ལྷ་མོ་ནག་མོ་ཆེན་མོའི་གཟུངས།

The Dhāraṇī of Devī Mahākālī

Devīmahākālīnāmadhāraṇī

· Toh 1087 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 101 (gzungs ’dus, waM), folio 253.a

For referencing Tibetan sources, please see our Scholar’s Edition

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Summary

s.1 *The Dhāraṇī of Devī Mahākālī* opens at the Bodhi tree in Bodhgayā shortly after the Buddha Śākyamuni has attained perfect awakening. As Śākyamuni sits at the base of the Bodhi tree, Devī Mahākālī circumambulates him three times and offers a *vidyā*, or "spell," in homage at the Blessed One's feet. Śākyamuni then expresses his wish that Mahākālī's *vidyā* be used to bind all beings from the highest heaven down through the lowest hell of the desire realms.

Acknowledgments

ac.1 Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee under the supervision of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche. The translation was produced by Adam Krug and then checked against the Tibetan and edited by Andreas Doctor.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

Introduction

i.1 *The Dhāraṇī of Devī Mahākālī* is a short text that presents how the goddess Śrīdevī Mahākālī first encountered the Buddha Śākyamuni, converted to his teaching, and offered a mantra in homage to the Buddha. In the Degé Kangyur the text is included both in the Tantra Collection (Toh 670) and the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs (Toh 1087).

i.2 The text presents a scene that also appears in *The Tantra of the Flaming Ḍākinī* (*mkha' 'gro ma me lce 'bar ba'i rgyud*, Toh 842), which is a longer tantra that recounts the complete origin story of Śrīdevī Mahākālī and her attendant Rematī.[1] According to this tantra, following her meeting with the Buddha, Śrīdevī Mahākālī became a protector of the Dharma who guards the followers of the Buddha's teaching. Within the Kangyur, the text is part of a small group of texts concerned with Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī.[2] *The Dhāraṇī of Devī Mahākālī* also bears some similarity to *The Dhāraṇī of Glorious Mahākāla* (Toh 668)[3] in terms of the setting in which the dhāraṇī is delivered and the various medical ailments for which it is prescribed.

i.3 *The Dhāraṇī of Devī Mahākālī* opens at the Bodhi tree in Bodhgayā shortly after the Buddha Śākyamuni has fully awakened. As the Buddha sits at the base of the Bodhi tree, Devī Mahākālī (as Śrīdevī Mahākālī is called in this text) circumambulates the Buddha three times and offers a *vidyā*, or "spell," in homage. Śākyamuni then expresses his wish that Devī Mahākālī may bind all beings from the highest heaven down through the lowest hell of the desire realms. Devī Mahākālī then recites her mantra and proclaims that it can be used to prevent various illnesses, to bind beings that cause plagues and misfortune, and to cure diseases such as leprosy, sores, and rashes.

i.4 Although the Tibetan text does not have a translators' colophon, it appears in both the Denkarma[4] and Phangthangma[5] Tibetan catalogs, indicating that the text existed in Tibetan by the early ninth century. There is currently no known

Sanskrit version of the text, and the text does not appear as an independent work in the Chinese canon. This English translation is based on the recensions found in the Tantra Collection (Toh 670) and the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs (Toh 1087) in the Degé Kangyur,[6] in consultation with the Comparative Edition of the Kangyur (*dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyur.

The Translation

1.

The Dhāraṇī of Devī Mahākālī

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was sitting at the base of the Bodhi tree shortly after becoming a perfect buddha. At that point Devī Mahākālī—Sovereign Goddess of the Desire Realm, Wife of the Demon, Yama's Sister—circumambulated the Blessed One three times and sat to one side.

1.2 Devī Mahākālī then addressed the Blessed One, saying, "Honorable One, were I to offer this vidyā in homage at the Blessed One's feet, would the Blessed One please accept my vidyā?"[7]

1.3 The Blessed One replied, "Devī Mahākālī—the Wife of the Demon and Yama's Sister—will bind beings[8] up through the Heaven of Controlling the Emanations of Others. She will bind beings down through the hell realms. She will bind beings out to the surrounding mountains. Her mantra should be recited as follows:

1.4 *tadyathā | oṃ ruru vitiṣṭha vadhotsi ruru roru vitiṣṭha vadhotsi svāhā |*

1.5 By pronouncing this vidyā, may all fevers, illnesses, plagues, and humoral disorders, as well as all illnesses such as leprosy, boils, skin rashes, and the like, be cured! *Svāhā.*"

1.6 *This concludes "The Dhāraṇī of Devī Mahākālī."*

Abbreviations

C Choné (*co ne*)

D Degé (*sde dge bka' 'gyur*)

H Lhasa (*lha sa/zhol*)

J Lithang (*li thang*)

K Kangxi (*kang shi*)

N Narthang (*snar thang*)

S Stok Palace (*stog pho 'brang*)

U Urga (*phyi sog khu re*)

Y Yongle (*g.yong lo*)

Notes

1. In Toh 842, the scene that corresponds with that found in the present text is at folio 232.a. Although the mantra that appears in both texts is the same, the two texts differ in their wording, so *The Dhāraṇī of Devī Mahākālī* is not a direct extract from Toh 842. For more details regarding Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī, see the introduction to Toh 1090.

2. The texts in this group are Toh 670, *Toh 671*, *Toh 672*, Toh 840, Toh 842, and *Toh 1090/1777*. While a detailed analysis of the provenance of these texts is beyond the scope of this introduction, we may briefly note that none of these works has a translator's colophon. Therefore, their status as translated texts from Sanskrit cannot be verified. Indeed, this group of texts devoted to Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī likely first began to circulate not in India but rather in the late eighth- or early ninth-century Tibet, where they appeared at the nexus of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, a point of intersection where Indic figures, narratives, and iconography found new expressions within the unfolding Tibetan Buddhist idiom.

3. Dharmachakra Translation Committee, trans., *The Dhāraṇī of Glorious Mahākāla*, Toh 668/Toh 1085 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2023).

4. Denkarma, 303.a.7. See also Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, p. 242, no. 423.

5. Phangthangma, p. 29.

6. This text, Toh 1087, and all those contained in this same volume (*gzungs 'dus*, *waM*), are listed as being located in volume 101 of the Degé Kangyur by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC). However, several other Kangyur databases—including the eKangyur that supplies the digital input version displayed by the 84000 Reading Room—list this work as being located in volume 102. This discrepancy is partly due to the fact that the two volumes of the *gzungs 'dus* section are an added supplement not mentioned in the original catalog, and also hinges on the fact that the compilers of the Tōhoku catalog placed another text—which forms a whole, very large volume—the *Vimalaprabhānāmakālacakra tantraṭīkā* (*dus 'khor 'grel bshad dri med 'od*, Toh 845), before the volume 100 of the Degé Kangyur, numbering it as vol. 100, although it is almost certainly intended to come right at the end of the Degé Kangyur texts as volume 102; indeed its final fifth chapter is often carried over and wrapped in the same volume as the Kangyur *dkar chags* (catalog). Please note this discrepancy when using the eKangyur viewer in this translation.

7. D and S: *bdag gi de*. The Tibetan only has a pronoun here. The term *vidyā* has been added to the English translation for clarity.

8. The objects of Mahākālī's dhāraṇī are not made explicit here, but the close relationship between this text and *The Dhāraṇī of Glorious Mahākāla* (Toh 668/1085), might allow us to supply the following list of beings that are bound by Devī Mahākālī's *dhāraṇī* as "all beings that cause illnesses and diseases, all grahas, beings that cause plague, bhūtas, and beings that cause faulty meditations and faulty views."

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Glossary

Bodhi tree

byang chub kyi shing

བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་ཤིང་།

bodhivṛkṣa

The tree in Bodhgayā under which Siddhārtha Gautama attained buddhahood.

Devī Mahākālī

lha mo nag mo chen mo

ལྷ་མོ་ནག་མོ་ཆེན་མོ།

devī mahākālī

Also known as Śrīdevī Mahākālī. A wrathful Dharma protector who is often portrayed together with her servant Rematī. At times she is conflated with Rematī, so that the two appear to be identical. In the Tibetan tradition, she is better known under her Tibetan name, Palden Lhamo (*dpal ldan lha mo*). She is most often portrayed riding on a donkey and adorned with various wrathful ornaments and hand implements.

health problem

nyes pa

ཉེས་པ།

doṣa

Literally a “fault,” this term signifies a wide range of health problems that might be brought on by an imbalance of the humors (*doṣa*) or some extraneous cause that has affected an individual because of some kind of behavioral or physical fault or defect (*doṣa*).

Heaven of Controlling the Emanations of Others

gzhan ’phrul dbang byed

གཞན་འཕྲུལ་དབང་བྱེད།

paranirmitavaśavartin

The name for the highest heavenly realm in the desire realm, which is considered higher than the Nirmāṇarati gods who generate their own pleasing magical emanations.

Sovereign Goddess of the Desire Realm

'dod pa'i khams kyi dbang phyug ma

འདོད་པའི་ཁམས་ཀྱི་དབང་ཕྱུག་མ།

An epithet for Devī Mahākālī. According to *The Tantra of the Flaming Ḍākinī* (Toh 842), Śrīdevī Mahākālī prays that in her next life she may meet the Buddha and become the sovereign goddess of the desire realm. When this becomes reality, she becomes known as "Sovereign Goddess of the Desire Realm."

vidyā

rig pa

རིག་པ།

vidyā

A spell.

Wife of the Demon

bdud kyi yum

བདུད་ཀྱི་ཡུམ།

An epithet for Devī Mahākālī. According to *The Tantra of the Flaming Ḍākinī* (Toh 842), Śrīdevī Mahākālī was at one point tricked into marriage with the rākṣasa king Daśagrīva and so becomes known as "Wife of the Demon."

Yama's Sister

gshin rje'i lcam mo

གཤེན་རྗེའི་ལྷམ་མོ།

An epithet for Devī Mahākālī. According to *The Tantra of the Flaming Ḍākinī* (Toh 842), Śrīdevī Mahākālī was originally born as a divine girl called Red Cāmuṇḍī. Her father was Mahādeva, her mother was Umadevī, and her brother at that time was called Yama Mahākāla. Hence, she is “Yama’s Sister.”