THE GENESIS OF TIBET'S FIRST BUDDHA IMAGES:  
An Annotated Translation from Three Editions of  
the Vase[-shaped] Pillar Testament (bka' chems ka khol ma)  

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Some aspects of the genesis stories of the two Lords of Lhasa (bla sgrags bo), Tibet's famous first Buddha Images, the Jo bo Śākyamuni and the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje, are well known. However, the genesis story from The Vase[-shaped] Pillar Testament (bka' chems ka khol ma), and its unique aspects, is almost completely unknown to Tibetology. For example, that these two Jo bo-s were originally made with crowns, or that they were created specifically for the benefit of Tibetans due to the machinations of a Strong btsan sgam po sum Avalokita has thus far gone unnoticed. Therefore, I present here a translation of the origin of Tibet's two First Buddha Images extracted from The Vase[-shaped] Pillar Testament (bka' chems ka khol ma), and some very brief preliminary remarks on significant features of this tale.

The genesis narrative of these Jo bo-s until now has, only been known from an incomplete paraphrase of the Mani bka' 'bum and the numerous translations of the Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long. Since both of these texts are known to have drawn heavily from The Vase[-shaped] Pillar Testament, a translation of its version of the genesis story will be useful to anyone interested in studying those texts or the development of Tibetan historical writing in general. Because of the vast differences in the three primary textual witnesses available, I have opted to translate a passage from one version of the The Vase[-shaped] Pillar Testament while consulting the two other versions, rather than first attempt to create a text-critical edition. In order to facilitate comparison between my translation and Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long version, I have decided to use Sørensen's abbreviations for the three versions of The Vase[-shaped] Pillar Testament (Bka' chems ka khol ma). Additionally, I have used the following abbreviations: Bod rgya rshi medod chen mo (TTC), and Mitsuhashi's digitized Mahāvyutpatti (Mvyut) version 2000.a1.2.

Extant Versions of the Vase[-shaped] Pillar Testament (Bka' chams ka khol ma)

1A. Rgyal rabs dang gir gys 'bya skyes ma ne bzhengs na bod yul drus su gdam drangs lugs dang rigs gsam mgon po mzas spyod rgyal po srong btsan sgam po raam thar ldeus pa. Manuscript, 1b1-81a2, Collection Dybykov, Akademija Nauk, SSSR, Institute Narodov Azii, Leningrad.


Sākyamuni Buddha (Jo bo Rinpoche) in Jokhang Temple
3. Chos rgyal srong btsan sgam po'i bka’' chams. Manuscript reproduction, 361.1-481.5, embodied in The Literary Arts in Ladakh, vol. 1, Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang, Darjeeling, 1972, 15 chapters. Version 1 and 3 are closely cognate, with the latter offering the briefest version.

The Vase[-shaped] Pillar Testament, Chapter Three. The Disciplining by the Miraculous Manifestation(s) [of the Buddha Śākyamuni]9

[17] Then, at that time, a sound in the sky together with precious offerings, the bodhisattva Avalokita having arrived, [he] was seated directly in front of the Bhagavān. Bodhisattvas of that retinue thought, “You are a strange one/immodest/shameless (ngo mishan can).” Because [he] dwelt on the bhumi-s,10 the bodhisattva thought, “Of course, I am.” Avalokita was delighted with those who did not salute him. Then Avalokita offered the following words to the Bhagavān Śākyamuni,

O Bhagavān, your intentions are still not fulfilled. You have not turned the wheel of religion for the beings in the Land of Snows.

After [Avalokita] offered those words, the Bhagavān spoke,

Those beings which were born in the Land of Snows, being extremely difficult to discipline, since it is still not possible to ripen them [now], at a later time, a bodhisattva such as you must make them ripe.

[18] After the Bhagavān spoke, then Avalokita offered the following words to Śākyamuni,

O Venerable Bhagavān! Since Tathāgata Amitābha dwells in Sukhāvatī11 in the West, he has intuited and perceived that you will pass beyond suffering. How will you be able to not pass beyond suffering?13

The Bhagavān spoke,

Because the welfare of my disciples is complete except for Kun tu rgyu rab bzang and Dris sa rab dga’, and then in order to exhort the lazy to the dharma, and to exhort that all is impermanent, I show the way of passing beyond suffering.14

Avalokita asked,

But you did not tread with your feet upon those down below [in] the North, the Land of Snows, [and] the light ray of your speech has not penetrated.15

After the Bhagavān spoke,

As for those down there, the beings who were born in the Land of Snows, because they did not become disciples of the Tathāgata,16 [and] due to having developed in the dark place of the night, are born from bad rebirth to bad rebirth; again, since all of the dead are going to evil existence like snow falling into a lake which will not emerge again,17 in the future, [they] will be disciplined by a bodhisattva such as you.

[19] Avalokita did not appear from the garden of Jetavanā.18 Having arrived in Sukhāvatī, Avalokita stated the words spoken by Śākyamuni to the Tathāgata Amitābha. From the mouth of Śākyamuni,

The beings who are born in the Land of Snows were not my disciples. In the future, they will be disciplined by one such as you.

And [the words of Śākyamuni] having been spoken, the speech from the mouth of the Bhagavān Amitābha,
O Son of the Family, at a later time, since those beings who were born in the Land of Snows are difficult to discipline, those beings who were born in that place go to evil places as soon as they die; directly under them exists the Avici hell, which is like the opening of an iron container. When by means of your magical display, you are able to pacify them certainly, first summon by means of various things and then secondly, you must liberate them by ripening [their] mindstreams by means of the dharma, and lastly lead them into my presence and come to this Pure Realm of Sukhavati, the field of the Buddha! I will also assist in removing disciples and beings from evil existence.

Avalokita having heard that speech, requested,

O Venerable Bhagavān Amitābha!

Finally beings who have greatly connected karma to the two of you, O Buddha Amitābha, I will lead them to the presence of your feet here in the realm of Sukhavati.

Bodhisattva Mahākārūnika Avalokiteśvara went to Jambudvīpa of the Sahā Universe and having gone, he resided in the excellent luminous site of India on Mt. Potala.

Then, the Bhagavān Śākyamuni emitted from his heart various light rays in the ten directions. Later, after that action sank [back] into [his] countenance, since Ānanda asked, “What was that?” The Bhagavān said, “Ask Ārya Maitreya.” Maitreya said, “This light ray is a sign the Bhagavān passes beyond suffering. It is timely to request and ask what is suitable to be asked.”

At that time, having heard the body of Jina Śākyamuni passes beyond suffering, the great amassed retinue said, “If the teacher has passed beyond suffering, we cannot hear it.” Having shown a magical display of rain falling from the upper part of the body and the lower part of the body catching fire, five hundred arhats passed beyond suffering. A majority of bodhisattvas went to other worlds.

At that time, since both Ārya Mañjuśrī and Ānanda were residing among that retinue, they petitioned the following words to the Bhagavān,

If now the faithful ones see you and also [your] face; the doubts of the retinue are eliminated by you; also the gifts of the benefactors are purified by you; also the six disciples are disciplined by you; also the outshining of the non-Buddhists is performed by you; O Bhagavān, you having gone beyond sorrow, who will train the six disciples? Who will eliminate the doubts of the retinue? Who will purify the gifts of the benefactors? Who will outshine the non-Buddhists? Oh! If the teacher of the world will no longer be here!?!?

[Those two] having said that, the Bhagavān said,

Not long after I have passed [beyond suffering], my auditors, those who have obtained the magical formula (dhāranī) which was remembered, since they will have collected my superior statements, the doubts of the retinue will be cut by my superior statements. Since the group of six [disciples] are magical manifestations of Buddhas of other worlds, [they] will discipline themselves. Also, the gifts of benefactors will be purified by my auditor monks. And as for outshining the non-Buddhists, in order for the Buddhist teachings to abide for a long time, construct a representative body (skuśhab) of me!"

Thus spake he.

Immediately after that, the Lord of the Gods, Śakra rose from his seat. For the three kinds
of representative images of the Buddha, the Bhagavān, Śākyamuni, the Lord of the Gods, Śakra, the benefactor, said, "I offer to do it." The artificer of the gods, Viśvakarma, said, "The making of the image, I offer to do it." The seventy-two glorious protectors said, "The worshiping the image, we offer to do it." Śrī Vajrapāṇi said, "Apprehending the secret of the image, I offer to do it." The protector deity Lcam dral said, "Protecting the icon, we offer to do it." Again, from the countenance of the Bhagavān, three light rays spread out; the first light ray was made to strike Ārya Maitreya; the second light ray was made to strike Brahmā; the third light ray was made to strike Rāhula; those three light rays happened for six days. Maitreya asked, "What is that?" And the Buddha Śākyamuni, the Bhagavān said, "Maitreya, speak in accordance with [your] capability!" Maitreya said, "The Tathāgata is the one who has prophesized the notion, construct a representative body of him who will thoroughly pass beyond suffering." Rāhula said, "I appointed Maitreya to build a support for the body of magical manifestation (sprul pa'i sku'i rten); I appointed Brahmā to build a support for the complete enjoyment body (longs spyad rdzogs pa'i sku'i rten); 1, Rāhula, appointed myself to build a support for the body of religion (chos sku'i rten)," having said that, Rāhula disappeared.

[23] Having carried the materials for the images, a limitless pile of gems of men, as much as what exists in the world, such as diamonds (rin po che'i dbang gi rgyal po), divine crystal (lha'i man shel), and gold, these were heaped in the presence of the maker of the gods, Viśvakarma.

The divine artisan, Viśvakarma having reduced to powder and melted those down; [he] made like a round vase in order to demonstrate the body of religion in the ten directions. Just as [he] went to the sky, and then, the body of religion is demonstrated to be similar to the sky. If [one asks], "What quality does that stūpa which is like Dpal dud pa, blue-black in color and [the size of] a full measurement of Brahmā, possess?" Then, if one circumambulates that one continuously for a week, it will be the one capable of conferring the highest siddhi. Then invited by dakinis, in the kingdom of U rgyan He ru ka, an assembly of non-humans made obeisance to what had been accumulated; now it is known as the Glorious Untouchable Stūpa. Immediately, Brahmā disappeared.

Having carried the immeasurable ingredients of the image: gems, horse/yak hair, fire, bone (ru), a beautiful array (bkod mkhes) and melted moongems (chu shel zhun ma), and piled them up in front of the divine artisan, Viśvakarma, he reduced to powder and melted those down; the basis for an image of complete enjoyment measured eighty yojanas and was bluish in color. After making offerings with presents to whatever qualities it has, by means of prayers, he had twelve dreams of rain showers. [24] That basis is present in the center of the ocean on the way from India to Suvarṇa-dvīpa (rgya gar ges gling). It stays there as a basis for an assembly of haughty worldly deities, and is named, "The Subducer of Heathens." Then, immediately Bodhisattva Ārya Maitreya disappeared.

The five precious substances of the gods (lha'i rin po che lnga): 1. sapphire (indranila), 2. indra gar ba, 3. thon ka (a blue gem), 4. emerald (mar gado), 5. ruby (padma na ka), 39 precious coral (byu ru) of humans (mi'i rin po che byi ru), lapis lazuli (nu rmen), pearl, [and] fifty-five semi-precious stones which were less than divine quality but better than human quality were brought and piled up in front of the divine artisan, Viśvakarma. The gods of the form-realm (vipa-dhātu) said, "The body size of the Bhagavān is thirty-six human-meaures (from the elbow to the tips of the fingers)." The gods of the desire-realm (kama-dhātu) said, "It is sixteen human measures." Men such as King Prasenajit said, "There is no difference from the usṣīṇa of the (Buddha's) head and Nanda's [head]," and there was no agreement on the body-size of the Buddha.

The maker Viśvakarma said, "I will measure with a little outline the body of the Buddha," and having said that, the maker Viśvakarma, face to face with the Buddha, the Bhagavān, Śākyamuni,
attached the precious outline to the little toe of the [Buddha's] foot, which was immediately present. Due to measuring from the bottom of the body to the uṣṇīṣa of the head, [he] did not reach the top.

[25] Moreover, the artisan Viśvakarma by means of [his] magical powers, halted at the seventh time to the top, though he [never] arrived. All around him, in a world-system called, "A Radiance Which Has Happiness," (jig rten gyi khams rdangs dga' ba can) since that place was a buddha-field, the artisan Viśvakarma asked a question of the Bodhisatvā Blessed With Joy (Dga' bas sbyin), "What is this bodhisatvā-field called? And what is the name of the teacher of this [place]?” The Bodhisatvā Blessed With Joy said, "O craftsman for the gods, it is called, 'Radiant Happiness,' and as for the teacher, he is called, 'Tathāgata Dga' ba'i dpal.'” Further, the artificer Viśvakarma asked, "O Bhagavān, What is the approximate distance to the Sahā world-system?” Then, the Buddha Dga' ba'i dpal pronounced

The distance between this world-system and the Sahā [world-system] below is equal to an atom of the world-system. Although you came here, through the power of your teacher Śākyamuni in order to show that the body of the Tathāgata is immeasurable, you have come here. If you came here by means of your magical powers, you act at an inferior time. You are incapable of coming here.

[26] The artificer Viśvakarma asked, "Well then, since I desire to go to the Sahā world-system, how can it be done?" Further, Buddha Dga' ba'i dpal said,

Remember the virtues of your own teacher, and you will be able to go. By merely remembering in the mind, like merely stretching out and drawing in a person's arms, you will discover your place (the Jeta grove).

Further, Buddha Dga' ba'i dpal proclaimed, Maker of the Gods, you, even by a magical display of the gods (lha'i sde [rdzu] 'phrul)⁴³ of the Great Śrāvakas and Arhats who have attained the magical powers, and Bodhisatvas who have attained the daśabhūmi,⁴⁴ are unable to see the uṣṇīṣa of the Buddha. The Buddha's uṣṇīṣa is the magical display of the Buddha. And even the magical display of the Śrāvakas and the Bodhisatvas cannot outshine the magical display of the Tathāgata. The magical display of the Śrāvakas and the Bodhisatvas cannot outshine the great magical display of the Tathāgata.⁴⁵ Such words are from the chapter, "Showing the Inconceivable Nature of the Buddha's Body" in the middle (dgu dums) chapter of the Ārya Mahā ratnakūṭādharmaśāstraśāhaśāhasrikagrantha (The 100,000 Chapters of the Many Various Teachings of the Glorious Great Heap of Jewels). In this way it is also written on the wall of the Bum thang Kyer chu'i lha khang.⁴⁶

[27] Then, the Bhagavān Śākyamuni said,

Artisan Viśvakarma, it is taught for you that there is not a size, which is both large and excellent for an image of the Tathāgata.

Having said that, he said,

Make two types of representative images of me! Make one similar with the size of having reached the age of eight. Make one type of body size similar with the size of having reached the age of twelve.⁴⁷ [Viśvakarma thought.] "Since nobody knows the sizes of the two [bodies], aged eight years and aged twelve years, I (Viśvakarma) will ask the old woman of Kapila (vasu) village, the nurse who plays children's games."⁴⁸ And when the one who...
was asked (the nurse) said, "[His size] is similar to the person of the doorman of Kapilavastu," the Bhagavān Śākyamuni perceived by means of a glance the nurse who played with him, he generated happiness in her. "When the prince reached age eight and twelve, since I sought after the reason they were playing, [I perceived] the outer and inner doorkeepers of the cool room/summer house of Kapila(vastu) were the same (size) as the princes aged eight and twelve." Having said that, measuring the inside person, Viśvakarma constructed one aged eight. Then, having measured the outer person, he constructed one at aged twelve.

[28] Because of the construction, that body was just the one perceiving samaṇa [by means of] the eye; performing the bhumiśpāra-mudrā; possessing eight-spoked wheels on the feet; adorned with a precious jewel unīṣa on the head; possessing various color[is]; the throne adorned with 108 lions and 108 Tārās; protruding twelve deeds [of the Buddha from] the Lalitavistaraśāstra on the back aurocele/curtain; thirty-five buddhas [of confession?] on the halo and on the nape of the neck protrudes wrathful Amrakunḍalin (Buddhānī ḍyon la) and on the left and right of the inner circle of the back curtain protrude many great Śrāvakas, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, Subhūti and Ānanda etc.; protruding on the outer circle are four types of ornaments and the seven royal possessions and the eight auspicious substances (bhena śis ṭrelas brgyud); having constructed the five family Jinas adorning the head from the five types of gems, he prayed to the head. He sewed a silk brocade blanket (zas gi snam yol) of a 1,000 lotuses, and constructed two complete body sizes of the three, the body of religion (dharma-kāya), the body of enjoyment (sambhogakāya), and the magically manifest body (nirmanakāya). At the place where there dwelled the two statues, Śrāvakas enter [the path] (trotaptana), once-returners (sakṛdāgāmin), never-returners (anāgāmin), arhats, and bodhisattvas who obtain bhūmi-s, reside [like] barley flour, dust in sunlight. [29] By virtue of that, at the place where there abides those images, the doctrines of the Great Vehicle will be effortless and [so] construct two possessing [those doctrines]. As for the craftsmanship, the divine artisan Viśvakarma did it. As for the giving of the gift, Lord of the Gods, Śakra did it. The material for the statue was collected by Ārya Maitreyā: a Magadhā measurement of bone and relics of Tathāgata Breaker-of-Transmigrator-Existence (Krakuchanda), All-Seeing (Vipaśyī), Possessing-An-Uṣṇīṣa (Śikhi Buddha), and Light-Protector (Kaśyapa), the three measures [of bones and relics] and the precious wish-fulfilling gem, that which develops intellect, and accomplished all aims [placed] into an empty passage of the body perpendicular to the right breast. The Bhagavān, the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the fully developed Buddha (sanyāsambuddha) Śākyamuni having performed the enthronement consecration himself, the Tathāgata Śākyamuni spoke the following words:

As long as this statue of me abides in the world, it is similar to me, the teacher Śākyamuni abiding in the world. This outshines the non-Buddhists. Also the teachings of the Buddha will abide in the world for a long time. Since the place where the statues will be is Magadhā, the deeds of the Teacher will be explained.

Having proclaimed that, Vajrapāṇī said,

[30] Since I hold the secret of all the buddhas of the three times, I, Secret-holder, hold it.

and was accepted as the sacristan of the temple. The patron was accepted by the Lord of the Assembly. Then, the first of those two representative images came to the possession of (dwelled in the hand of) King Prasenajit.
This small, poignant passage should suffice to demonstrate that even though later works appear to have been based on a missing version Bka’ chems ka khol ma, there are still unique and essential details to be found in the extant Bka’ chems ka khol ma-s. And it is these details to which we must attend if we are to unravel the scholastic arguments or personal experiences of later Tibetans familiar with this text. Regarding the Jo bo-s, we are struck by the simultaneous importance placed on their status as mimetic likenesses of the Buddha’s Miraculous Manifest Body (sprul sugs), and their inability to represent his Body of Religion (chos sugs). The tension in the narrative of the genesis of the Jo bo-s then comes to embody the complications inherent in the trikāya ontology and the implications for devotees who look to the bodies of the Buddha Śākyamuni for inspiration on their own path to a transcendent reality defying all depiction.

Notes and References

1. I would like to first express my sincere gratitude to Leonard W. J. van der Kuijpp for encouraging me to study the Bka’ chems ka khol ma and for reading through an early draft of this translation. Of course, any mistakes are entirely my own. I would also like to thank the U.S. Department of Education for granting me a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award during which time I prepared this article.


6. Cf. Sørensen 1994: 17 and ff. 39-40, where he dates the oldest compilation of The Vase-Pillar Testament (Bka’ chems ka khol ma), or the Lha sa [Bi kal’re] lhigs chen ma at 1055-1060. He also dates the final compilation of the Mani bka’-bum at 1170-1200. Whether or not we accept these dates and whether or not they are helpful in dating different segments of the text, we can at least accept that The Vase-Pillar Testament (Bka’ chems ka khol ma) is older than the Mani bka’-bum because, as Sørensen argues, the biographical portion is based on The Vase-Pillar Testament (Bka’ chems ka khol ma).

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and also Nyang ral mentions in his appendix that he drew from a Bka’ rtsis/gh chen mo.

7. Both Sorensen 1994 and Kapstein 2000 read the Stong bstan sgam po vita-literature as primarily a vehicle for promoting the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara cult in Tibet, but in doing so they overlook the contribution of these texts to the Jo bo Šākyamuni cult. For example, in this text, the genealogy of the Jo bo Šākyamuni Buddha precedes even the Amitābha-Avalokiteśvara narrative for which it is famous. One possible explanation for this sequence would be that as the Jo bo statue is the envoy of the Buddha Shakyañānuni and Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is the envoy of the Buddha Amitābha, the Jo bo ought to take precedence. Cf. KCKKKHM: 17-44.


9. Both Sorensen 1994 and Kapstein 2000 read the Stong bstan sgam po vita-literature as primarily a vehicle for promoting the Avalokiteśvara cult in Tibet, but in doing so they overlook the contribution of these texts to the Jo bo Šākyamuni cult. One possible explanation for the genealogy of the Jo bo Šākyamuni preceding even the Amitābha-Avalokiteśvara narrative would be that as the Jo bo statue is the envoy of the Buddha Šākyamuni compared to Avalokiteśvara being the envoy of the Buddha Amitābha, the Jo bo would thus be given precedence in the KCHKKHM and MNKB. Cf. KCKKKHM: 17-44.

10. This refers to Avalokita’s superior level of spiritual accomplishment.


12. This is a polite Buddhist way of referring to Šākyamuni’s impending death, or his parinirvāna, when he passes beyond all the suffering experienced in the world. For more information, see Collins, S. (1998) Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicitous: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

13. KCHKKM-1 628: khyod kyi dyang pa da rung ma stobs nor gnos pa nga ngan las mi ‘da’ bar grol ma ci las. Since your intention is not fulfilled, if I request [you] not to pass beyond suffering, what then?

14. Using one’s death as a final lesson on impermanence for one’s students is a common trope in biographies of Tibetan teachers and a commonly heard refrain even to this day.

15. Ignorance is often described symbolically as a fog or cloud.

16. Here the Buddha Šākyamuni refers to himself in the third person and means that because Tibetans have not had the opportunity to become his disciples, he will take this course of action.

17. KCHKKHM-1B 629: ngan ’gro ma ngan ’gro mdae ba shi ba ma nsams [rnam] yar mi ldag par msho la sbrang lha ’babs pa bshin ngan sogs du ’gro ba yin pad de dag shin tu ’dul bya bkas ste.

18. Tibetan: ’tse ts. This is the former pleasure grove donated to the Buddha Šākyamuni to be used as a
monastery. It was located in Śrāvasti in the kingdom of Kosala, which during the Buddha's life was ruled by King Prasenajit.

19. This is an epithet commonly used for bodhisatvas such as Avalokiteśvara.

20. KCHHKHM-1B 631: khun phyé bs.

21. Tibetan: za ma tog, a translation of kāranda=a container.


23. The Illuminator Dictionary lists the six disciples or nye ba'i drug pa seldrug sde as, 1) Nanda, 2) Upananda, 3) Āsoka, 4) Udayin, 5) Chanda and 6) Punarvasu.

24. This refers to the Buddhist practice of gaining merit through offering material support to Buddhist monks and nuns.

25. Mgon po la' smon dral could refer to a dgra lha, an "enemy god", his consort and retinue, but the particular protector is not specified here. The dgra lha are deities who are believed to be especially proficient in protecting against one's enemies and in helping to increase wealth and prosperity. On dgra lha and I cam dral, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1998): 318-340.


28. Very little has been published about Tibetan perspectives on properties of precious substances and the significance of their combinations. Therefore, for interested readers, where information is available, I have provided in the following notes brief remarks from the famous pharmacology text by D'e'u dmar dge bshes Bstan 'dzin phun tshogs (b. 1672), even though as much as 600 years separate his remarks from the Bka' chems ba khel ma.


29. The other texts provide alternate lists of precious substances. For example, KCHHKHM-1B 633: rin ma dbang gi rgyal po, lha's man shel chun ma, ger la sogs pa; KCHHKHM-3 374: rin po che'i i nten ni la, go ya ba, tho go mar ba, padma dkar, ger la sogs pa. According to the Dri med shel gong 3b1-2: gold confers longevity and vitality in old age as well as clearing up poison made of precious substances.

30. In Hindu and Buddhist mythology, Viśvakarma serves the role played by Hephaestus in Greek and Vulcan in Roman mythology. He is the craftsman for the gods, the divine artisan. In present day Indian Hinduisim, he serves as the patron saint of the silpin, or craftsmen of any kind, but especially those who fashion images of the gods. There is a Viśvakarma temple next to the New Delhi Railway station which doubles as a rest-house for low income travelers. In Nepal, he is the patron saint of mechanics. In Tibetan, his name is spelt Bi sho karna, or Byi shwa karna which likely reflects 11th century Nepali pronunciation for "Fishwokarma," and is still a common last name in Nepal today.

31. This line, especially the phrase "de je che red nas" is corrupted and not present in the other versions of the Bka' chems ba khel ma.

32. For ze [bya'], Myvyut. 6236 gives kera ram or sel ram.

33. I am unable to find any information on this substance in D'e'u dmar dge bshes Bstan 'dzin phun tshogs' pharmacology texts.
34. According to the *Dri med shel gong* 3a3: *chu shel* cannot be melted; it expels *ngag-s* and pacifies fevers.

35. This is the Indian Archipelago.

36. According to the *Dri med shel gong* 2b6: *indriṅšṭa* clears up all diseases without exception.

37. I am unable to find any information on this substance in D’eu dmär dge bshes Brstan ‘dzin phun ’tsogs’ pharmacology texts.

38. According to the *Dri med shel gong* 3a1-2: *marga ta* is supremely helpful for all diseases.

39. According to the *Dri med shel gong* 2b6-3a1: *padma rä ga* deprives one of all negative forces/malevolent spirits.

40. According to the *Dri med shel gong* 3a4: *bya ru* clears up liver disease/hepatitis (mchün thshad).

41. According to the *Dri med shel gong* 3a4-5: *mu men* clears up poisons, leprosy (chu ser) and lymph (mdzo) diseases. Sørensen (1994: 64) identified *mu men* as *vakrāta-rājāvarta*.

42. Nanda was the younger brother of the Buddha.


44. This is the tenth stage of the progressive spiritual development of a Mahāyāna Buddhist from a bodhisattva to a Buddha.

45. The same line is repeated with “great” inserted for emphasis.

46. KCHKKHM-2 26: Is the only text which identifies this passage as from the *dlup darn* section of the *Phags pa dkon mchog brtags pa chen po ’i Aryan mahānātākāsā*.


48. KCHKKHM-1B 638 and KCHKKHM-3 378 only mention the size of the Buddha image at age 8.

49. According to Bu ston (Obermiller 1931 (Part II): 13) he had 8 nurses who played with him (*rtsen pa’i ma mal krisa-dhātāri*), none of whom are named.

50. The following description of the appearance of the Jo bo Śākyamuni and Jo bo Mi bskyod rdlo rje differs dramatically from the statues in Lhasa today. On the significance of this passage and other written descriptions of these two Jo bo-s, see Warner, C. D. (forthcoming b).

51. Cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1998: 320-22, where Bbud rtsi’ khyi’la is a *dgu ba* lha mentioned in a *lha bsdangs* text used by the Rnying ma pa, but also worshipped by the Dge legs pa. He appears in a number of forms.

52. The seven royal possessions are the precious wheel (*khor lo rin po che*), the precious jewel (*nor bu rin po che*), the precious queen (*btan mo rin po che*), the precious minister (*blon po rin po che*), the precious elephant (*glang po rin po che*), the precious steed (*rtwa mchog rin po che*), and the precious general (*damg dön rin po che*).

53. The eight auspicious signs are the mirror (*me long*), heaoar (*ghi rgya*), cuds (*zech*), Durva grass (*rtwa dkar ba*), wood-apple fruit (*shing tog bul ba*), right-coiling conch shell (*dang dkar g.yas khyi*), vermilion powder (*li khyi*), and mustard seed (*yangs bar*). The imagery here suggests a certain type of cloth.


55. KCHKKHM-1B 639 has only one statue.

56. KCHKKHM-1B 639 has Maitreya as the benefactor, and the famous detail of the Buddha himself performing the consecration of the statue.

57. According to the TTC, he is fourth Buddha of this kalpa, one of the seven heroic Buddhas. Cf. Mvyt. 91 has kackusanda.

58. TTC: the first Buddha of this kalpa. Mvyt. 87.

59. TTC: second Buddha of this kalpa. Mvyt. 88.

60. TTC: sixth Buddha of this kalpa. Mvyt. 93.
61. Why are four previous Buddhas listed and only three measures of relics?
63. *Zil gyis guon pa* literally means, “oppress through splendor.”

64. KCHKKHM-1B 639 has only one statue and King Prasenajit prostrating before it. The rest of the passage is the same.
65. A complete translation and study of the extant versions of the *Bka' chams ka khol wa* (The Vase-shaped Pillar Testament) is an urgent desideratum which I hope to complete in the future.
66. See n. 54