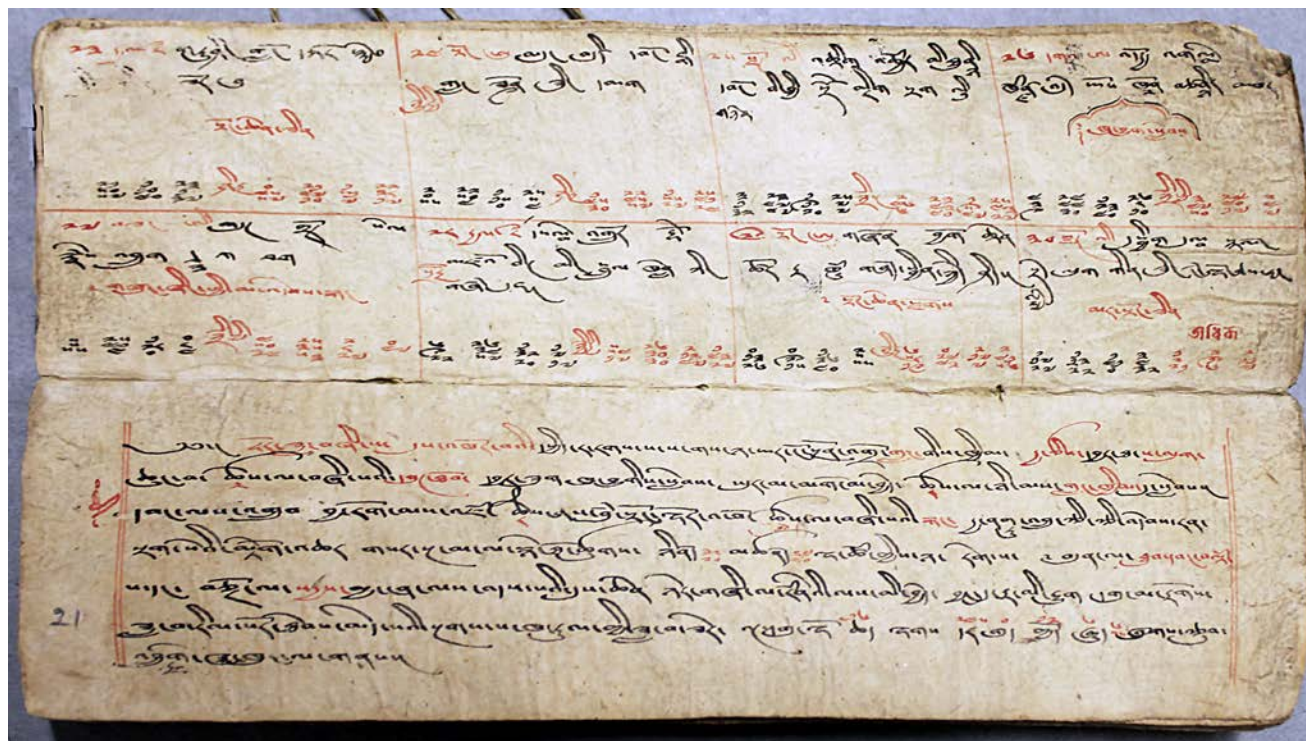


FIG. 18.16. The conclusion of the third “Mongolian” month (*hor zla*) and the introduction to the fourth in the almanac of 1782. MS Tibet.e.5. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. Photos: Matthew T. Kapstein.

The Tibetan almanac, in conclusion, offers a distinctive synthesis, not only of the Indian and Chinese astrological and divinatory systems from which it is derived, but also of diverse means of representation: expository and symbolic language, mathematics, visual symbolism, and an elaborate repertoire of charts, graphs, and tables. Although recent scholarship has begun to elucidate the varied streams that find their confluence in these manuals for guiding the year’s activities, much remains to be explored before all aspects of their history, contents, and formal features are adequately understood.

NOTES

1. Dated but historically interesting surveys of Tibetan astrology and divination include Schlagintweit 1863, chaps. 16–17; and Waddell 1895, chap. 17. Among more recent general accounts, see Ekvall 1963; Radha 1981. Maurer et al. 2019 offers ten studies of various aspects of Tibetan divination and may be taken to represent the state of the field in most areas besides astrology, which is not emphasized therein. For recent scholarship in that field, see n. 29.
2. For current research on specific Tibetan divination systems, see Sobisch and Nielsen 2019 (on rosary and dice divination); Smith 2021 (on pebble divination among the Bon po); and Dotson et al. 2021 (on Indian and Chinese dice divination with reference to its diffusion in Tibet and Inner Asia). One may also note Dotson 2007b, 2014, 2019 (on dice

- divination); Nishida 2016 (on scapulimancy); Orofino 1994 (on mirror divination); Ramble 2009 (on dice divination among the Bon po), 2013 (on Bon po astrology); Róna-Tas 1965 (on iconographic depictions of divination dice); Walter 1996 (on scapulimancy). Stein 1939 examines a set of thirty-three slips in the collection of the British Museum that describe the results of an unidentified system of divination. Goldberg 2000 offers a nonacademic presentation and translation of a system of divination based on the mantra of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī that was promulgated by the famous teacher Mi pham ’jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho (1846–1912).
3. See Uray 1983. For a wide-ranging survey of Chinese divination texts from Dunhuang, see Kalinowski 2003.
4. This manuscript is studied in depth in Nishida 2011, on which the discussion that follows is based.
5. A particularly interesting example, Or. 8210/S.6878 in the collection of the British Library, is an astrological diagram based on the figure of a tortoise, presaging the important role of such charts in later Tibetan divinatory arts. It has been studied in van Schaik 2008. For the tortoise chart in later times, see Yoeli-Tlalim 2018.
6. The manuscript was first noticed and transcribed in Bacot 1913, where it was misinterpreted as concerning divination by lightning. Laufer 1914 correctly understood that the system found there was based on bird calls. Nishida 2013 provides a thorough study of the Dunhuang corpus of Tibetan bird divination manuscripts to which PT 1045 belongs, with reference to the relevant secondary research during the century following Bacot’s and Laufer’s pioneering contributions.
7. Nishida 2011, 319.

8. Laufer 1914, 33–35. Nishida 2013, 322n9, following the closely similar text in IOL Tib J 747, differs with Laufer’s interpretation of the last line and renders it, “[The sound] *^i’u* *^i’u* foretells [that there is] a hindrance.”

9. Nishida 2013, 326n22, suggests that this may refer to the arrival of a goddess.

10. See Nishida 2013 for fully detailed analysis of the table and the other parts of text.

11. Yongdan 2015, 2017.

12. Large numbers of old manuscripts on the astral sciences have been reproduced, for example in the eighty-two-volume series *Bod kyī sman rtsis kyī dpe dkon dpe rnying phyogs bsgrigs*. These materials await close examination, and, until this is done, it is impossible to judge whether some might shed light on the representation of calendrical and astronomical data in the period preceding the Dga’ ldan pho brang. Late editions of many earlier works, however, do survive—an important example is mentioned in the following note—so that the substance of pre-Dga’ ldan pho brang knowledge in the area is generally well preserved.

13. Sde srid 1996. This vast work represents the tradition known as *Phug lugs* among the several Tibetan systems of astral calculation and follows the earlier synthesis by Phug pa Lhun grub rgya mtsho, the *Pad dkar zhal lung*, written in 1447.

14. This manuscript is now preserved in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City; see <https://rubinmuseum.org/blog/collection-highlight-white-beryl-manuscript> (accessed October 24, 2021). It has been reproduced in full detail with thorough commentary in Dorje 2001. Images of the manuscript have also been posted online at [www.himalayanart.org](http://www.himalayanart.org), item nos. 44801–44895. As Dorje 2001, 19–20, notes, the manuscript originally included illustrations for those chapters of the *White Beryl* concerning the zodiac and planetary movements, as well as the chapters on the *Svarodayatantra*. Six folios from the latter section apparently survive but, with the exception of one illustration (21), these have not been published.

15. The most detailed study to date of geomantic methods as represented in Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho’s work is Maurer 2019d. See also Maurer 2012, 2014, 2015, 2019e, 2019f, and Maurer, Rossi, and Scheuermann 2019, chap. 5.

16. Scanned images of Bavarian State Library Cod.tibet. 895–897 are available at <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/>. Parts of the manuscript have been studied in Maurer 2014, 2015, 2019f.

17. These conventions are borrowed directly from Indian symbolic numerals, for a summary of which see Subbarayappa and Sarma 1985, 332–333. See also §4.2. Oddly, in fig. 18.3, “moon” (1) intervenes between “eyes” (2) and “fire” (3). Small numeral figures written in the upper left corner confirm this understanding. The subject matter, as given here, however, is not yet correctly ordered. The content of “moon” was erroneously inscribed on the first folio recto, so that the true beginning of the chapter was then placed on fol. 2. The reader was thereby obliged to read in this order: 1a (title), 2a, 1b, 2b, 3a, and so on. This peculiarity is found in both the Munich and BDRC exemplars, tending to confirm that one was copied from the other, or the two from a common model.

18. The order of these passages, in relation to the text of the Sde srid 1996 (2:241–242), must be read in the sequence 2a left, 1b left, 2a right.

19. Sde srid 1996, 2:250.

20. Sde srid 1996, 2:251.

21. The full title is *G.yul las rnam par rgyal ba zhes bya ba’i rgyud gyi rgyal po dbyangs ’char ba*; Sanskrit *Yuddhajayārṇava-tantrarāja-svarodaya-nāma*. It is found, interestingly, in the *bzo rig* (“arts and crafts”) section of the Bstan ’gyur, Toh 4322, Peking 5813. A synthesis of traditional accounts of its history is given in Tshul khriims rgyal mtshan 1998a.

22. Dorje 1999, concerning a fifteenth-century scroll depicting the charts of the Buddhist *Svarodayatantra*, appears to be the only Western publication about it. I am grateful to the late Gyurme Dorje’s wife, Xiaohong Dorje, for sharing with me her husband’s unpublished notes on the *Svarodaya* from which that short article was derived. For a translation of a Śivaite version of the *Svarodaya*, see Daniélou 1982.

23. Naudou 1980, 119–120. In the Tibetan lineage list of the *Svarodayatantra*, Abhinavagupta’s great-grand-teacher is named as Utpal bzang po, no doubt to be identified with the Utpaladeva of the Kashmiri tradition. If that is correct, then his successor, Dpal gsang ba’i mtshan can, is probably Abhinavagupta’s teacher Lakṣmaṇagupta. The Tibetan tradition, however, names one figure as intervening between them, the otherwise unknown Dpal Yi dam bzang po. Although the Indian sources available to me do not establish whether Abhinavagupta did in fact play a role in the transmission of the *Svarodaya*, one reference in his *Īśvarapraty-abhijñā-vivṛṭivimarśinī* (Shāstrī 1938, 3:100) does establish that he knew of the work and its system of *cakras*. I am grateful to Harry Spier for locating and calling my attention to this reference.

24. The fifteenth-century scroll mentioned in n. 22 and studied by Gyurme Dorje is privately held. Digital images of the eighteenth-century scroll, in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art, New York, may be seen at <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/65765> (accessed November 5, 2021).

25. The extensive fifteenth-century commentary on the *Svarodayatantra* by Phug pa Lhun grub rgya mtsho is included in Byams pa ’phrin las 1998, 3:1–485.

26. Dorje 2001, 16, comments: “Owing to the secrecy of the *Svarodaya* system, which is repeatedly mentioned in its canonical treatises, it appears to have been rarely applied in Tibet in the manner of the Indian astrological tradition, or indeed that of Chinese elemental divination, both of which have a popular resonance. Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho in *White Beryl* even recounts how Glo-bo Lo-tsa-ba reputedly burned some of the charts associated with the more bloodthirsty rites of warfare (*gYul-rgyal skor-sogs dmar-nag-gi ’khor-lo*) and concealed others from the public domain. Writing in the nineteenth century, ’Jam-mgon Kong-sprul observed that the practical techniques of *Svarodaya* were still more prevalent in India and Nepal than in Tibet. Since the essential points of its instructions were largely concealed, nowadays in Tibet these techniques have generally survived in name alone, as part of an artistic heritage.”

27. BDRC no. W4PD971, vol. 34 of the manuscript collection of Dro bo bla ma. This volume includes, in images 291–346, a second manuscript concerning the *Svarodaya* charts,



titled *dpal dbyangs 'char ba'i re'u mig legs nyes kun gsal dri med shel gyi me long ngo mtshar rgyan gyi phra tshom*.

28. The “agricultural wheel” is described in Sde srid 1996, 2:400. It is also emphasized in modern manuals, such as Rkang btsugs 2002, 19.

29. Schuh 2012 is an extensive four-volume compendium including Schuh's own previous publications on the astral sciences, as well as valuable selections from the writings of Pelliot, Laufer, Petri, Yamaguchi, and Tseng. The fourth volume offers an alphabetical encyclopedia covering much of the terminology of Tibetan mathematics, astronomy, and astrology. Additional contributions in this area include Cornu 1990, 1997; Henning 2007; and Janson (2007) 2014.

30. Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan 1998b summarizes traditional accounts.

31. The Sde srid outlines the composition of the almanac in chap. 14 of his *White Beryl*, with variations for extensive, middle-length, and abridged versions. He declares there (1:174) that his presentation is “unprecedented” (*sngon med*), but this may only mean that it is his explicit exposition of the components of the almanac that is an innovation; almanacs that served as models for him no doubt already existed. Although the almanac is now generally designated *lo tho* in Tibetan, the Sde srid uses *le'u tho*, and the 1782 almanac discussed below reads *ri'u tho*. Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan 1998b, 473, suggests a derivation from Sanskrit *rtu*, “season, time period,” though this is perhaps fanciful.

32. The BDRC archive now includes scans of numerous *lo tho*, some from the early twentieth century, but not earlier.

33. The most widely diffused of modern almanacs, serving as a model for many of the almanacs published throughout the Tibetan world, was issued by the Lhasa Sman rtsis khang, founded by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1916 and first directed by Mkhyen rab nor bu (1883–1962).

34. Sde srid 1996, 1: chap.14.

35. See Turner 1800 for an account of his mission in Tibet and Bhutan.

36. The 1763 xylographic almanac unusually combines print with handwritten numeral figures and notes; the printed parts in fact serve as a template that can be filled in with different details in different years. It also includes several movable dials, used for effecting various calculations. These

features are exceptional among the printed *lo tho* I have been able to examine.

37. The title in this case is unusual in using only the proper name of the year according to the sixty-year Indian Prabhava cycle, but not the Chinese element-animal designation, which is current in Tibet. The name of the year has been entered by hand in red ink in both Sanskrit and Tibetan.

38. Sde srid 1996, 1:174. It may be noted that, although Tibetan almanacs almost always follow his directives and include verses in Sanskrit, these are seldom very correct. On Tibetan composition in Sanskrit, see Kapstein 2018a.

39. The months of the Chinese calendar are referred to in Tibet as *hor zla*, literally “Mongolian months,” reflecting the association of the system with the Mongol-ruled Yuan dynasty in China.

40. In fact, the *Kālacakra* system proposes several possible dates for the New Year, but it is the beginning of the month of Caitra, equivalent to the third “Mongolian” month of the Tibetan year that is preferred. See Henning 2007, 145–147.

41. On the *sme ba dgu*, see Hummel 1969; Cornu 1997; Rkang btsugs 2002, 58–59. See also Henning 2007, 184–185, on the “progressed central number.”

42. Tenzin Sherab and Tenzin Tsewang Jamling 2012, 36. I am grateful to Charles Ramble for sharing with me his observations on an old manuscript that he has found describing the *sgra gcan 'khor lo*. See also his study of similar instruments, Ramble 2021.

43. Rkang btsugs 2002, 51–58.

44. Following the Chinese system of five elements, the basic associations of the colors are wood = green; fire = red; earth = yellow; iron = white; water = blue.

45. Sde srid 1996, 1:176.

46. This diagram, called the “wheel of the month” (*zla ba'i 'khor lo*), includes details such as the positions of the minor “earth lords.” Its contents are summarized in Sde srid 1996, 1:176, and models for each month are given in Sde srid 1996, 1:136–141.

47. The monthly depictions of Īśvara (Tibetan *dbang phyug*) and his consort are called *dbang phyug mjal phrad ri mo*; Sde srid 1996, 1:176.

48. The daily information in the Tibetan almanac is explained in Rkang btsugs 2002, 73–75; Henning 2007, 201–210.

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