

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2002, we found ourselves engaged in critically editing two Phur pa tantras from the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, a project that eventually saw fruition in our volume of 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: two texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, Vienna, The Austrian Academy of Sciences Press. It became increasingly evident that our understanding of the origins of traditionally transmitted rNying ma Phur pa tantras such as these would remain incomplete without a thorough parallel investigation of the Dunhuang Phur pa materials, which, unlike the traditionally transmitted ones, can be guaranteed to have remained unmodified for almost 1,000 years. Hence we proposed to the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), our sponsors, that we begin a parallel project to decipher, transcribe, and translate the Dunhuang archaeological legacy concerning Phur pa, including both the Phur pa texts per se, and all related Phur pa materials that we could find. We hoped that by analysing this material philologically, and also to some degree comparatively, historically, and anthropologically, we might shed some further light on the mystery of the origins of these remarkable and influential texts. We hoped also to provide a potentially valuable resource for understanding the ritual, social and historical factors that gave subsequent Tibetan religion its characteristically tantric aspect. We are extremely grateful to the AHRC for awarding us funds that enabled us to devote 25% of our time over the three year period 2004-2007 to this work. By pursuing these two lines of research in near-parallel, we have been able to see connections between the Dunhuang and transmitted Phur pa traditions that might otherwise have remained unnoticed. The Dunhuang Phur pa texts in themselves also offer the possibility of an intimate historical insight into the post-Dynastic period (mid 9th to 11th centuries), and we hope our analysis has made some modest contribution to such significations. We regret that the time limitations did not permit us to go beyond the early Phur pa sources to more general early historical sources, which could have provided more thorough contextualisation of our material, a task which will have to await a further study.

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