TIBETAN RELIC CLASSIFICATIONS

Yael BENTOR (Jerusalem)

This essay is an attempt to clarify the Tibetan concept of relics through a survey of various classifications of relics found in the Tibetan literature. This study leads us to reconsider the significance of objects found within Tibetan images and stūpas, and to question the methodologies employed in previous research.¹

Tibetan Concepts of Relics.

As the Tibetan concept of relics was based on the Indian Buddhist tradition, we begin our survey with a brief summary of the types of relics known to have existed in India. Based on archaeology, testimonies of Chinese pilgrims to India and Indian Buddhist literary sources, three categories of relics may be distinguished:² 1) The bodily remains of the Buddha and other important (even if subsequently anonymous) saintly persons.³ 2) Various objects that came into contact or were otherwise associated with them. 3) Relics of the dharma, including entire scriptures or, in the majority of cases, the verse of interdependent origins as well as dhāranīs derived from certain Dhārani Sūtras. Providing one of the solutions to the problem of locating the presence of the Buddha, who has passed into nirvāṇa, within the samsaric world, these relics create possibilities for interaction with him; they provide inspiration and a locus for worship.²

Tibetan literature contains threefold, fourfold and fivefold classifications of relics (ring-bsrel). Mkhas-grub-rje (1385-1438) supplied a threefold classification based on 'former panditas',³ and therefore dating to before the fifteenth century:


The former panditas not only classified these relics, but also ranked them in the same order as highest, middle and lowest. This ranking of dhāranīs as superior to other types of relics is found in those Dhārani Sūtras which recommend the deposition of their particular dhāranīs in stūpas and images (see Bentor, in preparation). Their style of argumentation is one typical of the sūtra literature. The element chosen for comparison is usually a highly regarded practice or object of worship, second only to the main topic promoted in the specific sūtra. Such arguments may at times reflect actual dialogues between theoretical views represented in those practices. In this case, the dialogue is between those who locate the presence of the Buddha in his physical relics, and those who locate this presence in his teachings found in a concrete form in scriptures and dharma.

The identification of relics of the garb with images in Mkhas-grub-rje's work is atypical for most of the literature on the subject. In most cases, relics of the garb are explained to be hair and nails,⁶ as well as various objects that came into contact with the saints (see below). Hair and nails as relics of the garb appear at least as early as Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan [1147-1216] (translated in Bentor, in preparation). If we take relics of the garb to mean relics of contact, Mkhas-grub-rje's threefold classification would be parallel to our summary of relics found in India.

Far more common in Tibetan works is the fourfold classification of relics listed at least since the time of Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan. One such enumeration is provided by the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682):

1. Bodily remains: such as bones of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Śrāvakas, Pratyekabuddhas, and lineages of Lamas.
2. Mustard-seed-like relics: 'increasing bone' (phel-gdung) of Tathāgatas and relics (ring-bsrel) of scholars and practitioners.
3. Relics of the garb: hair of the head, nails and so forth.
4. dharmakāya relics: dhāranīs.¹¹

The fourth category is formed by dividing the bodily relics of the threefold classification into two. Bones of saints such as the Buddha, Lamas and so forth are differentiated from mustard-seed-like relics. Mkhas-grub-rje, on the other hand, explained the bodily relics as mustard-seed-like relics which emerge from bodily remains. The mustard-seed-like relics (yangs-brus bu-'bu ring-bsrel) are the smallest spherical relics the size of mustard seeds, which are said to grow out of other relics, or to emerge from holy personages (even while living) and sacred objects. They may function as both relics and as 'signs of saintly death' (Martin 1992 and forthcoming).

In the fourfold classification given above, the mustard-seed-like relics include two types: 'increasing bone' (phel-gdung) of the Tathāgata and 'relics' (ring-bsrel) of scholars and practitioners. The term ring-bsrel has both general and specific meanings. In its general meaning, ring-bsrel covers all types of the threefold, fourfold, and fivefold classifications of relics. In its specific meaning, ring-bsrel is one type of the mustard-seed-like relics. Both ring-bsrel, in its specific meaning, and 'increasing bone' have the ability to multiply or to emerge out of other relics. This capacity has important practical consequences. It ensures a constant supply of relics even when only one tiny fragment is available. This type of relic is what makes it possible to deposit a relic of Buddha Śākyamuni in stūpas constructed nowadays. Such relics would grow out of other pieces of his bones, or from another mustard-seed-like relic that originated from the Buddha's relics. The term 'relics as small as mustard seeds' is encountered in a number of sūtras in an hyperbolic sense, mustard seed being a simile for the smallest measure.¹² Relics even the size of mustard seed are said to produce inconceivable results [Adbhuta dharmaparyāya, Kāśyapa and Mahāraṇa Sūtras (Bentor 1988), the Saṃvaraprabhāsottama Sūtra (Emmerick 1970: 6)].¹³ Yet, the capacity of relics 'the size of mustard seeds' to multiply is not explicitly found in these sūtras.¹⁴

Another common Tibetan classification of relics is a fivefold one. Some authors such as Padma-'phrin-las (1641-1717, p. 304-305), and Kong-sprul Blo-gros-
mtha'-yas (1813-1899, p. 101), present both fourfold and fivefold classifications. Padma-'phrin-las lists the fivefold types of relics as follows:

1. Relics of the dharmakāya.
2. Relics of bodily remains of the Tathāgata.
3. Relics of the garb.
5. Mustard-seed-like relics.

Similar lists are provided by other authors of manuals for the deposition of relics and diharrṣīs. Numbers 2-3 and 5 in the above list are identical to those in the fourfold classification. The relics of the dharmakāya are here further divided into two separate categories. This is explained by Padma-'phrin-las as follows:

The scholars taught to identify the relics of the dharmakāya [no. 1] as stūpas and tsha-tsha which symbolize the quality of that [i.e. the dharmakāya]. The others [nos. 2, 3, 5] are as before. The dharma-relics [no. 4] are the collected words of the Buddha (The Victorious One, rgyal-ba) [including both] the great and small Vehicles.17

Kong-sprul explains dharma-relics as diharrṣīs and books.18

The fivefold classification is further explained in a work by Chos-kyi-grags-pa written in 1636 C.E.:

There are five relics: 1) Relics of the dharmakāya. 2) Relics like mustard seeds. 3) Relics of dharma. 4) Relics of physical remains. 5) Relics of the garb. Among these:

1) Relics of the dharmakāya are receptacles of the dharmakāya which indicate [or are a conventional sign of] its nature, such as the eight stūpas of the Tathāgata and tsha-tshas. The relics of the dharmakāya to be inserted inside them are: [Śākyamuni’s mantra:] Om namo bhagavate Śākyamuney eva tathāgataya arhare samyakasambuddha-yāya tadyathā Om muni muni mahāmuni-yē [read mahāmuni-yē] Svāhā as well as [the diharrṣīs of] Uṣṇīṣavijaya, Vimalaśrī, Guhyadātu, Bodhisattvabhūdākārakṣa, and Prajñārasamātpātā. Uṣṇīṣavijaya, Vimalaśrī, Guhyadātu and Bodhi-alakārakṣa may be found in another book.

2) Relics like mustard seeds emerge from the bones of exceptional persons such as the three ‘saints’ [Śrāvakas, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas]. Furthermore, those that have clear color and are slightly larger than, or the size of, a pea are called gdung, while those which are smaller than this are called ring-bsrel. In the Sku-gdung 'Bar-ba'i Rgyud and other Rnying-ma-pa tantras there are ba-ri-ran, ba-ri-ran, chu-ri-ran, nya-ri-ran, and pa'i-ca-ran.20 Even though such a classification exists, it refers only to colors and shapes. They, as well as all the gdung and ring-bsrel, are included within the category of mustard-seed-like relics.

3) Relics of dharma are mantras taught in the supreme great secret Vajrayāna and the numerous collections of diharrṣīs taught in the Śūryāyana of Mihlan-nyid-Pratijñāpāramitā. Furthermore, the pronouncements of the Buddha and reliable commentaries on them are called relics of the dharma.

4) Relics of bodily remains are those of superior persons such as the root lama as well as the community of Buddhists, Bodhisattvas, Śrāvakas, and Pratyekabuddhas or receptacles of the Body, Speech and Mind which emerge from them or parts of these [personages] such as flesh, blood, and bone. These are called relics of bodily remains.

5) Relics of garb are hair, finger or toe nails as well as cloth and so forth of the personages who were just mentioned; in short, the numerous items blessed by connection with their bodies.21

Relics of dharma are here the teachings of the Buddha written as mantras and diharrṣīs and also books containing his pronouncements, and this even includes reliable commentaries on the word of the Buddha. These are all relics of the dharmakāya, the ‘corpus of teachings’, in its concrete sense. The new category in the fivefold classifications are relics of the dharmakāya in its meanings of the Buddha’s qualities, the realization of enlightenment, that which was taught by the Buddha, the reality itself, and so forth (Eckel 1992: 97-109; Harrison 1992). These relics are stūpas and tsha-tshas which symbolize the dharmakāya. Hence, while relics of dharma are the Buddhist teachings embodied in books, the relics of dharmakāya symbolize the manifold abstract aspects of the dharmakāya. The stūpa, the symbol of the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, came to be also the relic of the dharmakāya. The stūpa encompasses both the abstract and manifested forms of the Buddha and the dharma. Within it are contained bodily remains and books — relics of the physical body of the Buddha and the corpus of his teachings (dharmakāya in one of its concrete meanings), while its external shape symbolizes enlightenment, reality itself, the path for realizing it, the qualities of the Buddha; in short, the dharmakāya in its abstract meanings. Furthermore, the stūpa is a symbol of the dharmakāya not only in its external form. In fact, the stūpa and tsha-tsha itself became a relic. Smaller stūpas as symbols of the dharmakāya are deposited within larger stūpas together with the physical relics and the relics of the teachings.

In his threefold classification, Mkhas-grub-rje listed diharrṣīs as the highest. Dge-legs-pa authors such as the First Panchen Lama (p. 802), the Fifth Dalai Lama (p. 401.5) or the First Lcang-skya 22 who favored a fourfold classification also ranked the diharrṣī relics as superior. This is also the position of the Dhrārṣī Śrītras (see above). The importance of the diharrṣīs is evident also in the Tibetan name for the practice of depositing these sacred items in stūpas and images, which is called grungs-bul — the offering of diharrṣīs, or grungs-grungs — the internal parts of diharrṣīs. In this case the word grungs (or dhrārṣī) serves as a collective name for all types of relics.

On the other hand, others, such as Kong-sprul (who presents a fivefold classification), say:

Whatever is the size of the receptacle (rten) it is necessary to have the complete five relics as the main inner deposits. Furthermore, a stūpa or
Bentor: Relic classifications

image, etc.] without either mustard-seed-like relics or dharmarelics is improper. 23

Here, the essential relics are both (one type of) the physical relics and the relics of the dharma. These are also the most frequently encountered types of relics in India (see Bentor, in preparation).

The Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan 24 as a Source for the Tibetan Classifications of Relics.

In presenting his threefold classification of relics in the 15th century Mkhagsgrub-rje commented that the 'former paditas' on whom he relied based their classification in turn on the Byang-chub Snying-po 'Bum (1968:106-107). Byang-chub Snying-po 'Bum is identified by Wayman (ibid.) as an abbreviation for Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan 'Bum ches bya-ba'i Gzung (Toh. 508). Padma-'phrin-las (1671-1717, p. 305) cites a work entitled Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan-gyi Gzung-kyi Cho-ga Zhib-mo as a source of his fivefold rather than threefold classification of relics. He does not identify the text as canonical and we may assume that this source is different from the Byang-chub Snying-po 'Bum that is said to contain a threefold classification. But Kong-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas (1813-1809), who follows the pattern of Padma-'phrin-las' presentation (both in listing first the fourfold classification and then the fivefold, and in the sequence of items in each listing), not only identifies the source of his fivefold classification as the Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan-gyi Gzung-kyi Cho-ga Zhib-mo, as Padma-'phrin-las does, but also remarks that this is a new translation from Chinese (rgya-nag gsar 'byor, p. 101). According to its colophon, Toh. 508 was indeed translated from Chinese in 1743 as part of a project of translating canonical texts missing in the Tibetan canon but extant in Chinese. This text is found only in the Lhasa Kanjur and in some, but not all, of the Derge Kanjurs. 25 The absence of Toh. 508 in Tibet prior to 1743 has provoked comments on several occasions. In his Kanjur Dkar-chag, Bu-ston (1290-1364) said: "A complete version of this text should be searched for, as it was translated into Tibetan," 26 a statement repeated in the Gzan-yig of the 5th Dalai Lama (Jampa Samten 1992: 120). Also Mkhags-grub-rje stated that the Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan 'Bum on which the 'former paditas' had relied (see above) did not exist as a complete text during his time (15th century) in Tibet (1968: 106-107). However, a translation dated 1743 could not have been the source for Padma-'phrin-las who was killed during the Dzungar invasion in 1717/18. We know that a text called Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan 'Bum ches bya-ba'is Gzung is included in the ninth-century Ldan-kar-ma catalogue. 27 Further Jampa Samten has recently shown that our text is one of the 23 texts contained in the Phug-brag Kanjur, and not in any of the other editions of the Kanjurs. As suggested by Schopen (1985:124, a. 1) and confirmed by Scherrer-Schaub (1992) a version of this text entitled Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan-gyi Gzung-kyi Cho-ga is found also among the Dunhuang manuscripts (PT 555). One of these earlier texts may have been available to Padma-'phrin-las.

The examination of the relic classifications found in the different available versions of the Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan generates as many problems as it solves.

One classification given in Toh. 508 (translated from Chinese, Lhasa, rgyud, vol. ta, 492a) consists of the following:

1. chos-kyi sku'i ring-bsrel — relics of dharmakaya.
2. chos-kyi dbyings-kyi ring-bsrel — relics of dharmadhatu.
3. rus-pa'i ring-bsrel — relics of bone.
4. sha'i ring-bsrel — relics of flesh.

As was already shown this list "is a predominantly, perhaps exclusively, late Chinese classification" (Schopen 1985: 127). This is, however, not the only classification found in Toh. 508. Another fourfold classification is given as follows (Lhasa, rgyud, vol. ta, 489a):

1. chos-kyi dbyings-kyi ring-bsrel — relics of dharmakaya.
2. sku-gdung gi ring-bsrel — bodily remains.
3. sku-gdung gi ring-bsrel — relics of the garb.
4. yungs-bru ita-bu'i ring-bsrel — mustard-seed-like relics.

This list is partly parallel to the predominantly Chinese categories and partly to the Tibetan fourfold classification (see above) which is repeated here in a sequence corresponding to the last list.

1. chos-sku'i ring-bsrel — relics of dharmakaya.
2. sku-gdung gi ring-bsrel — bodily remains.
3. sku-rab gi ring-bsrel — relics of the garb.
4. yungs-bru ita-bu'i ring-bsrel — mustard-seed-like relics.

The first category in Toh. 508 (Lhasa, fol. 489a) can be taken as parallel to the relics of the dharmakaya of the Tibetan classification. Both ring-bsrel and dbyings are possible translations of the Sanskrit word dhatu. We might note that where the Phug-brag version of the Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan has chos-kyi ring-bsrel (on fols. 59b and 63b), the Lhasa has gzung-po'is chos-kyi dbyings (fol. 485a) and chos-kyi dbyings-kyi ring-bsrel (fol. 489a). Hence, the origins of the term relics of dharmadhatu may have been dharmadhatu in its meaning of 'relics of dharma'. In this case, relics of dharmadhatu in Toh. 508 could have the meaning of relics of dharma, i.e. books and thangkas. The last category in Toh. 508 (fol. 489a) is identical to the parallel one in the Tibetan list. Relics of bone (rus-pa'i ring-bsrel) are similar to bodily remains (sku-gdung gi ring-bsrel). Finally Toh. 508 has relics of flesh where the common Tibetan classification has relics of the garb. While relics of flesh are not commonly included in the main Tibetan classifications, they do occur as, for example, in the work by Chos­kyi-grags-pa cited above (type 4), in Martin (forthcoming) or in Hsian Tsang's account of Bodhigaya (1885 II: 133).

The Phug-brag version of the Byang-chub Snying-po 'Rgyan contains yet other listings of relics categories. In a passage parallel to Toh. 508, fol. 492a, the Phug-brag Kanjur (fol. 66a) has only one type of relic — bodily remains of the Tathāgata (de-bzhin-gshags-pa'is ring-bsrel-gyi sku-gdung). The parallel to Toh. 508, fol. 489a, in the Phug-brag Kanjur (fol. 63b) has bodily remains of the Tathāgata and dharmakaya which are mere mustard seeds (de-bzhin-gshags-pa'is sku-gdung gi ring-bsrel dang/
Bentor: Relic classifications

chos-kyi ring-bsrel yung[s]-bru-tsam). Here the measure of mustard seed seems to be used in the same hyperbolic sense encountered in various sūtras (see above). In the fourfold and higher classifications of relics the mustard-seed-like relics took on a life of their own and appeared as a separate type of relic. The Dunhuang version of our text has again differing categories.28 The parallel to Toh. 508, fol. 492a and Phug-brag, fol. 66b refers, like the Phug-brag Kanjur, to bodily relics alone (ring-bsrel snyped-kyi sku-gdung, PT 555, fol. 22b1), but the parallel to Toh. 508, fol. 489a and Phug-brag, fol. 63b provides a sixfold classification of relics (PT 555, fol. 20a2-3):

1. de-bzhin-gshegs-pa'i chos-kyi ring-bsrel — dharma relics of the Tathāgata.
2. de-bzhin-gshegs-pa'i sku-gdung gi ring-bsrel — bodily relics of the Tathāgata.
3. sku-bal-kyi ring-bsrel — relics of the garb.
4. gdüng-gi ring-bsrel — bodily relics.
5. chos-kyi ring-bsrel — dharma relics.
6. yungs-bru tsam-kyi ring-bsrel — relics just as mustard seeds.

Here 'dharma relics of the Tathāgata' are distinguished from 'dharma relics', and 'bodily relics of the Tathāgata' are distinguished from 'bodily relics'. Otherwise this listing is similar to the fourfold Tibetan classification.

These versions of the Byang-chub Snying-po Rgyan contain one, two, two sets of four, and six types of relics. They do not contain a threefold classification as mentioned by Mkhās-grub-rje nor a fivefold listing cited by Padma-phrin-las and Kong-sprul Bi-gros-mtha'-yas. Still, it should be emphasized that all the types of relics which appear in the different versions are relics that were actually in use in the Indo-Tibetan tradition. Another aspect that requires examination is the context of these classifications in the scripture. The intent of the relevant passages in the Byang-chub Snying-po Rgyan is not to provide us with a scholastic analysis of the types of relics but rather to demonstrate the still greater power of the dharma taught there. In one occurrence the merit accumulated through the deposition of the Byang-chub Snying-po Rgyan Dhāraṇī in a stūpa is said to be superior to that of the deposition of other types of relics which are then listed. This type of argument is typical for the genre of Dhāraṇī Sūtras related to stūpas and images which are collectively called by Tibetan authors 'the five great dhāraṇīs' (gzungs-chhen sde iṅga).29 Where the other of the Dhāraṇī Sūtras use as the basis of comparison relics in general (ring-bsrel), bodily remains (sku-gdung), Tathāgatas, and the dharma as teachings, all in incalculable large numbers,20 the different versions of the Byang-chub Snying-po Rgyan list as their basis for comparison one or more different types of relics.31 For the sake of the arguments made in the text, the number of the types of relics is not what is important.

The importance of the categories of relics which appear in the various versions of the Byang-chub Snying-po Rgyan lies in their uniqueness within the Indo-Tibetan literature. It seems that no other scriptural authority for the classification of relics was available to Tibetan authors writing on this subject. But it is difficult to know which, if any, versions of the Dhāraṇī Sūtra were available at every point in history. The complexities in the historical transmissions of this scripture in Tibet make it difficult to judge in every case whether the citations by Tibetan authors are direct quotations of particular versions, or attributions of non-canonical systems of relic classifications to this Dhāraṇī Sūtra. It is also not clear whether certain later Tibetan classifications were incorporated into some of the versions of this scripture. We might conclude, however, that the Byang-chub Snying-po Rgyan is the main scriptural authority for the differing relic classifications used in Tibet. In addition, Tibetan authors rely on scriptures that teach, for the most part, only one type of relic such as the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, Adbhutadharmaparyaya, Khāgāra Sūtra and Mahārāja Sūtra, which mention bodily remains, the Prajñāsūnatpāda Sūtra and the 'Five Great Dhāraṇīs', which mention relics of dharma, and the Subhūtaparipṛcchā Tantra, which seems to mention both.

Comparison to relic classification of the Theravāda tradition.

The scriptural authority of the Pāli and Theravāda tradition with regard to relic classification has long been cited by Western scholars. In the absence of any well known Mahāyāna classification, this Pāli listing was used by scholars writing not only on Pāli or Theravāda Buddhism but also on the Mahāyāna tradition. This Pāli classification does not, in fact, refer to relics but rather to shrines (cetiya). It does not appear in the canon but in the introduction to the Kākagabodhi Jātaka dated to the fifth century C.E. or earlier (Trainor 1990: 110), and consists of 1. shrines for the bodily remains (śārīrīka), 2. shrines for objects used by or associated with the Buddha (pārībhogika), and 3. indicative shrines (uddesika). The first two categories are parallel to the Tibetan classification of bodily remains and relics of the garb.32 Tibetan relics of dharmakāya may be classified as indicative relics. Yet, this would neither exhaust the entire range of indicative shrines nor of relics of dharmakāya. In a previous treatment of Buddhist relics and their classifications Benard (1988) assumed the threefold typology of the Pāli literature to be the basic Buddhist classification. She then placed the various types of relics she found in the Tibetan tradition into these Pāli categories. Not only is there no justification for such a procedure, but this synthetic approach fails to do justice to the historical dynamics of the various Buddhist traditions.

A Sinhalese classification of shrines, said to be based on the scriptural authority of the Kākagabodhi Jātaka, consists of bodily relics, the bodhi tree and images of the Buddha (Gombrich 1971: 105; Trainor 1990: 109-110). This list, which introduces innovations in relation to the earlier one, bears resemblance to Mkhās-grub-rje's threefold classification, but the bodhi tree replaces the dhāraṇī of his classification. In addition there occurred an expansion of the threefold Pāli classification into a fourfold one. An example may be found in the Thai tradition.34

1. dītta-cetiya, shrines for bodily relics;
2. paribbhoga-cetiya, shrines by use or by association, especially the bodhi tree (as in the Sinhalese tradition);
3. dhamma-cetiya, doctrinal shrines; according to Phra Rajavaramuni, a doctrinal shrine is a "monument of the Teaching". (ibid.)
4. uddesika-cetiya, indicative shrines; for the most part images, as in the Sinhalese tradition, but other 'reminders' as well.
Unlike the classical classification of the *Kālikagabodhi Iktaka*, and similar to the Tibetan one, this Thai typology does include relics or shrines of the teachings. These appear as well in later Pāli sources, such as the *Sarasaśigaha* by Siddhattha (13th-14th centuries?) and the *Vīṇa-viśka* by Sariputta (12th century?). If compared to the Tibetan fourfold classification, this Theravāda classification has, in place of mustard-seed-like relics, indicative reminders. These indicative reminders (and to some extent also reminders by association) include mostly images of the Buddha depicting events in the life of the Buddha, *stūpas* and paintings or reliefs representing the sites of the great events in the life of the Buddha, copies of *dhātu-cetiyas* and *paribhoğa-cetiyas*, copies of the Buddha's footprints and of other *uddeśika-cetiyas*, and so forth. These shrines consist of sacred objects or relics, by their physical remains, objects that came into contact with the Buddha, or the holy scriptures. Instead they are indicative of sacred events and sites.

Let us examine these indicative shrines and some of their Tibetan parallels. Any shrine bound up with the location of various events in the life of the Buddha would theoretically remain limited to the geographical sphere of the Buddha's activities. In order to expand this geographical area, various legendary accounts relate shrines located outside the Ganges valley to the Buddha's visits there. The Buddha is said to have visited Sri Lanka (Trainor 1990: 90-91, 139-140), Thailand (Pruess 1976), northwestern India (Fa Hsien 1886/1965: 29; Hsien Tsang 1885; 93) and even Tibet (Martin 1991: 152). The footprints or shadows left upon such visits became relics as well. Such accounts, however, cannot be related to the major events in the life of the Buddha, in particular to his enlightenment or nirvāṇa. The *uddeśika* shrines serve to transport the Buddhist sacred geography of India into the wider Buddhist world. In Tibet this function is fulfilled, for example, by the eight *stūpas* related with each of the four major and four minor events in the life of the Buddha. Each of these *stūpas* receives its own distinctive shape. When constructed in other locations, these *stūpas* make the eight most sacred sites in the life of the Buddha available for worship. These complexes of eight *stūpas*, known already in India (I Tsing 1896: 108) have been commonly constructed by Tibetans until the present day. Their role in transferring the sacred Indian pilgrimage sites to Tibet, which makes possible the worship of the eight great events in the life of the Buddha, and especially his enlightenment, is considerably more important for Tibetan pilgrims than the spatial symbolism of the *stūpa* so extensively discussed in recent publications (especially Snodgrass 1985).

**Conclusions.**

Tibetan images and *stūpas* may contain a large variety of objects, such as bodily remains, hair, nails, teeth, skulls, pieces of cloth, hides, pellets (*rib-ri*), images, *stūpas*, *tsha-tshas*, paintings, block-printed pictures, large number of *dharanis*, scriptures or parables of them. Indian and Tibetan works and so forth. Since this content does, for the most part, clearly reflect Buddhist classifications of relics and of receptacles of the Buddha's body, speech and mind, it is remarkable that the bulk of the Western literature on this subject has failed to notice any significant linkage between this content and the Buddhist cults of relics. This oversight may be a result of the primary method of investigation which has usually involved little more than emptying private and museum pieces of their fillings and describing them. Such a method tells us very little about the cultural and Buddhist significance of these ritual deposits. It is hoped that the present essay will contribute to our understanding of Tibetan concepts of relics and eventually allow us to see the practical implications for their placement in images and *stūpas*.

**NOTES**

1. Among these works are those by Olson (1950-71), Lange (1964), Schulemann (1969), Sommarström (1980), Hatt (1980), Preston (1983), Reedy (1986), Leonov (1991 & 1992), and Pal (1992). It should be emphasized that these works display varying degrees of familiarity with the cultural context of their findings. Some go beyond simple description to employ various scientific methods of analysis such as carbon dating and x-ray. These type of analyses have little to offer in the way of cultural and religious explanation.

2. This is based on Hsien Tsang 1885; Fa Hsien 1886/1965; Falk 1977; Schopen 1985, 1987, 1991; Mitra 1990 and references there; Trainor 1990; Boucher, 1991, etc.

3. Around main objects of worship are found also *stūpas* containing relics of people wishing to be buried ad sanctas as shown by Schopen (1987).

4. The *ye dhaṁma*... gāthā, see Boucher 1991.


6. For corrections to Wayman's translation of this passage, see Schopen 1985: 123-4.

7. *Sku-bal*, this will be explained below.

8. This will be clarified below.


10. See references in the following note.


12. On the measure of mustard seed, see Emmerick 1967.

13. See also Adikaram 1953; 137; Bigandet 1912: II 89. After the Buddha's nirvāṇa his relics are also said to have dispersed in the world into invisible particles like mustard seeds (see Strong 1979: 223).

14. For the ability of relics to 'grow' (*rgyas*) as found in the *Pitṛputra Śūtra*, see Martin 1992: 188.
passage from the
na-mo bha-ga-wa-te Shfl-kya-mu-na-ye ta-thfl-ga-tfl-ya arha-te samyak-sam­
bsrel
chu­
Dhflra~i.

This passage from the Sku-gyang 'Bar-ba Tantra is translated and explained in
Martin, forthcoming.


The various versions of the title of this scripture are mentioned below.

See also Schopen 1985: 124 and Jampa Samten 1992:120.


I would like to thank Christina A. Scherrer-Schaub for providing me with the following details.

See Bentor, in preparation.

In another instance the different types of relics are one among the several similar uses to illustrate the extent of the merit that can be derived from retaining, reading, reciting, understanding and so forth, of the Byang-chub Snying-po Rgyan Ddra'n.

Baube 1887: iv, 228; translated into English by Rouse 1901: 142.

These two types of relics are mentioned also in the Milindapatha 341.

These are the rules of Offerings and thrones (khri) contain various offerings and 'omens', such as earth and stones from hollow places, medicinal herbs, grains, jewels, edibles, etc.

See n. 1. 

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bentor, Yael, in preparation, "On the Question of the Indian Origins of the Tibetan Practice of Depositing Relics and Ddra'n in Stupas and Images".

Bigandet, Paul Ambrose 1911-1912. The Life or Legend of Gaudama, The Buddha of the Burmese, and Images".


24These two types of relics are mentioned also in the Milindapatha 341.

25Phra Rajavararumni 2335 B.E. (1990-1991) and Damrong Rajanubhab 1973. I would like to thank Charles Hallisey and Peter Skilling not only for introducing me to these sources respectively, but also for providing me with copies.


28In addition the pedestals or thrones (khri) contain various offerings and 'omens', such as earth and stones from hollow places, medicinal herbs, grains, jewels, edibles, etc.

See n. 1.

Bentor: Relic classifications

Chos-kyi sku'i ring-bsrel dang/ de-bzhin-gsheds-pa'i sku-gdung-gi ring-bsrel dang/ 


16Chos-manz-pa, pp. 5-7; Chos-kyi-grags-pa, pp. 281-283.

17Mkhas-pa-dag-gis chos-skul's riungs-bsrel ni de'i yon-tan mthson-byes mchod-ri

dang shtsha/ gzhahn-mams gong-dang 'dra-lu/ chos-kyi ring-bsrel ni rgyal-ba'is bha'is theg'

18Chos-kyi ring-bsrel gzungs snags dang giegs-bam la ngos 'dzin, p. 102.

19Martin, forthcoming.

20This is the rules of Offerings and thrones (khri) contain various offerings and 'omens', such as earth and stones from hollow places, medicinal herbs, grains, jewels, edibles, etc.


22Lcang-skya I says: "Four [types] of relics were taught. Among them, the relics of

23Rten che-chung gang-yin-kyang nang-gzhug gtso-bo ring-bsrel bzhugs [sic] ring-gsal ni tshang-bar

26S ee Bentor, in preparation which paraphrased this fivefold classification as well.

27See Bentor, in preparation.

28In another instance the different types of relics are one among the several similar uses to illustrate the extent of the merit that can be derived from retaining, reading, reciting, understanding and so forth, of the Byang-chub Snying-po Rgyan Ddra'n.

29S ee Bentor, in preparation.

30See Bentor, in preparation. The five dharmakaya, the dharma body mantras were taught as superior.”

31See also Schopen 1985: 124 and Jampa Samten 1992:120.

32The various versions of the title of this scripture are mentioned below.


34Bigandet, Paul Ambrose 1911-1912. The Life or Legend of Gaudama, The Buddha of the Burmese, and Images".


36See Bentor, in preparation which paraphrased this fivefold classification as well.
Bentor: Relic classifications

Pai-chen Bia-ma I Blo-hzang-chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan (1570-1662) [Dge-’Iugs-pa], le maltre Padmasambhava. des premières de la fondation, quelle est la Relics] to be Placed in a?

anrerieurs denie in Nagilrjunikol)qa", ceci: trois freres Vimalo~l)l~a etP. un terrain apparemment minuscule au DhtiralJl est si gar,ons, mere a recherches sur l'histoire de la construction de Bya-rung kha-shor
tiMtains echapper de ma bouche : ‘il c'est la qui autorisaient and Images”.


BENTOR: RELIC CLASSIFICATIONS

Le stūpa de Bodnath au Népal, Bya-rung kha-shor pour les Tibétains, est si célèbre que l’histoire de sa fondation est dans toutes les mémoires et qu’il suffira ici d’en rappeler les grands traits. Les variantes sont relativement nombreuses (voir en annexe le tableau qui répertorie les plus importantes), mais le schéma principal se ramène à ceci : trois frères ayant prononcé devant ce stūpa qu’ils ont construit le vœu de renaître au Tibet pour y diffuser le bouddhisme, reprennent naissance comme le roi Khri-srong lde-btsan, l’Abbé Sántarākṣa, le maître Padmasambhava.

Quant au nom du stūpa, il trouve son explication dans la version répandue actuellement où c’est la mère des garçons, gardeuse de volaille de son état (bya-rdzi-mo), qui avait commencé la construction (après avoir demandé un terrain apparemment minuscule au roi du Népal, selon une version). L’extension de ce terrain — miraculeuse ou grâce à l’astuce de la femme —, et la taille de l’édifice ayant suscité la jalousie et l’opposition des habitants du Népal, ceux-ci demandèrent au roi d’interdire la construction ; mais le roi refusa, arguant de sa parole donnée : ‘J’ai laisse échapper de ma bouche : ‘il convient de le faire’ (bya-rung kha-shor), [et un roi ne revient pas sur sa parole].” Ainsi, si l’on voulait traduire le nom actuel du stūpa, on pourrait le rendre par “Construction autorisée verbalement”.


En effet, l’histoire de ce monument soulève plusieurs questions concomitantes :

1. Depuis quand le site de Bodnath a-t-il été reconnu par les Tibétains comme celui de Bya-rung kha-shor ?
2. Exista-t-il un stūpa et une tradition népalaise antérieurs qui auraient l’identification à Bya-rung kha-shor ?
3. Si l’histoire de la construction est légendaire, quelle est son origine, et comment cette histoire s’est-elle développée ?
4. Enfin, si l’on dénie tout caractère historique au récit de la fondation, quelle est la signification réelle de l’élaboration d’une telle légende ?

Pour les deux dernières questions, les conclusions de F.K. Ehrhard rejoignant pour l’essentiel celles auxquelles j’étais parvenue, je renvoie à ses articles, n’indiquant ici que brièvement les résultats :