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Eight Verses Praising Śrīdevī Mahākālī

Śrīmahākālīdevīstotrāṣṭaka

Translated into Tibetan by
Brahmin Vararuci

དཔལ་ལྷ་མོ་ནག་མོ་ཆེན་མོ་ལ་བསྟོད་པ་བརྒྱད་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

dpal lha mo nag mo chen mo la bstod pa brgyad pa zhes bya ba

Śrīmahākālīdevīstotrāṣṭakanāma



Toh 1777
Degé Tengyur, Vol. 28 (rgyud 'bum, sha), folios 271.b–272.a.

Translated by Catherine Dalton and Andreas Doctor
under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha

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co.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 *Praising the Lady Who Rules Disease*, or, as it is alternatively titled, *Eight Verses Praising Śrīdevī Mahākālī*, is a short praise to the Dharma protector Śrīdevī Mahākālī. The text is included in the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs section of the Degé Kangyur as well as in the Tantra section of the Degé Tengyur.

ac.

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i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

This text, which appears in both the Degé Kangyur and Tengyur under the alternative titles *Praising the Lady Who Rules Disease* (Toh 1090) and *Eight Verses Praising Śrīdevī Mahākālī* (Toh 1777), is a short praise to the goddess known as Śrīdevī Mahākālī. According to *The Tantra of the Flaming Ḍākinī* (*mkha' 'gro ma me lce 'bar ba'i rgyud*, Toh 842), which recounts the origin story of this goddess and her attendant (and half-sister) Rematī, the two are protectors of the Dharma who have taken vows to guard the followers of the Buddha's teaching.¹ Within the Kangyur, the praise is part of a group of small group of texts concerned with Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī.² The praise appears to have been included in the Tengyur based on an assumption that it was authored by a historical person, the brahmin Vararuci. However, this authorial attribution seems to be incorrect and was likely caused by the text's rather confusing pedigree (see more below).

i.2

As for Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī, in *The Tantra of the Flaming Ḍākinī* (Toh 842) we find an elaborate origin story for these two goddesses.³ In this tantra both Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī form the aspiration to jointly protect the Dharma in the future—continuing in their respective roles as “the Lady” (*jo mo*) and “the Servant” (*khol mo*). Central to their activity as Dharma protectors is the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, who blesses Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī at several crucial junctures in their lives and finally, following their conversion to the Buddha's teaching, confers on them extensive empowerments and instructions so that he becomes their main spiritual teacher.

i.3

A common series of epithets used in the Kangyur texts for Śrīdevī Mahākālī (and occasionally Rematī as well) is “Yama's Sister” (*gshin rje'i lcam mo*), “Wife of the Demon” (*bdud kyi yum*), and “Sovereign Goddess of the Desire Realm” (*'dod pa'i khamis kyi dbang phyug ma*). The background for these epithets is explained in *The Tantra of the Flaming Ḍākinī*, where they all refer to events in the first of Śrīdevī Mahākālī's past lives. According to this tantra, 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.” At some point Red Cāmuṇḍī rescues a nāga from the attack of a garuḍa and subsequently gains fame under the name White Conch Protectress. Unfortunately, she is soon thereafter tricked into marriage with the rākṣasa king Daśagrīva and so becomes “Wife of the Demon.” Later, White Conch Protectress (together with Rematī) flees his kingdom and, once free, prays that in her next life she may meet the Buddha and become the sovereign goddess of the desire realm. This aspiration is eventually fulfilled when White Conch Protectress and Rematī (now in a subsequent lifetime) encounter the Dharma protector Ekajaṭī and receive from her the names Black Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Yakṣa Rematī, respectively.

i.4 Interestingly, although these epithets are all related to a specific past life of Śrīdevī Mahākālī, in the related Kangyur texts they are also at times used in reference to Rematī. In fact, even though *The Tantra of the Flaming Ḍākinī* clearly presents Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī as two distinct individuals, it seems at times in the Kangyur literature as if their names and epithets are used almost interchangeably, in reference to both—almost as if the two protectors at times share the same identity. An example of this is found in the tantra *Verses Praising Śrīdevī Kālī* (Toh 671) where Śrīdevī Mahākālī is praised as “Sovereign Goddess of the Desire Realm, Wife of the Demon, Yama’s Sister, Śrīdevī, Black Rematī, Black Devourer.”⁴ The seemingly indistinguishable nature of the two protectors is also evident from the titles assigned to the praise in the Degé Kangyur (Toh 1090) and Tengyur (Toh 1777). The Kangyur title, *Praising the Lady Who Rules Disease*, is a clear reference to Rematī, who is said to at one time have drunk from a pond infected with disease, following which she is able to cause illness in others by breathing on them. She is also said to carry some of the infected water with her in a pouch concealed on her body. In this way she can infect others with disease but also cure them, if she decides to.⁵ On the other hand, the Tengyur title, *Eight Verses Praising Śrīdevī Mahākālī*, is a clear reference to the other protector, Śrīdevī Mahākālī. So in the very titles of this praise, the conflation of the identities of the two protectors is already apparent.

i.5 In India, the epithet Śrīdevī (Glorious Goddess) is broadly applied to a range of peaceful and wrathful goddesses, but in Tibet the name is mostly identified with the wrathful Dharma protector Palden Lhamo (*dpal ldan lha mo*; Palden Lhamo being the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit Śrīdevī), who, just like Śrīdevī in India, also appears in several manifestations.⁶ In the Kangyur, however, the appearance of Śrīdevī Mahākālī, as well as that of Rematī, is always nearly identical.⁷ Their iconography is described primarily in the tantra called *The Verses Praising Śrīdevī Kālī* (Toh 671) and in *Praising the*

Lady Who Rules Disease (Toh 1090), and the reasons behind many of their characteristic features are described in *The Tantra of the Flaming Ḍākinī* (Toh 842). In these works, both goddesses are described as black in color, riding a donkey, wearing shackles as adornments, and holding a skull and a sword.⁸ They are wrathful in appearance, with bloody fangs and bloodshot eyes, and wear a garland of fresh skulls. Besides such traditional wrathful ornaments, both goddesses also keep a lion and a snake as ear ornaments, while the sun adorns their navels. To readers familiar with the iconography of Śrīdevī / Palden Lhamo in the Tibetan traditions, the many similarities are clear. However, it should be kept in mind that Śrīdevī / Palden Lhamo has several distinct manifestations in Tibet, so not all the features of Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī apply to all manifestations of Śrīdevī / Palden Lhamo.

i.6 As for Rematī, she also appears to have been linked to the similarly named Indian goddess Revatī, but the situation with these two names is somewhat complicated. In the Kangyur, the name Rematī (phoneticized as *re ma ti*) nearly always references the protector Rematī, as she appears in the group of texts centered on this goddess, riding on a donkey and holding her various implements.⁹ On the other hand, in non-Buddhist Indian literature the name Revatī commonly refers to various other goddesses (e.g., Durgā), who often, but not always, have a wrathful and protective nature. However, Revatī is also the name of a rākṣasī who is associated with the illness and mortality of children.¹⁰ In Tibetan literature, the name Revatī is most often translated and rendered as *nam gru*, which has roughly the same semantic range.¹¹ Of its various referents, it is the rākṣasī demoness Revatī who in the Kangyur occasionally is linked with the Dharma protector Rematī.

i.7 Sometimes Revatī (*nam gru*) and Rematī even appear to have been considered identical. For example, the text *In Praise of the Goddess Revatī (lha mo nam gru la bstod pa*, Toh 1091) ties the name *nam gru* directly to the name Rematī. However, this text is extracted from the longer text *The Great Tantra of Supreme Knowledge (rig pa mchog gi rgyud chen po*, Toh 746), in which only the name *nam gru* is used and the name Rematī does not occur. Moreover, in Toh 1091 the name Rematī is only found in the opening homage and the concluding colophon—sections of the text that were presumably added after the praise was extracted from Toh 746.¹²

i.8 Indeed, in Toh 746 the figure to whom the name applies is described as “the rākṣasī *nam gru* (Revatī), who has great strength and great diligence and kills children in the threefold world,”¹³ as well as “the terrifying lady of the dark night, Yama’s Sister.”¹⁴ Therefore, it is clearly the rākṣasī Revatī who appears in Toh 746, not the protector Rematī. Still, the mention of her as “Yama’s Sister” does of course link her to the Kangyur literature on Rematī. As further evidence of such a link, *The Secret Tantra of the Wrathful Vajra Mind*

(*rdo rje gtum po thugs gsang ba'i rgyud*, Toh 458) uses both *re ba ti*¹⁵ and *re ma ti*¹⁶ to refer to the same figure (who is also identified in both occurrences as “Yama’s Sister”).

i.9 With this in mind, one could perhaps argue that Rematī and Revatī are to be considered equivalent.¹⁷ However, there are also reasons to see them as separate names for two distinct beings. First, only the name Revatī is attested in Sanskrit, whereas Rematī is overwhelmingly the name found in Tibetan-language sources. Second, the physical appearance, activity, and narratives connected with the rākṣasī Revatī are significantly different from those of the protector goddess Rematī, who appears in the Kangyur literature with a much more elaborate iconography and a fully developed role as a protector of the Dharma. Whereas Revatī mostly plays a supporting role in the tantric literature of the Kangyur as an obstacle maker who needs to be pacified, Rematī plays a much fuller character with a complex origin account and more developed practices associated with her.

i.10 On the other hand, as we have mentioned above, there are instances where texts in the Kangyur clearly link the two names to a shared identity. When, how, and why Revatī and Rematī—two figures who are clearly distinct in significant ways—were linked in some texts in the Kangyur are therefore questions that remain unanswered, and so this topic requires further research.

i.11 Besides the two versions of this praise (Toh 1090 and Toh 1777) that we present in translation here, a third witness is found in the Kangyur text *Verses Praising Śrīdevī Kālī* (Toh 671). This tantra consists of twelve individual praises to Śrīdevī Mahākālī uttered by a host of divine, semidivine, and human actors, and one of these twelve praises is the one contained in Toh 1090 and Toh 1777. It seems in fact that the standalone Kangyur and Tengyur recensions of the praise were most likely extracted and adapted at some point from the version of the praise found in Toh 671.¹⁸ None of these texts includes a translator’s colophon, but the Denkarma imperial catalog lists a text by the long title *Praising the Lady Who Rules Disease Composed by the Brahmin Vararuci* (*nad kyi bdag mo la bstod pa bram ze mchog sred kyis byas pa*), which almost certainly refers to our *Praising the Lady Who Rules Disease* (Toh 1090). So the text must have already been extracted from *Verses Praising Śrīdevī Kālī* (Toh 671) by the early ninth century.¹⁹

i.12 In *Verses Praising Śrīdevī Kālī*, each of the twelve praises is spoken by a different member of Vajrapāṇi’s retinue. However, in this tantra this particular praise is not spoken by the brahmin Vararuci but rather by Yama, the Lord of Death. Instead, it is only in the *subsequent* praise in the tantra that the brahmin Vararuci begins to speak. It therefore appears that when the praise was extracted to form a standalone text, the authorial attribution—

which in *Verses Praising Śrīdevī Kālī* precedes, rather than follows, each praise in the tantra—was misrepresented in the extracted text. In this way it appeared as if it was the brahmin Vararuci who was the author of the praise, rather than the Lord of Death. This is presumably also the reason why this extracted passage was included in the Tengyur, as the editors of the Tengyur may have assumed that the figure Vararuci, whom they identified as the author of the adapted text, was a historical person, rather than the ahistorical Vararuci who appears in *Verses Praising Śrīdevī Kālī* and elsewhere in the tantric literature centered on Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī.²⁰ Perhaps it was thought that Vararuci was the identically named historical person(s) known to have authored several grammatical and astrological treatises? In any case, it seems that the praise in Toh 1090 and Toh 1777 should be attributed to the Lord of Death, not Vararuci.

i.13 The praise is included in the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs (*gzungs 'dus*) section of the Degé Kangyur and other Tshalpa-lineage Kangyurs that include a separate dhāraṇī section.²¹ In Tshalpa-lineage Kangyurs that lack a section so named, the text is found in the Tantra section, but only in the equivalent but unnamed dhāraṇī collection constituting part of the Tantra section. It is not found in any Kangyurs belonging to the Thempangma grouping, such as the Stok Palace Kangyur, nor do we find it in the Dunhuang collections. It is also included in all four recensions of the Tengyur, presumably since the colophon of the work identifies it as having been authored by the brahmin Vararuci. It seems likely that the work's inclusion in some Kangyurs, despite also having a (mistaken) authorial attribution in both its Kangyur and Tengyur recensions, may be related to its being part of the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs, which seems to have been compiled on the basis of an earlier collection or collections of dhāraṇīs and associated ritual texts.²² These collections, known in Sanskrit as *dhāraṇī-saṃgrahas*, appear in South Asia and Tibet—including at Dunhuang and as extracanonical Tibetan dhāraṇī collections—and often include praises as well as dhāraṇīs and dhāraṇī sūtras.²³ As mentioned above, the present work has been preserved under two titles: the recension included in the Kangyurs is titled *Praising the Lady Who Rules Disease*, while that in the Tengyurs is titled *Eight Verses Praising Śrīdevī Mahākālī*.

i.14 The praise is not extant in Sanskrit and does not appear to have been translated into Chinese. This English translation was produced based on both the Degé Kangyur and Tengyur recensions (Toh 1090²⁴ and Toh 1777), with additional reference to the notes from the Comparative Editions (*dpe bsdur ma*) of the Kangyur and Tengyur, as well as to the recension of the praise found in Toh 671. We have listed some, but not all, major differences between Toh 1090/1777 and Toh 671 in the notes to the translation.

However, in general we have attempted to translate Toh 1090/1777 as an independent text without incorporating the many different readings in Toh 671.

Eight Verses Praising Śrīdevī Mahākālī

1.

The Translation

[F.271.b]

1.1 Homage to Glorious Vajrapāṇi.²⁵

O Devī, you wander in this world, naked,²⁶ riding a donkey;
Anointed with sesame oil, your hair a single plait, and with lead earrings,
you are seductive and fully adorned,
While iron shackles grace your feet as anklets.
We know your²⁷ nature is beautiful,²⁸ and yet²⁹ who can know the matter of
your great ocean of activity for others? | 1 |

1.2 In saṃsāra, at the time of destruction, when from human bodies³⁰ blood and
fat ooze forth, and smoke rises,
O Devī, in a single instant you will toss all beings into your terrifying, fanged
mouth.
O Kālī, you who hold a human skull, as the domain of yogic practice³¹ you
take delight in cremation grounds,
And the terrifying ringing of your bell subdues the wicked ones³² and
dispels and quells³³ all ills and mortal perils.³⁴ | 2 |

1.3 Adorned with a crown of warriors' heads, you bear a garland of heads
severed on the battlefield.
You dance with your supple arms opened wide, wearing a nāga lord³⁵ as a
belt across your broad hips. [F.272.a]
Intoxicated by the liquor of blood, in your hands you brandish a spear and
sword.
Your eyes bloodshot, you are seen by the host of bhūtas who wander
cremation grounds at night. | 3 |

1.4 You wear a great³⁶ torn³⁷ hide and a half-open shawl, bound with a belt of
braided straw.³⁸

- With your moon-like face adorned with strings of fresh human entrails, you
ring³⁹ a bell at your cheek.
Your body freshly oiled and painted in patches with drops of blood, fat, and
the like,⁴⁰
You tear at human flesh⁴¹ with your glistening teeth. O Kāpālikā, protect me!
| 4 |
- 1.5 Fiercest among fierce ladies, terrifying, with human flesh in your mouth, the
first time they saw you
Even the māṭṛkās were frightened and terrified as you flew into a rage, your
bloodshot eyes flickering about—I bow to you!
Beautiful Kālī, your black body is so overwhelming that even Śakra and the
rest are compelled
To praise you daily, and even I, Yama,⁴² will always bow trembling before
you. | 5 |
- 1.6 You who bring an end⁴³ to humans and all living beings,⁴⁴
On one side, by your ear, is an uraga, whose thousand-headed hood is
spread and adorns you.⁴⁵
At the other ear you keep a supreme lion, as you trample the entire⁴⁶ ocean-
encircled earth.
The sun that crosses the sky, brilliant with a thousand rays, rests directly at
your navel.⁴⁷ | 6 |
- 1.7 You are the fire that blazes forth from the expanse of the ocean,⁴⁸
Able to dry up the whole of the sea.
Because all women are pacified,⁴⁹
You are present⁵⁰ as half of Mahādeva’s body.⁵¹ | 7 |
- 1.8 Durgā, Umā, Mahākālī,
To whom gods and asuras pay homage—
You who know all plagues,
Render them harmless!⁵²

Yama’s Sister, Wife of the Demon,
Sovereign Goddess of the Desire Realm—I praise you!⁵³ | 8 |
- 1.9 *This concludes “Eight Verses Praising Śrīdevī Mahākālī, the Lady Who Rules All
Disease,” composed by the brahmin Vararuci.⁵⁴*

n.

NOTES

- n.1 The two goddesses are half-sisters, since Mahādeva is the father of both of them.
- n.2 The texts belonging to 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 this group of 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 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. In addition to the texts in this grouping, there are other Kangyur texts, such as Toh 458, Toh 746, and Toh 1091, in which the name Revatī (*nam gru*) appears and, in one instance (Toh 458) the name Rematī is also found. However, these instances all refer to a rākṣasī demoness named Revatī and not the protector Rematī, who appears in the above group of texts (this point is also discussed in more detail elsewhere in this introduction).
- n.3 The origin account of the two protectors is found in Toh 842 (vol. 99 [rnying rgyud, ga], folios 223.b–234.b). The events of this account have also been summarized and discussed first by Giuseppe Tucci (1949, pp. 218–19) and later by Amy Heller (1997, pp. 286–90).
- n.4 *'dod pa'i khamṣ kyī dbang phyug ma/bdud kyī yum la gshin rje'i lcam gcig ma/dpal ldan lha mo nag mo re ma ti/nag mo za byed* (vol. 91 [rgyud 'bum, ba], folio 207.a).
- n.5 This story is told in Toh 842 (vol. 99 [rnying rgyud, ga], folio 231.a).

- n.6 For early discussions of Palden Lhamo, see Tucci 1949 (pp. 590–92) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956 (pp. 22–37). For a more recent overview of Palden Lhamo, see Heller 2005 (pp. 217–20).
- n.7 It should also be noted that Śrīdevī Mahākālī, as she appears in these Kangyur texts (see [n.2](#)), is not necessarily identical with the non-Buddhist goddess Kālī, although the two goddesses draw on shared mythological themes.
- n.8 In Toh 1090 Śrīdevī Mahākālī also holds a spear.
- n.9 The exceptions to this appear to be Toh 458 and Toh 1091, both discussed below.
- n.10 Revatī appears as a rākṣasī with an evil influence on children in the *Mahābhārata* and elsewhere. On this rākṣasī, see Srinivasan 2020, pp. 104–5 and 134–35. Revatī is also one of the constellations in the heavens, personified as a goddess.
- n.11 However, *nam gru* can also refer to a group of local female deities and even a male monastic disciple of the Buddha Śākyamuni (in which case *nam gru* translates the Sanskrit name Revata).
- n.12 As discussed in [n.2](#), the group of texts in the Kangyur devoted to the protector goddesses Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī in the specific forms discussed here appear likely to have first circulated in late eighth- or early ninth-century Tibet. This is not the case for texts, like Toh 746 (and the parts that were extracted from this text into the main body of Toh 1091), that concern the rākṣasī Revatī (*nam gru*). It therefore appears that the use of the name Rematī (*re ma ti*) as identical to Revatī (*nam gru*) in a few Kangyur texts, such as in the homage and colophon of Toh 1091—and therefore the link between these two otherwise distinct figures—was likely the work of later redactors of the canon.
- n.13 *srin mo nam gru zhes bya ba stobs chen mo/ brtson 'grus chen mo/ 'jig rten gsum na byis pa rnam gsod pa*, folio 92.a.
- n.14 *mtshan mo nag mo 'jigs byed ma// gshin rje'i sring mo chen mo*, folio 92.a.
- n.15 Folio 16.b.
- n.16 Folio 26.a.
- n.17 This has been suggested by Dorji Wangchuk (2022).

- n.18 The relevant section in Toh 671 in the Degé Kangyur is located in vol. 91 (rgyud 'bum, ba), folios 208.a–208.b. While the content of the praise in Toh 671 is identical to the extracted texts, the verse structure is different in several places, especially toward the end of the praise, and some passages seem to read more clearly in Toh 671 than in the extracted standalone texts.
- n.19 Denkarma, folio 304.a.4. See also Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, p. 265, no. 462. Hence, we know that the misunderstanding regarding Vararuci had already occurred by then. Notably, Toh 671 is not listed in the Denkarma catalog, which makes dating it difficult.
- n.20 In the origin account presented in Toh 842, Vararuci also appears in a longer passage as an important Buddhist teacher who instructs Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī in the practice centered on the protector Ekajaṭī.
- n.21 *Praising the Lady Who Rules Disease* is one of only twelve texts in the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs section of the Degé Kangyur (and the other Kangyurs that include such a section) that, unlike the other 235 works in the Compendium, do *not* also appear in duplicate in other sections of the Kangyur.
- n.22 The opening lines of the table of contents (*dkar chag*) of an independent dhāraṇī collection printed in Beijing in 1731, found in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest and transcribed by Orosz, identify the source of all such dhāraṇī collections as the extracanonial collection edited by Tāranātha (Orosz 2010, pp. 67 and 100). This mention is also noted by Hidas 2021, p. 7, n. 56.
- n.23 See J. Dalton 2016 and J. Dalton and van Schaik 2006 on the *dhāraṇī-saṃgraha* collections preserved at Dunhuang, which contain praises and prayers as well as dhāraṇīs. See Hidas 2021 for the catalogs of eighteen *dhāraṇī-saṃgraha* collections surviving in Sanskrit, many of which also contain praises.
- n.24 This text, Toh 1090, 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 it also hinges on the fact that the compilers of the Tōhoku catalog placed another text—which forms a whole, very large

volume—the *Vimalaprabhānāmakālacakratantṛāṭikā* (*dus 'khor 'grel bshad dri med 'od*, Toh 845), before the present volume, numbering it as vol. 100 although it is almost certainly intended to come right at the end of the Degé Kangyur as volume 102; indeed its fifth and final chapter is often carried over and wrapped in the same volume as the Kangyur *dkar chag* (catalog). Please note this discrepancy when using the eKangyur viewer in this translation.

- n.25 This homage line is found only in the Tengyur recension of the text (Toh 1777). It is absent in the Kangyur recension (Toh 1090).
- n.26 Toh 671: *mtshan mo* (“at night”).
- n.27 We have emended *lha mo khyod nyid kyis* to *lha mo khyod nyid kyi*.
- n.28 Toh 671: *khyod nyid yin par shes/ral pas bdag nyid mdzas par brgyan te* (“We know it is you, beautifully adorned with matted locks”).
- n.29 Following Toh 1090: *kyi*. Toh 1777: *kyis*.
- n.30 Following Toh 1777: *mi lus*. Toh 1090: *mi rus* (“human bones”).
- n.31 Following Toh 1090: *rnal 'byor grub pa'i spyod yul can*. Toh 1777: *rnal 'byor grub pa'i rnal 'byor can*.
- n.32 Following Toh 1090: *g.yo can*. Toh 1777: *g.yo byed* (“what moves”). Toh 671 reads *g.yog bcas* (“together with your servant”). This seems to be a more plausible reading, since it refers to the relationship between Śrīdevī Mahākālī as “the Lady” and Rematī as “the Servant.” This whole sentence in Toh 671 reads *khyod ni g.yog bcas mya ngan med cing 'chi ba'i 'jigs pa med par dril bu'i sgra yang sgrogs* (“You, together with your servant, are free from anguish and have no fear of death, as the sound of your bell rings out”).
- n.33 Following Toh 1090: *'jigs sel zhi la*. In support of this are the Peking and Narthang recensions of Toh 1777: *'jigs pa gsal zhing zhi la*. Degé recension of Toh 1777: *'jigs pa bsal zhing* (“clear fears and”).
- n.34 Following Toh 1090: *nad dang 'chi ba*. Toh 1777: *nad chen 'chi ba* (“the great illness that is death”).
- n.35 Here “nāga lord” could also be plural. In some manifestations of Śrīdevī her belt consists of several snakes.
- n.36 Following Toh 1777: *chen po*. Toh 1090: *sar pas* (“fresh”).
- n.37 Following Toh 1777: *dral*. Toh 1090: *dril* (“wrapped”).

- n.38 The translation of this sentence follows Toh 1777. An alternative translation, based on Toh 1090, would be as follows: “You are wrapped in a fresh hide, and a wide garment is your shawl—half-open and bound with a belt of braided straw.”
- n.39 Following Toh 1777: *’khrol*. Toh 1090: *’dril* (“wield”).
- n.40 Following Toh 1777: *khrag dang zhag la sogs pa’i thig les*. Toh 1090: *khrag dang zhag mang ’dzag pa’i thig les* (“many drops of blood and fat that have dropped down”).
- n.41 Following Toh 1777: *mi yi sha*. Toh 1090: *mi ro’i sha* (“human corpse flesh”).
- n.42 In Toh 671 it is clear that this praise is spoken by Yama. We therefore read *rshin rje nyid* as “I, Yama.”
- n.43 Following Toh 1777: *mjug brtul ba*. Toh 1090: *mjug brtul bas* (“because you bring to an end”).
- n.44 In Toh 1090, the first line in this verse has nineteen syllables, whereas the other three lines in the verse only have seventeen syllables. However, in Toh 1777 all four lines have nineteen syllables, suggesting that Toh 1090 may have lost two syllables in the last three verse lines over the course of the text’s transmission.
- n.45 Following Toh 1090. Toh 1777: *rna ba ya gcig la/ brang gis ’gro ba ’go bo’i gdengs ka stong dang ldan pa rgyab nas rgyan du byas nas gnas*, yet reading *’go bo’i* as *mgo bo’i* (following Toh 1090) (“At one ear is an uraga whose thousand-headed hood adorns you from behind”).
- n.46 Following Toh 1777: *ma lus*. Toh 1090 omits this.
- n.47 Following Toh 1777: *khyod kyi lte ba’i thad ka’i phyogs su gzhags*. Toh 1090: *khyod kyi lte ba’i phyogs so bzhag* (“you have placed at the position of your navel”).
- n.48 “Expanse of the ocean” translates the Tibetan *rgya mtsho’i klong*, which in turn is attested as a translation of the Sanskrit *vaḍabāmukha*. *Vaḍabāmukha*, which means “the mare’s mouth,” is the name for a mythological underwater cavity at the bottom of the sea that contains a fire known as *vaḍabāgni* (“the mare’s fire”). At some point this fire will erupt and consume the entire world. Some texts, such as *The Sovereign Ritual of Amoghapāśa* (*Amoghapāśakalparāja*, Toh 686, 2.128 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh686.html#UT22084-092-001-533>)), personify “the mare’s mouth” as the deity *Vaḍabāmukha*, who is sometimes identified with Śiva, possibly in his role as the final destroyer of the universe.

- n.49 Following Toh 1090: *zhi mdzad phyir*. Toh 1777: *zhi bya'i phyir* (“in order to pacify”).
- n.50 Following Toh 1090: *bzhugs*. Toh 1777: *bzhag* (“placed”).
- n.51 Our translation of this line is tentative. In Toh 671 this phrase reads *lha chen sku dang 'tsham par bzhugs* (“You appear similar to Mahādeva’s form”).
- n.52 Following Toh 1777: *de ni 'jigs pa med par mdzod*. Toh 1090: *de la 'jigs pa med par 'gyur* (“you cause any fear of these to disappear”).
- n.53 Following Toh 1777: *'dod khams dbang phyug ma la bstod*. Toh 1090: *'dod pa'i khams kyi dbang phyug ma*. Toh 1777 includes these two final lines as part of the praise, whereas in Toh 1090 these same two lines—although matching the meter of the preceding lines—instead seem to form part of the text’s colophon.
- n.54 The translation of this colophon follows Toh 1777. As mentioned in the previous note, the structure of the final lines in Toh 1090 is rather different and the colophon there includes the two preceding lines. The translation of the colophon in Toh 1090 reads: “Yama’s Sister, the Wife of the Demon, the Sovereign Goddess of the Desire Realm, the Lady Who Rules All Disease—she is the Great Goddess who is praised in eight verses composed by the brahmin Vararuci.”

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for Sanskrit names and terms ·

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in the Sanskrit manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other Sanskrit manuscripts of the Kangyur or Tengyur.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where Tibetan-Sanskrit relationship is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source Unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 asura

lha ma yin

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

*asura**Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A type of nonhuman being whose precise status is subject to different views, but is included as one of the six classes of beings in the sixfold classification of realms of rebirth. In the Buddhist context, asuras are powerful beings said to be dominated by envy, ambition, and hostility. They are also known in the pre-Buddhist and pre-Vedic mythologies of India and Iran, and feature prominently in Vedic and post-Vedic Brahmanical mythology, as well as in the Buddhist tradition. In these traditions, asuras are often described as being engaged in interminable conflict with the devas (gods).

g.2 bhūta

'byung po

འབྱུང་པོ།

bhūta

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

This term in its broadest sense can refer to any being, whether human, animal, or nonhuman. However, it is often used to refer to a specific class of nonhuman beings, especially when bhūtas are mentioned alongside rākṣasas, piśācas, or pretas. In common with these other kinds of nonhumans, bhūtas are usually depicted with unattractive and misshapen bodies. Like several other classes of nonhuman beings, bhūtas take spontaneous birth. As their leader is traditionally regarded to be Rudra-Śiva (also known by the name Bhūta), with whom they haunt dangerous and wild places, bhūtas are especially prominent in Śaivism, where large sections of certain tantras concentrate on them.

g.3 Daśagrīva

da sha grI ba

དམ་གྲི་བ།

daśagrīva

The king of Laṅkāpuri. He is also known as the king Rāvaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. To appease the devas and to save his own life, he is said to have offered his sister in marriage to Mahādeva. From this union the Dharma protector Rematī was born.

g.4 devī

lha mo

ལྷ་མོ།

devī

g.5 dhāraṇī

gzungs

གཟུངས།

dhāraṇī

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The term *dhāraṇī* has the sense of something that “holds” or “retains,” and so it can refer to the special capacity of practitioners to memorize and recall detailed teachings. It can also refer to a verbal expression of the teachings—an incantation, spell, or mnemonic formula that distills and “holds” essential points of the Dharma and is used by practitioners to attain mundane and supramundane goals. The same term is also used to denote texts that contain such formulas.

g.6 Durgā

rdzong

རྩོད།

durgā

A popular goddesses in the non-Buddhist pantheon. She is associated with overcoming demons and evil forces through wrathful methods. This activity is alluded to in her name, which means “fortress” or “citadel.”

g.7 god

lha

ལྷ།

deva

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Cognate with the English term *divine*, the devas are most generally a class of celestial beings who frequently appear in Buddhist texts, often at the head of the assemblies of nonhuman beings who attend and celebrate the teachings of Śākyamuni and other buddhas and bodhisattvas. In Buddhist cosmology the devas occupy the highest of the five or six “destinies” (*gati*) of saṃsāra among which beings take rebirth. The devas reside in the *devalokas*, “heavens” that traditionally number between twenty-six and twenty-eight and are divided between the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*), material realm (*rūpadhātu*), and immaterial realm (*ārūpyadhātu*). A being attains rebirth among the devas either through meritorious deeds (in the desire realm) or the attainment of subtle meditative states (in the material and immaterial realms). While rebirth among the devas is considered favorable, it is

ultimately a transitory state from which beings will fall when the conditions that lead to rebirth there are exhausted. Thus, rebirth in the god realms is regarded as a diversion from the spiritual path.

g.8 Kālī

nag mo

ནག་མོ།

kālī

Here an epithet for Śrīdevī Mahākālī.

g.9 Mahādeva

lha chen

ལྷ་ཆེན།

mahādeva

A name of Śiva.

g.10 mātṛkā

ma mo

མ་མོ།

mātṛkā

“Mothers”; a class of female spirits common to both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions. Typically these spirits are associated with creating obstacles and illness during pregnancy and early childhood. However, when supplicated they can also protect against these very same obstacles.

g.11 nāga

klu

ལྷུ།

nāga

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A class of nonhuman beings who live in subterranean aquatic environments, where they guard wealth and sometimes also teachings. Nāgas are associated with serpents and have a snakelike appearance. In Buddhist art and in written accounts, they are regularly portrayed as half human and half snake, and they are also said to have the ability to change into human form. Some nāgas are Dharma protectors, but they can also bring retribution if they are disturbed. They may likewise fight one another, wage war, and destroy the lands of others by causing lightning, hail, and flooding.

g.12 rākṣasa

srin po

སྲིན་པོ།

rākṣasa

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A class of nonhuman beings that are often, but certainly not always, considered demonic in the Buddhist tradition. They are often depicted as flesh-eating monsters who haunt frightening places and are ugly and evil-natured with a yearning for human flesh, and who additionally have miraculous powers, such as being able to change their appearance.

g.13 Red Cāmuṇḍī

dmar mo tsa muN+Di

དམར་མོ་ཙ་མུ་ལྷོ།

—

A goddess who eventually becomes known as the Dharma protector Śrīdevī Mahākālī. Her parents are the goddess Umadevī and the god Mahādeva.

g.14 Rematī

re ma ti

རེ་མ་ཏི།

—

A wrathful Dharma protector who is often portrayed together with her mistress Śrīdevī Mahākālī. At times she is conflated with Śrīdevī Mahākālī, so that the two appear to be identical. She is most often portrayed riding on a donkey and adorned with various wrathful ornaments and hand implements. Rematī is also known for her ability to inflict disease on others and retract it at will. In Kangyur literature Rematī is at times linked to the Indian goddess Revatī and also to the rākṣasī demoness Revatī. This link appears to have been made by the editors of the Kangyur.

g.15 Revatī

re ba ti · nam gru

རེ་བ་ཏི། · ར་མ་གུ།

revatī

This name can refer to various non-Buddhist goddesses (such as Durgā), who often have a wrathful and protective nature. Revatī is also the name of a rākṣasī associated with the illness and mortality of children. Revatī is also

one of the constellations in the heavens, personified as a goddess. The Tibetan rendering of this name can also refer to a group of local female deities and even a male monastic disciple of the Buddha Śākyamuni (in which case *nam gru* translates the Sanskrit name Revata). In Kangyur literature Revatī (both the goddess and the rākṣasī) is at times linked to the Dharma protector Rematī. This link appears to have been made by the editors of the Kangyur.

g.16 Śakra

brgya byin

བརྒྱ་བྱིན།

śakra

A common epithet of Indra, the lord of the gods, who dwells on the summit of Mount Sumeru and wields the thunderbolt. The Tibetan translation is based on an etymology that *śakra* is an abbreviation of *śata-kratu*: one who has performed a hundred sacrifices (Tib. *brgya byin*). The highest Vedic sacrifice was the horse sacrifice, and there is a tradition that he became the lord of the gods through performing a hundred of them.

g.17 Sovereign Goddess of the Desire Realm

'dod khamṣ dbang phyug ma

འདོད་ཁམས་དབང་ཕྱུག་མ།

—

An epithet for Śrīdevī 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.”

g.18 Śrīdevī Mahākālī

dpal lha mo nag mo chen mo

དཔལ་ལྷ་མོ་ནག་མོ་ཚེན་མོ།

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.

g.19 Umā

dka' zlog

དཀའ་ལྷོག

umā

A goddess who is the wife of Mahādeva (Śiva). The name Umā is often synonymous with the two goddesses Durgā and Pārvatī. The Tibetan rendering of her name is also at times used as a translation of the name Durgā, a fact that highlights the close relationship between these two goddesses.

g.20 Umadevī

lha mo u ma de ba

ལྷ་མོ་ལུ་མ་དེ་བ།

—

To help the devas win a battle against the asuras, Vajrapāṇi manifested the goddess Umadevī. Together with the god Mahādeva, she has two children: the girl Red Cāmuṇḍī and the boy Yāma Mahākāla.

g.21 uraga

brang gis 'gro ba

བྲང་གིས་འགོ་བ།

uraga

A class of serpent-like beings.

g.22 Vajrapāṇi

phyag na rdo rje

ཕྱག་ན་རྡོ་རྗེ།

vajrapāṇi

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Vajrapāṇi means “Wielder of the Vajra.” In the Pali canon, he appears as a yakṣa guardian in the retinue of the Buddha. In the Mahāyāna scriptures he is a bodhisattva and one of the “eight close sons of the Buddha.” In the tantras, he is also regarded as an important Buddhist deity and instrumental in the transmission of tantric scriptures.

g.23 Vararuci

mchog srid

མཚོག་སྲིད།

vararuci

The colophon to this praise attributes its composition to a certain brahmin named Vararuci. However, in Toh 671, from which the praise was extracted, Vararuci utters not this praise but rather the subsequent tribute that follows in Toh 671. In Toh 842, a brahmin Vararuci, who is most like the same person who appears in this text, acts as the first Buddhist teacher for Śrīdevī Mahākālī and Rematī after their encounter with the Buddha and their conversion to Buddhism. It is unclear whether this brahmin Vararuci is thought within the literature to be identical with the historical person Vararuci, a well-known author of several treatises on grammar and astrology.

g.24 White Conch Protectress

dkar mo dung skyong ma

དཀར་མོ་དུང་སྐྱོང་མ།

—

A goddess who eventually becomes known as the Dharma protector Śrīdevī Mahākālī. Her parents are the goddess Umadevī and the god Mahādeva. She received her name by protecting a nāga called Conch Excrescence (*dung gi mdzer ba can*) from being killed by a garuḍa.

g.25 Wife of the Demon

bdud kyi yum

བདུད་ཀྱི་ཡུམ།

—

An epithet for Śrīdevī 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.”

g.26 Yama

gshin rje

གཤིན་རྗེ།

yama

The lord of death.

g.27 Yāma Mahākāla

gshin rje ma hA kA la

གཤིན་རྗེ་མ་རྒྱ་ཀ་ལ།

—

The divine brother of Red Cāmuṇḍī. His parents are the goddess Umadevī and the god Mahādeva.

g.28 Yama's Sister

gshin rje'i lcam mo

གཤིན་རྗེའི་ལམ་མོ།

—

An epithet for Śrīdevī Mahākālī. According to *The Tantra of the Flaming Dākinī* (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.”