

## Article

# Piercing to the Pith of the Body: The Evolution of Body Mandala and Tantric Corporeality in Tibet <sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> This article grew out of a paper presented at the conference for the Society for Tantric Studies held in Flagstaff, AZ, USA, 23–25 September 2016. I am grateful to the participants for their questions and feedback. The article builds upon the research completed in my 2015 dissertation on a fifteenth-century debate on body mandala and expanded in my current book project. The book interprets a textual exchange between Mkhas grub rje, the main focus of the present article, and Ngor chen kun dga' bzang po, a prominent Sakyapa tantric commentator and founder of Ngor monastery, to demonstrate the dynamics of exchange between ritual, exegesis, and embodiment in fifteenth-century Tibet.

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**Abstract:** Buddhist tantric practitioners embrace the liminal status of the human body to manifest divine identity. In piercing to the pith of human embodiment, the tantric practitioner reconfigures the shape and contours of his/her reality. This article investigates the evolution of one particular technique for piercing to the pith of the body on Tibetan soil, a ritual practice known as body mandala [*lus dkyil* Skt. *deha-maṇḍala*]. In particular, it uncovers a significant shift of emphasis in the application of the Guhyasamāja body mandala practice initiated by champions of the emerging Gandenpa [Dga' ldan pa] or Gelukpa [Dge lugs pa] tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) and Mkhas grub rje (1385–1438). This article reveals some of the radical implications of ritual exegesis, ranging from the socioreligious aspects of securing prestige for a tradition to the ultimate soteriological goals of modifying the boundaries between life and death and ordinary and enlightened embodiment.

**Keywords:** tantra; body mandala; tantric ritual; Guhyasamāja Tantra; Mkhas grub rje; sādhana; bardo

## 1. Introduction: Acts of Mapping Landscape, Body, and Text

According to legend, the Chinese Princess Wencheng, wed to the great seventh-century dharma king of the Tibetan empire, possessed a unique ability to read the landscape of Tibet. Perceiving its many hidden sites of power and vulnerability, she proscribed a taming of the landscape through the technology of geomancy. As a result, King Songsten Gampo constructed temples to pin down the vital points of the body of Tibet, a body envisioned as a supine demoness.<sup>1</sup> The most potent site, the Jokhang temple, pinned down the heart of that demoness. Legends like this one suggest that, from a Tibetan perspective, to map the bodily landscape is to pierce to its pith, to see beyond its surface, and to know its hidden points of power and danger as a means of harnessing them.

Mapping the Tibetan landscape paved the way for the secure foundation of a Buddhist empire, one that suppressed, appropriated, and incorporated the materiality of the land as well as the beliefs and practices associated with it. These complex and continuously evolving dynamics of interaction between Buddhism and landscape are a defining characteristic of Himalayan Buddhism. Masters of geomancy learn to detect patterns and signs that enable them to navigate unseen obstacles, usurp

<sup>1</sup> For more on the supine demoness, see (Gyatso 2003).

enemy strongholds, or establish and centralize points of power. Treasure revealers called *tertön* [*gter ston*] are Himalayan Buddhist specialists gifted with a karmic inheritance granting them the ability to read the invisible divine qualities of the landscape. For example, *tertön* may discern that what appears to normal individuals as a rocky outcropping in a remote locale is actually a mandala, a celestial palace inhabited by buddhas and attendant deities. A treasure revealer will ‘open’ such a place to make its divine qualities available to ordinary and advanced Buddhist practitioners, allowing pilgrims to absorb its blessings and yogins to deepen their soteriological practices in situ.<sup>2</sup> Both the geomancer and the *tertön* therefore possess extraordinary views of the landscape that enable them to tap into points of power and recognize obstructions to channeling this power productively.

From a tantric Buddhist perspective, like the landscape, the body is an ambiguous entity, offering both blessings and obstacles; its most precious attributes are often invisible to those lacking the skills to recognize and interact with them. Buddhist tantric practices employ analogous technologies for mapping and manipulating vital points in working toward the goal of enlightenment in this very body. Buddhist traditions provide a wealth of tools for making sense of human embodiment. For example, practitioners of the non-tantric variety employ Buddhist philosophical concepts of impermanence and karmic defilement to understand the significance of the human body. Consequently, they adopt ethical practices for avoiding attachment to embodiment and to self-seeking behaviors of body, speech, and mind. Likewise, they may be motivated by the rarity of the gift of human embodiment to dedicate themselves to spiritual practice. Tantric practitioners, on the other hand, embrace the liminal status of the body, cultivating expertise in locating aspects of the body invisible to the ordinary person as a means of manifesting divine identity. Working through the body, the practitioner strives to liberate him/herself from the confines of attachment to an inaccurate and limiting view of the world and mode of interacting with it. In piercing to the pith of human embodiment, the tantric practitioner reconfigures the shape and contours of his/her reality.

This article investigates the evolution of one particular technique for piercing to the pith of the body on Tibetan soil, a ritual practice known as body mandala [*lus dkyil* Skt. *deha-maṇḍala*]. Within tantric Buddhism, the body mandala is a ritual process of imagining the human body as a mandala. Body mandala enacts a connection between microcosm and macrocosm that proliferates in tantric technologies. While the *tertön* engages with the landscape as a mandala, opening up powerful routes to access spiritual potency through pilgrimage, the practitioner of body mandala learns to see his/her own body as a mandala. Moreover, in developing this ritual expertise, like the geomancer, the body mandala practitioner develops skill in locating and manipulating vital points. The legend of pinning down the demoness serves an iconic role in representing how Buddhism was successfully ingrained in the Tibetan landscape. It also provides an especially vivid example of the vital link between obtaining an accurate view or map of one’s environment and achieving mastery. These comparisons with the expertise of *tertön* and geomancer have prepared us to better understand the significance of mapping the body for a corporeally oriented ritual practice like body mandala, revealing an inner ritual logic for inculcating in oneself a new sense of divine identity.

Alexis Sanderson has traced the roots of this practice to Śaiva sources, and a variety of forms of the practice appear in Indian Buddhist sources across tantric cycles such as the *Guhyasamāja*, *Cakrasaṃvara*, and *Hevajra*.<sup>3</sup> It is a sophisticated technology for realizing one’s divine identity, one available only to experienced practitioners who have undergone ritual initiation. Body mandala practices adapt the framework of tantric *sādhana*, the ritual structure for orchestrating the transition from ordinary to enlightened identity. In the initial generation stage [*bskyed rim* Skt. *utpatti-krama*] of *sādhana*, the practitioner repeatedly produces and dissolves the forms of deities within or as

<sup>2</sup> For excellent descriptions of the significance of landscape in soteriological practice, see (Huber 1994; Zangpo and Koñ-sprul 2001).

<sup>3</sup> On Sanderson’s work in tracing body mandala prototypes to Śaiva sources such as the *Tantrasadbhāva* see (English 2002, fn 470; Sanderson 2001).

the body itself. In the following perfection or completion stage [*rdzogs rim* Skt. *niṣpanna-krama* or *saṃpanna-krama*], he/she cultivates a more nuanced approach by tapping into hidden pathways for the movement of energies within the body and redirecting those energies to realize oneself as a buddha.

This article focuses upon clues to the evolution of body mandala in Tibet provided in Mkhas grub rje's chapter on body mandala from his *Ocean of Attainment*, a text whose general topic is the Guhyasamāja generation stage practice.<sup>4</sup> Mkhas grub rje dge legs dpal bzang po (1385–1438) was a famed fifteenth-century Gelukpa scholar and second abbot of Ganden monastery. He is perhaps best known for his connection with his teacher Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), the 'founder' of the Geluk tradition. Through his philosophical and tantric polemical writings, Mkhas grub played a role in distinguishing the Geluk tradition from its predecessors and rivals. His writings on body mandala may also be interpreted in light of this larger project of establishing prestige and securing patronage for that tradition.

With careful exactitude, Mkhas grub establishes the "correct" way of mapping divine forms onto the human body in body mandala practice by relating various versions of this map through textual citations from tantric texts. In tracing these citations, we are therefore creating another kind of map, a map of Mkhas grub's own text. Such a map allows us to better understand how he navigates textual authority to promote a version of body mandala practice that contributes to the identity and prestige of his tradition. What was at stake in reconfiguring the practice in this way, in rewiring connections between divine forms and corporeal potentialities? The parallel between body and landscape established in this introduction provides us with a framework for better understanding the answers to this question. As in the legend of pinning down the demoness, the connection between mapping the body and the mastery of its hidden depths suggests both political and soteriological implications. This article reveals a connection between one particular reconfiguration of mapping deities onto the body Mkhas grub makes and the hidden bodily potentialities discussed above. What does transforming one's body into a mandala have to do with sectarian identity or prestige? Such seemingly esoteric acts of interpretation had real-world consequences. The article shows how Mkhas grub is branding or trademarking a Gelukpa version of body mandala practice rooted in the Guhyasamāja tradition and endorsing its power to manipulate the very boundary between life and death.

## 2. Contributions and Goals

The broader field of Guhyasamāja studies continues to grow beyond the early studies and translations (Matsunaga 1978; Wayman [1977] 2005) to more contemporary translations of key commentaries.<sup>5</sup> This article makes a modest contribution to the understanding of the evolution of body mandala practices of the Guhyasamāja cycle. It adds dimension to our understanding of the relationship between esoteric ritual and the dynamics shaping the intellectual climate of an era. It also reminds us that the limitations and potential of the body were perpetually reinvented by tantric ritual texts and commentaries like those surrounding the Guhyasamāja.

Although Tibetan Buddhists continue to practice body mandala today, the complexity and secrecy of the practice have limited the variety of available scholarship. This article therefore provides an example of the kinds of issues that arose in the interpretation of this ritual among Tibetan exegetes. It also acknowledges and incorporates the most recent studies within the field. In her 2006 article, Yael Bentor made important contributions to the study of Mkhas grub's text, and, in particular, to

<sup>4</sup> Mkhas grub, rje dge legs dpal bzang. (1385–1438). [*Ocean of Attainment of the Guhyasamāja Generation Stage*] *Gsang 'dus bskyed rim dngos grub rgya mtsho*. TBRC W384.vol. 7 (ja), pp. 5–384: See pp. 233–62. new Zhol par khang edition of *gsung 'bum/\_mkhas grub rje* (zhol). Reproduced from a set of prints from the 1897 Lhasa Old Zhol (Ganden Puntso Ling) blocks. TOH 5481. New Delhi: Mongolian Lama Guru Deva. 1980–1982. TBRC W384.

<sup>5</sup> For examples, see the following: (Kittay 2011; Tsong-kha-pa and Kilty 2013; Wedemeyer 2007; Wright 2010). Kittay engages closely with the work of early scholars such as Wayman.

the ways in which it demonstrates his willingness to differ from Tsongkhapa on key points of ritual enactment and interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Bentor made some initial observations about the relevance of the Guhyasamāja sādhanā techniques to the transmigration process and posited some important dynamics of interaction with Bu ston rin chen grub's (1290–1364) writings. In a more recent article,<sup>7</sup> Bentor reevaluates her conclusions in light of a text by Tsongkhapa's own teacher, Red mda' ba Gzon bu blo gros (1348–1412),<sup>8</sup> and suggests that both Tsongkhapa and Mkhas grub may define their interpretations of the Guhyasamāja practice in contradistinction to Red mda' ba's.<sup>9</sup>

The goal of the present article is to enrich the understanding of the evolution of body mandala on Tibetan soil. In the process, it uncovers a significant shift of emphasis in the application of the body mandala practice initiated by Tsongkhapa and Mkhas grub and demonstrates the relationship of this shift to larger trends in fifteenth-century Tibetan ritual and medical traditions. It also suggests that an analogous practice of reinventing the potential of the Guhyasamāja ritual system occurred in an eleventh-century explanatory tantra [*bshad rgyud* Skt. *vyākhyātantra*].

Finally, this article contributes some methodological suggestions for approaching tantric ritual texts. Namely, we can observe Dunhuang sources, Indian tantric texts, and Tibetan commentaries side-by-side as participating in a common project of mapping the body. Furthermore, just as we trace alternative schema for mapping the body, we must also map these texts themselves by tracing the citations they employ and evaluating their relationships and implications for establishing the authority of a tradition. Doing so will allow us to more clearly see how Tibetan authors continue to innovate despite their claims of simply elucidating the teachings of the past. Consequently, through exegesis, they reinvent the modes of producing textual meaning as through ritual enactment the practitioner reconfigures the modes of producing corporeal meaning.

In interpreting Mkhas grub's argument for mapping goddesses of the Guhyasamāja mandala onto the body in a particular way, an argument that may at first glance appear to deal with insignificant ritual minutiae, this article reminds us of the more radical implications of ritual exegesis. These implications range from the socioreligious aspects of securing prestige for a tradition to the ultimate soteriological goals of modifying the boundaries between life and death and ordinary and enlightened embodiment.

The article guides the reader to appreciate these implications by first presenting an unusual form of mapping deities onto the body outlined in a Tibetan ritual text from the Dunhuang caves. Then, it turns to Mkhas grub's proposal of how to map the goddesses of the Guhyasamāja mandala onto the body, with special attention to his use of citations. The article concludes by evaluating the link between one particular modification to the bodily map proposed by Mkhas grub and broader goals of the tantric practitioner in fifteenth-century Tibet.

<sup>6</sup> (Bentor 2006). I look forward to engaging with Bentor's forthcoming translation of the entirety of Mkhas grub's *Ocean of Attainment*, with particular attention to points of exchange with Ngor chen kun dga' bzang po's body mandala debate texts.

<sup>7</sup> (Bentor 2015a). Also of interest are (Bentor 2014; Bentor 2015b).

<sup>8</sup> See Red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros. 2009. *Gsang ba 'dus pa'i bsgrub thabs mdor byas dang bsgrub thabs rnam gzbag gi tika rnam gnyis kyi mi 'dra ba'i khyad par zhus pa'i lan*, in "Spring yig gi tshogs," Red mda' ba Gzhon nu blo gros kyi gsung 'bum, vol.5, pp. 273.4–283.5. Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang. W23629.

<sup>9</sup> At the root of many of these points of distinction are their relations to and conflicts with the interpretations of the eleventh-century figure, 'Gos khug pa lhas btsas, particularly those articulated in his *Gsang 'dus stong thun*. Wedemeyer 2014 challenges previous depictions of 'Gos as a tantric "reformer" of the second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet, purging the tradition of practices employing sex and violence inherited from the chaos of the dark age. In addition to 'Gos's text on the Guhyasamāja, Wedemeyer also evaluates the "Refutation of Mistaken Mantra" (*Sngags log sun 'byin*), attributed to him. Wedemeyer makes a valuable observation that resonates with my own project of disentangling the critiques articulated in the fifteenth-century body mandala debate texts of the Sakyapa and emerging Gandenpa or Gelukpa traditions. Namely, he observes that representations of 'Gos as "puritanical" reveal "a conflation of two separate issues within the Tibetan religious world: on the one hand, a criticism of the authenticity of certain Tantras, and on the other, a criticism of mistaken practice of Tantra based upon misinterpretation of the fundamental scriptures (mūlatantra)" (Wedemeyer 2014). I am grateful to Nancy Lin for bringing this article to my attention.

### 3. Mapping the Body in a Ritual Text from Dunhuang

How did body mandala practice evolve and in what ways was it deployed to tap into the body's hidden powers and to protect and subvert its points of vulnerability? Let us first consider IOL Tib J 576/1, a Tibetan text produced between the ninth and eleventh centuries (though in all likelihood produced in the tenth century) and recovered from the Dunhuang library cave.<sup>10</sup> The text describes an unusual method of mapping deities, many of whom appear to be connected with the Vajradhātu mandala, onto the body. The five *jinas*, chiefs of the five buddha families, are associated with the head, the middle fingers of the hands, and the middle toes of the feet; each is accompanied by a goddess. So something of the centrality of the main Buddhas of the mandala is communicated through their association with these respective parts of the body, namely aligning the main Buddha of each family with a central appendage. By 'centrality', I am referring to the logic by which the mandala's form evolves over time into a space that negotiates between a core and a periphery as articulated by the arraying of lesser deities around a central Buddha image.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the association of centrality with primacy that comes to typify the structure of the mandala is asserted here in the context of the body, albeit in a different form.

However, this is the only instance I have encountered of mapping the five families onto the five appendages of the body. We might call the rite described here a 'proto-body mandala'. This designation emphasizes its experimental nature, its somewhat unorthodox grouping of deities, the fact that the *jinas* are accompanied by consorts (despite the primary association of the main deities and the other texts contained in the manuscript with the yoga tantras), and an approach to mapping deities onto the body that does not appear to have been perpetuated in other sources over time.

This Dunhuang text displays an emphasis upon the extremities and apertures of the body, likely for apotropaic purposes. Virtually all of the points specified on the body are connected with the sense faculties (eyes—sight; nose—smell; ears—hearing; tongue—taste; fingers and toes—touch).<sup>12</sup> As points of vulnerability in the Buddhist construction of the person, the armoring, and, in the tantric case, deification of the sense doors is essential to ensuring ritual purity and a pristine condition of awareness.<sup>13</sup> As the boundaries of embodied personhood, the extremities and the senses mark both mark the borders and the points of interaction between the self and the world. In forming his/herself into the ideal ritual vessel to receive the divine presence, the tantric practitioner must seal these boundaries to prevent unwanted energies, thoughts, and even sensory stimuli from entering. These corporeal boundaries are apparent to the ordinary person, unlike the subtle elements of psycho-physical anatomy to be discussed later in this article. Thus, the Dunhuang text does not contain any reference to the heart center or any sites that come to be associated with the chakras other than the head.

Both Buddhist and non-Buddhist tantric rituals employ the placement of deities and their related seed syllables on the body as a mode of protection and purification. Elizabeth English has astutely

<sup>10</sup> IOL Tib J 576. British Library Location: Volume 68, folios 47–61. Stein site number: Chp. 73.XIV.5 [25]. For more detail on the contents of this text, see Chapter Two of (Dachille 2015). For a study of the material dimensions of the manuscript, see my forthcoming essay: (Dachille forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> See (Luczanits 2008) for an important introduction to the evolution of the form and structure of early mandalas. Luczanits' essay deals specifically with many of the drawings and paintings from the library cave at Dunhuang for examples that challenge the standard definitions of mandala, definitions based in later iconographic standards (Luczanits 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Though of course the fingers and toes are not the only sites on the body to absorb sensation, they are more obvious instruments of touch.

<sup>13</sup> One might also consider the power invested in the apertures of the body as sites of liminality, not just between interiors and exteriors but between life and death. Alexis Sanderson discusses Buddhist tantric descriptions of how the consciousness leaves the body at death through one of nine doors or orifices, depending upon one's karmic "destiny". The door at the crown of the head is considered the most auspicious. Sanderson traces this model back to Brahmanical sources as well as to early non-tantric Buddhist ones. See (Sanderson and Eino 2009), note 297. Sanderson uses the term *utkrānti* in his description. Sanderson refers to the *Abhidharmakosabhasya* 3.43abc, where Vasubandhu describes the cessation of consciousness at various bodily sites and the specific case of the *arhat* for whom consciousness may cease at the heart or crown. Among the tantric sources, he refers to Bhavabhata's commentary on the *Catuspītha-tantra* f.52r2. (Sanderson and Eino 2009).



noted resemblances of body mandala practice to technologies for purifying the body of the practitioner through association of the components of the body with deities (English 2002, pp. 114–19), for armoring the body through *nyāsa*,<sup>14</sup> and for blessing and preparing the hands of the ritual specialist through *hastapūjā-vidhi*. (English 2002, pp. 218–20). In reading representations of the body within tantric ritual manuals, such resemblances are significant in indicating perceptions of sites of corporeal power and vulnerability as well as the power of ritual in embracing the former and overcoming the latter. These resemblances also provide clues to the evolution of ritual forms as well as of these perceptions of the body. On a broader scale, these corporeal representations, the modes of mapping deities onto the body, invite a dialogue with philosophical, medical, and even sociopolitical understandings of the body's power and vulnerability. The final section of this article will return to this point, to suggest one such point of dialogue. First, we must work slowly through Mkhas grub's acts of mapping body mandala practice in his *Ocean of Attainment*.

#### 4. Goddesses, Elements, and Winds: Mkhas Grub Maps the Guhyasamāja Body Mandala

Typically, body mandala texts do not map the *jinas* onto the appendages of the body like that Dunhuang text does. Nāgārjuna's *Pinḍīkṛta sādhanā* [*Mdor byas*] provides one more typical example of how deities are mapped onto the body in body mandala.<sup>15</sup> This text elaborates the Guhyasamāja generation stage practice; it is believed to be a counterpart to the more well-known *Pañcakrama* by the same author, which focuses upon the completion stage practice.<sup>16</sup> Wright attests to the enduring significance of the *Pinḍīkṛta* within the Gelukpa tradition as the basis for Tsongkhapa's Guhyasamāja sādhanā used today.<sup>17</sup> The *Pinḍīkṛta* locates the five *jinas* on the crown, mouth, throat, heart center, and feet. Other Guhyasamāja texts map them a bit more abstractly onto regions of the body. Mapping the *jinas* accurately onto the body is indeed a concern for Mkhas grub in his *Ocean of Attainment*.<sup>18</sup> The methods of interpretation proposed by this article of mapping the body in conjunction with mapping textual citations could be fruitfully applied to the case of the *jinas* in Mkhas grub's text.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See (English 2002, pp. 163–66). Gavin Flood's description of *nyāsa* practices in the content of Hindu tantra reinforces the emphasis upon guarding bodily extremities and the senses observed in the Dunhuang text. Flood describes how in the Vaiṣṇava text, the *Jayākhyā Saṃhita*, the practitioner redistributes the same mantras associated with the same deities from the previous portion of the ritual "on the head, eyes, ears, mouth, shoulders, hands (again), buttocks, heart, back, navel, hips, knees and feet". The bodily points articulated here are oriented around external points, with the exception of the heart and perhaps the navel, as well as around the sensory orifices. The process is one of armoring the body with mantra, culminating in the distribution of the mantra of Nārāyaṇa across the entire span of the body. Touch, sound, and vision all figure in this process. The practices of purification and protection, as described in the first two phases of the *Jayākhyā*, appear in early Buddhist tantric literature and are elaborated on in the generation stage practices of the body mandala (Flood 2000, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Nāgārjuna. *Pinḍīkṛta. Mdor byas*. sde dge bstan 'gyur Vol. 34 ff.1v–11r Toh 1796. See Wright's 2010 translation (Wright 2010, p. 8). Roger Wright has dated the *Pinḍīkṛta* to between 800 and 950 CE (Wright 2010, p. 16).

<sup>17</sup> Wright notes that Tsongkhapa's text elaborates upon the basis of the *Pinḍīkṛta* but "maintains the same sequence of visualizations and mantras." (Wright 2010, p. 54). See Tsong kha pa T5303: *Dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs rnal 'byor dag pa'i rim pa*. See also (Wright 2010), Appendix A, which compares the structure of the two texts.

<sup>18</sup> Mkhas grub grapples with the modes of mapping the *jinas* from Chapter Eight, verse nine of the *Guhyasamāja Root Tantra*, Nāgārjuna's *Śrī guhyasamāja-mahāyogatantrōtpattikrama-sādhanā-sūtra-melāpaka-nāma* [*Mdo bsres*], a short commentary on generation stage practice based upon the first seventeen chapters of the root, and Candrakīrti's *Pradīpoddhyotana* [*'grel pa sgron gsal*] to clarify ambiguities and resolve apparent discrepancies among them. See Matsunaga's 1978 edition of the root tantra, p. 24 for the Sanskrit text: *Stanāntaraṃ yāvaccchikhāntamadhya caranāntare cāpi nyased vidijñā/Nābhikatiguhya jīnātmajānāṃ nyāsaṃ prakuryāt kulapañcakānām*'. Matsunaga (Matsunaga 1978, fn 16) states that two manuscripts, BG & BT read *valgāntare* vs. *caranāntare*. Fremantle (Fremantle 1971)'s edition likewise footnotes this alternative and also makes note of a manuscript C that reads *sparsāntare* instead. See 24.5–24.6 of the sde dge bstan 'gyur edition of the *Mdo bsres*. Nāgārjuna. *Śrī guhyasamāja-mahāyogatantrōtpattikrama-sādhanā-sūtra- melāpaka-nāma*; Rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i bskyed p'i rim pa'i bsgom pa'i thabs mdo dang bsres pa zhes bya ba. Translated by Dharmasribhadra and Rin chen bzang po. P2662, vol. 60–61; T1797. See 118.4–119.3 of (Candrakīrti [*zla ba grags pa*]). Candrakīrti [*zla ba grags pa*]. *Pradīpoddhyotana-nāma-tikā*. Sgron ma gsal bar byed pa zhes bya ba'i rgya cher bshad pa. sde dge bstan 'gyur edition. Toh 1785. vol. 29, pp. 2–402 (ff.1v–201v).

<sup>19</sup> For example, one might consider the role of the *Pradīpoddhyotana* in Mkhas grub's mapping of the *jinas* onto the body. Bentor (2015a) focuses upon Mkhas grub and Tsongkhapa's interpretations of three Ārya tradition sādhanas: Nāgārjuna's *Pinḍīkṛta* and his *Śrī guhyasamāja-mahāyogatantrōtpattikrama-sādhanā-sūtra- melāpaka-nāma* [*Mdo bsres*] as well as Nāgābodhi's *Samāja-sādhanā-vyavasthale* (*sthāli*) [*Rnam gzhaq rim pa*]. Although Bentor refers to the *Pradīpoddhyotana*, the article focuses more on Mkhas grub and Tsongkhapa's interpretations of Nāgābodhi's text. Bentor mentions that Red mda' ba taught his commentary on the *Pradīpoddhyotana*, the *Yid kyi mun sel*, to them and also that Tsongkhapa taught the *Pradīpoddhyotana* to

However, the present article focuses upon Mkhas grub's exegetical maneuvers in mapping four goddesses, Locanā, Māmakī, Pāṇḍaravāsini, and Tārā. Why? This particular set of maneuvers reveals a compelling way in which Mkhas grub is modifying existing modes of mapping the goddesses to establish a signature Gelukpa Guhyasamāja practice, one with enhanced potential to fulfill the needs of fifteenth-century tantric practitioners. The description of the goddesses appears within the same portion of his text as the *jinās* do, a section devoted to articulating the mapping of deities vs. merely seed syllables onto the body. In this portion of his argument, Mkhas grub is attempting to modify an existing correlation of these goddesses with the elements to posit and solidify their relationship to bodily winds.<sup>20</sup>

Mkhas grub begins the relevant section by referencing the arrangement of the goddesses according to the *Samāja-sādhana-vyavasthole (sthāli)* [*Rnam gzhaḡ rim pa*]. This text is an Ārya cycle text attributed to Nāgabodhi, dealing with the Guhyasamāja generation stage.<sup>21</sup> Mkhas grub asserts:

“The *Samāja-sādhana-vyavasthole* intends for one to arrange the goddesses who are the five mothers [*yum*] on the bodies of both the father and mother deity. It's unreasonable [*mi rigs*] to arrange the four, Locanā and so forth on the navel, heart center, throat, and crown”.<sup>22</sup>

When we track down the relevant passage within Nāgabodhi's text, we find it solidifies the relationship of these four goddesses to the elements through citation of Chapter Seventeen verse 51 of the root tantra:

“The arrangement of the goddesses is taught.  
 Moharati Locanā is the earth element.  
 Dveṣarati Māmakī is water.  
 Rāgarati Pāṇḍaravāsini is fire.  
 Vajrarati Tārā is rlung.  
 We look to the root tantra to clarify the meaning:  
 ‘As for the element of earth, it is explained as Locanā.  
 As for the element of water, it is explained as Māmakī.  
 [330] As for the element of fire, it is explained as Pāṇḍaravāsini.  
 As for the element of air, it is known as Tārā.’  
 So it is said.”<sup>23</sup>

Mkhas grub continues by citing the *Pinḍīkṛta* [*Mdor byas*]:

“In the *Pinḍīkṛta* (it says):  
 ‘As for Locanā and Māmakī, likewise Pāṇḍaravāsini and Tārā,

Red mda' ba in 1401–2. Just a couple years later, Red mda' ba entered retreat, and Tsongkhapa composed his commentary on Nāgabodhi's text. (Bentor 2015a, p. 185) Bentor observes how Tsongkhapa refutes Red mda' ba's positions therein and how Mkhas grub continues Tsongkhapa's project of refutation in the *Ocean of Attainment*. As a result, she extends her 2006 assessment of Mkhas grub's “unnamed opponents” to focus more definitely upon the refutation of Red mda' ba. Bentor's elaboration upon her initial thesis adds further support to my approach to Mkhas grub's body mandala debate writings as an attempt to distinguish the emerging Gandenpa tradition from its Sakyapa roots.

<sup>20</sup> The incorporation of the body mandala of the consort, or “mother deity,” here in relation to that of the male practitioner or “father deity,” is one reason for the added complexity of the argument surrounding the goddesses.

<sup>21</sup> Toh 1809 Sde sde bstan 'gyur Vol. 35 ff. 121a–131a by Nāgabodhi. For partial editions, see (Tanaka [2011] 2002, 2004, 2009). For Tsongkhapa's position on the attribution of texts to Nāgabodhi, see (Tsong-kha-pa and Kilty 2013, pp. 65–66). See also Tsongkhapa's commentary on this text: Rnam gzhaḡ rim pa'i rnam bshad dpal gsang ba 'dus pa'i gnad kyi don gsal ba. In *Gsung 'Bum/Tsong kha pa blo Bzang Grag pa*. Reproduced from Lhasa zhol par khang blocks. New Delhi: Lama Guru Deva, vol. 6. pp. 5–166.

<sup>22</sup> Rnam gzhaḡ rim par yum lnga'i lha mo rnam bkod pa ni yab yum gnyis ka'i lus kyi [240.2] dbang du byas pa'i lha rnam la dgongs pa yin no spyan ma la sogs pa bzhi lte ba snying kha mgrin pa spyi bo rnam su 'god pa yang mi rigs te.

<sup>23</sup> I have located and translated this passage using Kimiaki Tanaka's partial critical edition, which has been emerging over the course of a series of articles. See Tanaka 2001–2002, 2004, & 2009. (Tanaka [2001] 2002, 2004, 2009). It is perhaps of note that the alternate names for the goddesses provided in the Rnam gzhaḡ citation above are found in the body mandala of the father deity; in that text, the names Locanā et al. refer instead to the goddesses in the body mandala of the consort.

they are arranged by the mantrika on the earth (element) and so forth.<sup>24</sup>

And in terms of the explanation of arranging the four goddesses in the sites of the four elements:

‘It is proper to arrange Locanā in (the area of) the genitalia, the abode of earth *rlung*, Tārā at the navel, the abode of wind *rlung*, Māmakī at the heart center, in the abode of water *rlung*, and Pāṇḍaravāsīnī at the throat, in the abode of fire *rlung*.’ So it is said.<sup>25</sup>

As for the second part of this citation (“it is proper to arrange Locanā in the (area of the) genitalia”), its derivation is unclear as it does not appear in the *Piṇḍīkṛta*.<sup>26</sup> The closing phrase *zhes zer ro* suggests that it is a quotation, although it is possible that Mkhas grub is simply paraphrasing, perhaps even from a Tibetan source. The statement locates the goddesses (Locanā, Tārā, Māmakī, and Pāṇḍaravāsīnī) on four specific sites on the body (the genitalia, navel, heart, and throat), which are, in turn, defined as the abodes of elemental *rlung* (earth, wind, water, and fire *rlung*).<sup>27</sup>

Mkhas grub continues his critique a few pages later:

“You who lack discerning minds claim that it’s necessary to arrange (deities) on sites such as the secret place<sup>28</sup> based upon the explanation for arranging deities such as Locanā on (elements such as) earth. When it comes to the meaning of the tantra, of course you have doubts (like this).”<sup>29</sup>

The polemical flavor of Mkhas grub’s writing is impossible to ignore here. He then proceeds to set forth his own position:

“Nevertheless, as far as I’m concerned, this is how it is:

Within the classification of five root *rlung*, the abode of the earth *rlung*, downward-clearing *rlung*, is the secret place.

The abode of balancing, wind *rlung*, is the navel.

The abode of life-sustaining, water *rlung*, is the heart center.

The abode of the upward moving, fire *rlung*, is the throat.

The abode of the all-pervading, space *rlung*, is the whole body.”<sup>30</sup>

The list of five primary or root winds matches a common set (*thur sel*, *mnyam gnas*, *srog ’dzin*, *gyen rgyu*, and *khyab byed*).<sup>31</sup> Here Mkhas grub is identifying each of the five root winds as an elemental

<sup>24</sup> This initial quote from the *Piṇḍīkṛta* is derived from the mahāsādhana section of that text, explaining the arrangement of the body mandala of the consort. In the context of laying out the body mandala of the father deity, in the atiyoga section of the text, the *Piṇḍīkṛta* instructs: “With Moharati, the mantrin should place them on the earth (element), and so forth: that with solidity, that with fluidity, that with warmth and that with airiness respectively.” See Wright (Wright 2010) translation and edition v61.

<sup>25</sup> *mdor byas su; spyang dang ma’ ma ka’i dang ni; de bzhi du ni gos dkar mosgrol ma yang ni sngags pa yis; sa [240.3] la sogs bar nam par dgod; ces ’byung ba bzhi’i gnas su lha mo bzhi dgod bar bshad pas; sa rlung gi gnas ’doms su spyang ma dang; rlung gi rlung gi gnas lte bar sgrol ma dang; chu rlung gi gnas snying khar ma’ ma ki dang; me rlung gi gnas mgrin par gos [240.4] dkar mo dgod par rigs so; zhes zer ro*

<sup>26</sup> I was also unable to locate it in Tanaka’s partial editions of the *Rnam gzhag* thusfar but continue to pursue this citation.

<sup>27</sup> These sites differ from the set critiqued by Mkhas grub in that the genitalia [*doms*] replace the crown. Neither the crown nor the feet, for that matter, are included here.

<sup>28</sup> *Gsang gnas* is literally translated as “secret place,” but the phrase is understood to refer to the genital region.

<sup>29</sup> *spyang ma sogs bzhi sa la sogs pa la dgod par bshad pas gsang gnas sogs su dgod dgos par ’dod pa de ni khyed cag rgyud don la zhib par ’byed pa’i blo dang mi ldan pa dag la de lta bu’i dogs ba ’byung ba [245.5] bden no*. Khenpo Choying Dorje and Khenpo Yeshe suggested that the use of *’dod pa* may contribute the derogatory tone of the passage (whereas *dgong pa* would have been the more neutral choice).

<sup>30</sup> *’on kyang nga ni ’di yin te; rlung la rtsa ba’i rlung lngar phye ba’i sa rlung thur sel gyi gnas gsang gnas dang; mnyam gnas rlung gi rlung gi gnas lte ba dang; srog ’dzin chu rlung gi gnas snying kha dang; gyen rgyu me rlung gi gnas mgrin pa dang; khyab byed [245.6] nam mkha’i rlung gi gnas lus thams cad la*.

<sup>31</sup> See entries by OT, IW, & RY on thlib.org [*srog ’dzin*, *gyen rgyu*, *khyab byed*, *me mnyam*, *thur sel*] Garrett (2008, pp. 65–66) describes how these five root winds (together with five subsidiary winds) are common in tantric physiological accounts, citing the twelfth-century Sakya patriarch Grags pa rgyal mtshan as one example. She locates the winds at areas of the body: *thur sel* in the anus, *mnyam gnas* (or *me mnyam*) in the navel, *srog ’dzin* in the heart, *gyen rgyu* in the throat, and *khyab*



wind and locating it within the body (at the secret place, navel, heart, throat, and bodily totality). There is, however, no mention of the goddesses, and we are working with a list of five rather than four. Mkhas grub continues:

“In light of this explanation, as for the one who explains the four (goddesses), Locanā and so forth, as the four elements here (this may be said):

Generally speaking, there are many contexts for applying the four elemental winds to the four such as Locanā. However, having construed the four goddesses as the elements such as earth, here one generates the four goddesses as the aspects of bodily solidity, moisture, heat, and motility. If one arranges them like that, having condensed all five root *rlung* into just the element of *rlung*, it is necessary to make all of those the basis of accomplishing Tārā. So then it would not be fitting to apply the generation of Locanā from the earth *rlung* and so on, on account of the absence of the characteristics of solidity in the downward-clearing *rlung*”.<sup>32</sup>

Mkhas grub is grappling with two alternative systems of correlation for the goddesses. Unfortunately, mapping the goddesses onto the body through association with the elemental *rlung* contradicts the already existing system of correlating them with the (unlocated) elements in both the root tantra and the *Pinḍīkṛta*. The correlation of these goddesses with the elements and their defining characteristics is the dominant mode of correlation for the *Pinḍīkṛta*. There is no reference to the locations of the elements or to elemental *rlung*. Likewise, the root tantra [XVII.51]<sup>33</sup> itself clearly correlates these goddesses with the elements, though there is no mention there of their locations, elemental qualities (e.g., solidity), or elemental *rlung*.

Systems of correlation for mandala were often modified and structures adapted to effectively incorporate or even conflate multiple systems of “correlative correspondences.”<sup>34</sup> Mkhas grub’s polemics on correlating the goddesses might be read as a form of iconography in the making, in which elements, elemental winds, and root winds must all be accommodated in attempting to locate them more concretely upon the human body.

Over the course of his argument, Mkhas grub also cites Candrakīrti’s *Vajrasattva-sādhana*.<sup>35</sup> Like the *Pinḍīkṛta* and the *Samāja-sādhana-vyavasthole*, it focuses upon generation vs. completion stage practices. This *sādhana* as a whole seems to espouse a three-buddha body system. The mapping of these three bodies onto the *sādhana* structure becomes significant in the Tibetan interpretation of the Guhyasamāja as a technology for manipulating the process of death and rebirth, a theme to which we shall return shortly.<sup>36</sup>

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byed throughout the body. They bear associations with the elements and with colors as well as bodily functions. On the medical conception of *rlung*, see pp. 62–63. The three humors are *rlung*, bile, and phlegm; each is construed in terms of five types. Further research into both tantric and medical systems will produce subtleties in our understanding of *rlung*. Garrett 2008 makes some important inroads in chapters four and six. See (Garrett 2008) especially see (Kon-sprul et al. 2005, fn 47).

<sup>32</sup> ...bshad pa yin la; ‘dir spyan sogs bzhi sa la sogs pa’i kham s bzhi bshad pa ni spyir ‘byung ba bzhi’i *rlung* dang spyan sogs bzhi sbyor ba’i skabs mang du yod kyang; ‘dir ni lus kyi sra ba’i cha dang; [246.1] gsher ba’i cha dang; dro ba’i cha dang; g.yo ba’i cha rnam la sa’i kham s la sogs pa bzhi byas nas; de dag lha mo bzhi bskyed ba yin zhing; de ltar bzha g pa na ni; rtsa ba’i *rlung* lnga ka yang *rlung* gi kham s gcig bur byas nas de thams cad sgrol ma’i bsgrub gzhiir [246.2] byed dgos kyi sa *rlung* las spyan ma bskyed pa sogs byar mi rung ste; thur sel gyi *rlung* la sra ba’i mtshan nyid ma tshang ba’i phyir ro

<sup>33</sup> As identified by Tanaka in the context of its citation within the *Rnam gzhag*.

<sup>34</sup> This term was coined by Charlotte Furth in her 1999 study of women’s medicine in Imperial China, to describe the multiple relationships of yin and yang as a correlative set to one another as well as to other like sets such as male and female (Furth 1999).

<sup>35</sup> For this quote, see 49.15–19 [III.3.2] in Luo Hong and Toru Tomabechi edition of the text (Candrakīrti and Tomabechi 2009). Bentor (2015a) points out that Red mda’ ba and Ngor chen, together with a number of other prominent Sakyapas, dispute the attribution of this text to Candrakīrti, providing a reference to Ngor chen’s comment in his *Shin tu rnal ‘byor gyi khyad par sgrub thabs kyi yan lag tu bris pa*. See (Bentor 2015a, p. 166).

<sup>36</sup> Bentor’s recent contributions further substantiate this assessment in showing how Candrakīrti’s *sādhana* informed Tsongkhapa’s (and Bu ston’s) interpretation of the *Samāja-sādhana-vyavasthole* in terms of these three buddha bodies. See (Bentor 2015a, p. 174).

Mkhas grub concludes his argument on the goddesses with two citations that indicate a significant hermeneutic shift. The first is a citation from the *Vajramālā*, an explanatory tantra [Tib. *bshad rgyud*/Skt. *vyākhyātantra*] accepted as *buddha-vacana* within the Ārya Guhyasamāja tradition.<sup>37</sup> It is, therefore, in a different class than the commentaries attributed to Nāgārjuna and his disciples that have formed the core of the body of citations discussed thus far. This text is cited extensively by Mkhas grub as well as in the writings of his teacher Tsongkhapa. It is perhaps best known for the 40 verses that expound upon the first 40 syllables of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*. These verses are cited in both Candrakīrti's *Pradīpodyotana* and in part within Āryadeva's *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa* (Kittay 2011, p. 5). No original Sanskrit text of the *Vajramālā* survives (except portions cited in these texts); however, Tibetan translations began to emerge in the eleventh century (Kittay 2011, p. 6). Unlike the other texts cited by Mkhas grub thus far, the *Vajramālā* focuses upon completion stage practices of the Guhyasamāja, although some generation-stage practices are included. We are fortunate to be aided in our understanding of the *Vajramālā* by David Kittay's 2011/13 (Kittay 2011, 2013) study and translation. Kittay regards the text as a compendium of different practices inclusive of both Mahāyoga and yoginī-tantra based interpretations of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*.<sup>38</sup>

The quotation from the *Vajramālā* extends the correlation of goddesses and elements to include not only elemental qualities but also bodily substances:

"In the *Vajramālā Explanatory Tantra* (it says):

'Moreover, the Bhagavatī Locanā abides in the earth element, in the fat and so forth of this one. The Bhagavatī Māmakī abides in the water element, the blood and so forth. The Bhagavatī Pāṇḍaravāsīnī abides in the fire element, heat and so forth. The Bhagavatī Tārā abides in the *rlung* element, trembling and so forth.'

Thus it is clearly explained".<sup>39</sup>

Based upon these correlations, Mkhas grub asks:

How could anyone in their right mind claim that the flesh of the body (is endowed with/made up of) the earth *rlung* and the blood (with/of) fire *rlung*?<sup>40</sup>

Mkhas grub explains further:

"In that case, there is the explanation for dissolving earth, water, fire and *rlung* and so forth. At the time of dissolution of the twenty-five coarse [*rags pa*] (constituents) the potential for producing the consciousnesses [*rnam shes kyi rten phyed pa'i nus pa*] dissolves. The bodily deities, the (set of) four, Locanā and so forth, are taught to be dissolved in accord with the dissolution (of) those.

That being the case, at the time of the dissolution of the subtle elements [*khamsh phra pa*], a vision akin to a mirage manifests on account of the dissolution of earth into water and so forth. Thus there is the teaching concerning the dissolution of the coarse among the many subtle and coarse (components) possessed by the four elemental *rlung*. If you don't know how to make distinctions like this, not knowing how to distinguish the dissolution of the

<sup>37</sup> The *Vajramālā* (Explanatory Tantra). *Śrī-vajramālā-abhidāna-mahāyogatantra-sarvatantra-hṛdaya-rahasya-vibhanga-nāma*: Rdo rje'i 'phreng ba'i rgyud. Rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud dpal rdo rje phreng ba mngon par brjod pa rgyod thams cad kyi snying po gsang ba rnam par phyed ba zhes bya ba. Toh 445, rgyud, vol. Ca, (208a–277b) 415–554.

<sup>38</sup> (Kittay 2011, p. 188). As Kittay notes, some chapters of the text explicitly clarify the Mahāyoga or Yoginī-tantric basis for interpretation.

<sup>39</sup> *bshad rgyud rdo rje 'phreng ba las kyang*; yang 'dī'i sha sogs [246.6] sa khamsh la; bcom ldan 'das yum spyān bzhuḡs so; khrag sogs chu'i khamsh la ni; bcom ldan 'das yum ma ma bzhuḡs; dro ba la sogs me khamsh la; bcom ldan 'das yum gos dkar bzhuḡs; bskyod pa la sogs *rlung* khamsh la; bcom [247.1] ldan 'das yum grol ma bzhuḡs; zhes ches gsal bar gsungs te. This quotation can be found in the sde dge edition of the *Vajramālā* 270a.3–4 [539.3–4], where the only real difference in *mi bskyod* vs. *bskyod pa*. For Kittay's translation see (Kittay 2011, p. 743).

<sup>40</sup> *lus kyi sha sa rlung dang*; khrag me *rlung* du shes rig dang ldan pa su zhig khas len par byed. I have emended *ma* to *me* and *shas* to *shes*.

coarse and the dissolution of the subtle, how would it be possible to realize the essential point of the completion stage (*rdzogs rim gyi gnad zab mo dag rtogs par lta ga la 'gyur*)?"<sup>41</sup>

Mkhas grub is interpreting the correlation of goddesses with the elements, qualities, and substances cited from the *Vajramālā* in terms of the order of dissolution of the body at death enacted in completion stage practices. The dissolution of the bodily elements in *sādhana* practice serves as preparation for the moment of death. Earth *rlung* is the coarsest of the elemental *rlung*, while wind *rlung* is the most subtle. The signs of death can also be distinguished in terms of coarse and subtle. For example, when earth dissolves into water, the appearance of mucus is a coarse sign that can be seen by anyone, while the vision of the mirage is a subtle sign that only the dying person can see. The sense consciousnesses reliant upon the presence of these elements in the body, likewise, dissipate. When Mkhas grub refers to the dissolution of "the potential for producing the consciousnesses" [*rnam shes kyi rten phyed pa'i nus pa*], he is referring to the vital connections between the elements and the varieties of sensory consciousness; he is solidifying the correlation of the goddesses with particular phases of this process.

Contemporary Gelukpas extol the Guhyasamāja as a system for navigating the process of death and rebirth through the attainment of three buddha bodies. However, this connection is not clear in the early Indian sources I have reviewed. When Mkhas grub specifically identifies this practice of dissolution of coarse and subtle components as fundamental to the "essential point of the completion stage," he reveals the importance of ritual technologies of dissolution to a two-stage *sādhana* structure for his interpretation of the Guhyasamāja. While his own text is focused upon the generation stage, his consistent references to the *Vajramālā* and the logic of dissolution in mapping the goddesses onto bodily constituents, elements, and winds emphasize connections with the completion stage.

Mkhas grub continues his discussion of the dissolution of the body by parsing the relationship of subtle and gross components:

"(With regard to) that which is referred to as the "dissolution of the subtle," the three, earth, water, and fire are coarse. Compared to these, the element of *rlung* is subtle. There are many distinct degrees of coarse and subtle for the internal subdivision of *rlung* itself."<sup>42</sup>

Mkhas grub's choice of the *Vajramālā* is significant. It is a text with explicit groundings in the yoginī tantric approach to the body, arguably a more subtle approach enhanced by a more elaborate apprehension of the vajra body's hidden potentialities, the channels, winds, and drops that lie beneath the surface. Unlike the majority of citations in this section, is also linked explicitly with completion stage practices. Therefore, Mkhas grub imitates a process enacted by the *Vajramālā* itself of reading later completion-stage oriented and yoginī tantra-enriched formulations of the body onto early generation-stage-focused texts of the Guhyasamāja.

Mkhas grub's concluding move is perhaps even more radical. Moving farther afield from the texts of the Ārya Guhyasamāja cycle, beyond the completion-stage focused explanatory tantra of that system, Mkhas grub invokes an explanation from another explanatory tantra, the *Samputa*:

<sup>41</sup> *des na rags pa nyi shu rtsa lnga thim pa'i skabs su; sa chu me rlung sogs thim [247.2] pa bshad pa ni; lus kyi sra ba'i cha la sogs pa la sa la sogs par byas nas; de dag gis rnam shes kyi rten phyed pa'i nus pa thim pa'i dbang du byas te; de dag thim pa dang mthun par lus kyi lha spyen ma la sogs pa bzhi yang thim par gsungs pa yin [247.3] la; khams phra pa thim pa'i skabs su, sa chu la thim pas smig rgyu lta bu'i nyams 'char ba sogs ni 'byung ba bzhi'i rlung la phra rags du ma yod pa'i nang nas rags pa thim pa'i dbang du byas nas gsungs pa yin te; 'di lta bu'i rnam dbyed dag ma shes na rags [247.4] pa thim pa dang phra ba thim pa tsam gyi khyad par yang mi shes na rdzogs rim gyi gnad zab mo dag rtogs par lta ga la 'gyur.*

<sup>42</sup> *phra ba thim zhes pa yang; sa chu me gsum rags shing; di las rlung gi khams phra pa yin gyi; rlung rang gi nang gses kyi dbye ba [247.5] la phra rags kyi khyad par rim pa du ma zhig yod do.*

Alternatively, then you must reflect on how to account for the explanation from the *Saṃputa Tantra* of arranging Locanā in the navel, the abode of earth and Tārā in the crown, the abode of *rlung*.<sup>43</sup>

The *Saṃputa Tantra*, regarded as common to the interpretation of both the Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara systems, is a more radical source for support than Mkhas grub's previous choices. He builds upon his discussion of the completion stage-focused interpretations of the *Vajramālā* and its incorporation of both mahāyoga and yoginī tantra-based approaches to extend the limits of interpretation beyond the Guhyasamāja system. After working carefully and closely through the interpretation of commentaries and an explanatory tantra associated with the Ārya tradition of the Guyasamāja, suddenly Mkhas grub has brought those approaches to locating goddesses and elements within the human body into dialogue with a yoginī tantra-affiliated explanatory tantra.

Evaluating the logic of these choices illuminates the ways in which Mkhas grub exhibits a larger trend among tantric authors to re-interpret the body in light of the most potent ritual technologies available. The Indian texts of the Guhyasamāja cycle and their associated forms of body mandala may not have collectively exhibited prominent concerns with the more subtle potentialities of corporeal structures and processes found in the mahāyoga and yoginī tantras. However, that does not mean they lacked the potential to do so.

## 5. Dissolving the Bodies of Fifteenth-Century Tantric Practitioners

Tantric *sādhana* often depict the formation and dissolution of the body as mirror images of one another, proceeding from the emanation of forms from the most subtle of elements and energies to the dissolution from the most coarse and tangible. Parallels between the creation and destruction of the cosmos and of the human form are also apparent.<sup>44</sup> In her study of the varying uses of embryological accounts in Tibetan Buddhist texts, Frances Garrett has explored tantric narratives of gestation and the formation of the human body as models for spiritual transformation. In doing so, she has demonstrated how these narratives were often produced in dialogue with narratives of the body's dissolution at death. In accounts of ordinary birth, wind and karma interact with the elements as well as with the essences of father and mother to produce the human body. However, the goal of tantric practice is to create not an ordinary human body but a buddha body. Referring to the work of Brian Cuevas, Garrett notes the proliferation of ritual formulations of the intermediate state between death and rebirth in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Tibet based in the six doctrines of Nāropā (Garrett 2008, p. 110). See (Cuevas 2003; Mullin 1996). Tsongkhapa, in particular, used these doctrines to map the life trajectory of death, intermediate state [*bar do*], and rebirth states onto *sādhana* practices based in highest yoga tantra.<sup>45</sup> Employing *sādhana* as a means to purify these states of existence is referred to as “bringing the three bodies to the path.” [*sku gsum lam 'khyer*] (Garrett 2008, p. 112). The trajectory of embodiment was thereby connected with the production of three varieties of buddha bodies: *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya* respectively.<sup>46</sup> Garrett describes Tsongkhapa's articulation of these practices in his *Sngag rim chen mo* as part of the transition from generation stage to completion stage practice: “Success in this type of meditation is said to result in the winds of one's subtle body entering, remaining, and

<sup>43</sup> *gzhan du sam pu ta las; lte ba sa'i gnas su spyen ma dang spyi gtsug rlung gi gnas su sgrol ma 'god par bshad pa ji ltar 'chad soms* [248.2] shig.

<sup>44</sup> The comparison of the relationship between the role of *rlung* in cosmic creation and destruction (derived from the Abhidharma tradition) and its role in tantric conceptions of bodily creation and dissolution is compelling. Kittay (2011, p. 133) observes that the five winds presented in the *Vajramālā* accord with those found in the *Visuddhimagga* 11: 37.

<sup>45</sup> Garrett (2008) also refers to (Bentor 2006)'s discussion of Tsongkhapa's and Mkhas grub's participation in debates over this practice, in particular over the questions of whether only birth is purified by the generation stage and whether the rules only apply for birth from a womb (Garrett 2008, p. 114). See (Bentor 2006, p. 186 fn4 & p. 192 respectively). It is of interest to note that Tsongkhapa and Mkhas grub postulate that the purification of the three states occurs in the generation stage, while the generation of the Buddha bodies occurs in the completion stage.

<sup>46</sup> As discussed above, Candrakīrti's *Vajrasattva-sādhana* organized generation stage practice in terms of the production of these bodies.

then dissolving inside the central channel, whereupon one may begin completion stage practices.” (Garrett 2008, p. 113). Manipulation of and control over the channels, winds, and drops of the subtle body or perhaps, more accurately for the Tibetan context, of the “vajra body” [Tib. *rdo rje'i lus*] is therefore essential to this practice and ultimately to the soteriological project. I use the term “subtle body” to describe a body defined by invisible structures and processes realized exclusively by the advanced tantric practitioner through sustained ritual practice.<sup>47</sup>

In Garrett’s comparison of embryological narratives, she notes discrepancies over the role of the elements in human conception and development and, in particular, over the role of wind [*rlung*]. She notes that by the fifteenth century, the winds became more important to Tibetan medical accounts of fetal gestation, suggesting that religious texts actually influenced medical ones.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the role of the elements also became more prominent over time. In this regard, Garrett observes: “the increasing interest in the material nature of the human body, and in connecting the human individual with the cosmos at the material level, may be an idea that comes to medical thinkers as a result of the increasing influence of Buddhism on contemporary scholarly communities.” (Garrett 2008, p. 137). Both elements and winds appear to have been given more weight and attention than karma in this context.

We have looked closely at Mkhas grub’s efforts to negotiate the relationship of winds and elements embodied as deities in aspects of body mandala ritual. If we consider these efforts in light of Garrett’s discussions of controversies within Tibetan embryology, we find a shared discourse of themes of gross and subtle, emanation and absorption, cosmic creation and destruction, all located within the body. Concerns with causality and especially with the causal efficacy of winds and elements at the nexus of tantric and medical accounts provide us with a taste of the intellectual climate expressed within the bodily discourses of late-fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Tibet.

Mkhas grub’s means of correlating the goddesses with elemental winds demonstrates his ability to brand a Gelukpa Guhyasamāja body mandala practice with the potential to fulfill the demands of practitioners of the day in making the most of embodied ritual action. Such a practice had to be able to hold its own in the face of sophisticated modes of subtle body manipulation like the Hevajra body mandala promoted in the Path and Fruit [*lam 'bras*] teachings of the Sakyapa tradition. The emerging Gelukpa tradition had to work especially hard to disambiguate its own teachings from the Sakyapas in light of its undeniable roots in that transmission of the teachings. Therefore, Mkhas grub’s body mandala writings provide a salient example of the ways in which reinventing textual and corporeal meaning functioned as complementary processes.

<sup>47</sup> The term “subtle body” generated a lively conversation at the 2016 meeting of the Society for Tantric Studies. Skepticism about the use of this term is warranted by its history. In his recent edited volume on the “subtle body,” Geoffrey Samuel has traced the Western usage of the term back to a translation of the Vedantic term *sūkṣma-śarīra* employed by members of the Theosophical Society. Samuel accounts for the challenges posed by the history of the term while preserving it as a workable category for a complex network of concepts and practices suggested by early Upaniṣadic, late Vedic, and classical Vedantic literature in addition to their more explicit and familiar development in yogic as well as Buddhist and Hindu tantric literature. The specificity and diversity of conceptualization and practical application varied across traditions. See (Samuel and Jay 2013). Lorelai Biernacki pointed to the concept of the subtle body as transmigrating body, the *puryaṣṭaka*, in the writings of Abhinavagupta. (Biernacki) For more on this type of subtle body, see p. 98 fn 398 in (Bansat-Boudon and Tripathi 2014). James Mallinson suggested that Sanskrit sources may not articulate a distinction between subtle and gross components of the body’s physical elements in the way that the Tibetan sources Garrett and I are working with do. I am grateful to Mallinson for sharing his chapter on the yogic body with me. We do find a comparable formulation of a spectrum of gross and subtle in the depiction of the channels in Mallinson’s translation of a passage from the *Parāḥyatantra* 14.54. See (Mallinson and Singleton 2017). Scholars working on the Kālacakra corpus may also add valuable background for better understanding Buddhist tantric conceptions of subtle and gross elements, and especially the winds.

<sup>48</sup> (Garrett 2008, p. 153). Garrett observes that: “the names and functions of the winds, as taken from the Buddhist sutra, are the most prominent and consistent details these medical commentators add to their accounts of the body’s weekly development.” These winds include the five root winds discussed above along with five subsidiary winds, all drawn from tantric physiology. None of these, however, seem to be labeled specifically as elemental winds.



## 6. Conclusions: Piercing to the Pith

“Piercing to the pith” has been described to me through the metaphor of an arrow hitting its target, getting to the essential point or heart of the matter.<sup>49</sup> It is a phrase used to distinguish the method of cultivating the perfections, the *pāramitānaya*, which “pierces to the pith of the mind” [*sems la gnad du bsnun*], from the tantric method of the *mantranaya*, which pierces to the pith of the body [*lus la gnad du bsnun*]. This distinction attests to the centrality of the body to the tantric project. For Mkhas grub, the instrumental role of body mandala in piercing to the pith of the body is what sets it apart from other mandala technologies:

“So, if you ask, ‘why is the body mandala superior to the two fabricated external mandala?’ (i.e., mandala paintings and altars/sand mandala):

The distinction emerges based on the fabricated and unfabricated basis of establishment. The completion stage, generated from meditation by piercing to the pith of the body [*lus la gnad du bsnun*], is the main cause of establishing the supreme accomplishments. By cultivating the transformation repeatedly while generating all the current parts as deities, the channels, winds and drops of the body become workable [*rung du gyur*]. By piercing to the pith of the body in meditation, the ripening of the effortless generation of realizing the completion stage becomes supreme”.<sup>50</sup>

Likewise, as we have observed, by extension, the ability to distinguish between the body’s subtle and gross components and to reenact their dissolution is, for Mkhas grub, key to realizing the essential point of the completion stage (*rdzogs rim gyi gnad zab mo*). To construct a body mandala is to “pierce to the pith of the body,” to access its subtle energies and to harness their potential.<sup>51</sup> Body mandala is therefore a ritual technology for interacting with the body in a deeper way, deriving the maximum benefit from embodiment and getting to the very heart of the matter.

Tantric ritual texts ask their readers to engage with textuality on multiple levels simultaneously. For example, this article has demonstrated the relevance of Mkhas grub’s acts of mapping the bodily landscape in light of his efforts in navigating a textual landscape by mapping corporeal correspondences and exegetical maneuvers in tandem. Ritual technologies respond to the needs of practitioners in a particular time and place, and their authors often participate in larger domains of competition for prestige and patronage. In considering these different elements of textuality in terms of ritual detail, patterns of exegesis, and the dynamics of socioreligious and intellectual history, the readers of tantric ritual texts “pierce to their pith,” make them “workable,” and ultimately “realize their essential point,” with a deeper appreciation of the often radical and utterly relevant implications of esoterica.

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<sup>49</sup> Khenpo Choying Dorje, Personal Communication, Spring 2011. “Piercing to the pith” may have different meanings in the different cycles and transmissions of tantric practice. It is possible that it is a practice that evolved in conjunction with acts of reading the yoginī tantras back into the Guhyasamāja system (as the *Vajramālā* does). I have been unsuccessful to date in locating the Sanskrit equivalent of *gnad du bsnun* or in securing the Indian origins of this practice. Some potential clues emerge in Mallinson and Singleton’s chapter on the yogic body, namely references to piercing the cakras and knots [*granthi*] from the *Netratantra* and *Yogabija* respectively. See (Mallinson 2017). In communicating with Mallinson about the terminology for such practices, he suggested *granthi-bhedana* as one term used in yogic contexts. Personal communication, June 2017.

<sup>50</sup> *zhes lus dkyil nyid bcos ma phyi’i dkyil ‘khor nyis las mchog tu bshad pa ci zhe na. bsgrub gzhi bcos ma bcos kyi [252.1] khyad par gyis mchog dman gyi khyad par de nyid byung ba yin te. mchog gi dngos grub kyi rgyu’i gtso bo ni. lus la gnad du bsnun nas bsgom pa las byung ba’i rdzogs rim nyid yin la; da lta kyi cha thams cad lhar bskyed cing byin gyis brlabs pa [252.2] yang yang goms pas lus kyi rtsa rlung thig le rnams las rung du gyur te; lus la gnad du bsnun nas bsgom pa’i tshe rdzogs rim gyi rtogs pa bde blag tu skye ba’i smin byed khyad par can du ‘gyur la.*

<sup>51</sup> On the etymology of mandala as ‘taking the pith’, see (Lee 2003, p. 130, fn 3). See reference to (Lessing and Wayman 1968, p. 270, fn 1): “Saraha writes in his *Śrī-Buddhakapālatantrapāñjika-jñānavatī* (T. 1652) Derge, Ra, 105a-5: ‘Manda’ means essence (or pith, *sāra*, *hṛdaya*); ‘-la’ means seizing that-thus, ‘seizing the essence’ *maṇḍala*”) (*dkyil ni snying po’i/ ‘khor ni de len pa ste snying po len zhes pa’o*) (Lee 2003).

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