


TUVINIAN IMAGES OF DEMONS FROM TIBET

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uva, today a republic within the Russian Federation covering an area less than half the size of Germany but inhabited by 305.000 people only, is located in the south of Sibiria and just north of Mongolia at the upper course of the Yenisei River. The majority of the people, about 200.000, are Tuvans, a group of Turcic speaking people who were since the 17th century — due to Mongolian and Manchurian rule — strongly influenced by the Tibetan form of Buddhism. Until today the Buddhist worldview exists beside the traditional animistic world view and shamanistic practices. Since the 1930s the communists repressed all Buddhist and shamanistic traditions. Buddhist monasteries were closed and many of their books were burnt. Nevertheless a lot of Buddhist manuscripts written in Tibetan language and script survived. However, most of them originally not belonged to the libraries of the former Buddhist monasteries of Tuva but to the private property of single families of married lamas who hid them during the period of persecution in hard to access rock caves. In 1953 Dr. Mongusch Kenin-Lobsan started secretly to collect these texts. Later he was able to organise real expeditions on behalf of the National Museum of Tuva which nowadays houses about 20.000 texts. Thanks to the initiative of Ms Rita Sumba and the support of the present director Anatoly Kombu the museum has started to catalogue its Tibetan books. The special selection of manuscripts nowadays preserved in the National Museum of Tuva is explained by their origin: The majority of them was not meant for the curriculum of Buddhist monasteries but for performing magic rituals according to the needs of the common people. Many texts are wellworn handwritten copies in *dbu can* script from the beginning of the 20th century as they are written on modern industrial paper. Although Tuva has been clearly dominated by the dGe lugs school of Tibetan Buddhism much to my surprise I have seen quite a lot of rNying ma texts.

Among the manuscripts are several small leaves with depictions of symbols and spirits well known to us from the context of Tibetan Buddhism. As an example I want to present a series of fifteen demons whose images are drawn with coloured pencils on the front of four thin cardboards. The smallest card showing one image only has a size of 6,8 x 7 cm (the size of the actual image is 3,4 x 6,4 cm), the second showing two images has a size of 5,4 x 9,3 cm. The other two leaves with six images each measure 21 x 7,3 cm. Together with other cards and manuscripts the set is preserved in a small package bearing the signature 1-108. The cards obviously were meant for use in rituals addressing the specific demons. Similar cards presenting different series of demons have been published by Bethlenfalvy (2003).



The fifteen demons depicted here are generally summarized as the fifteen great *gdon*¹ of children (*byis pa'i gdon chen lnga*), that is to say a group of demons who especially afflict children. We know drawings of the demons from the illustrations to the Blue Beryl, the medical treatise of the dGe lug pa scholar and famous politician *sde-srid* Sangs rgyas rgya mstsho (1653-1705).² In the following table I assign the Tuvinian

- 1 Regarding a description of the character of the *gdon* in general especially as demons causing diseases see Tucci and Heissig (1970): 193, 195. As such demons the *gdon* are also briefly characterized by Tseng (2005): 51. For further general remarks on the *gdon* see Clifford (1984): 148-55. In a text composed by Mi pham rnam rgyal in 1908 the fifteen *gdon* of children are mentioned together with other beings whose specific existence is explained by the evil deeds of their last life (Schuh 1973: 225).
- 2 Parfionovitch, Gyurme Dorje and Meyer (1992), vol. 2, 262, illustrations no. 85-99. Exactly the same drawings of the demons and spellings of the respective names are in Wang le and Byams pa 'phrin las 1986: 316, 318. But note that the illustrations to the Blue Beryl *ibidem* depict two different groups of fifteen demons of children.

images to the names as they are listed in these illustrations.³ In brackets I add the variations in spelling as given by Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las.⁴

1. 'Jam po ('Jam pa po) — ox (*ba glang*) (Fig. 1)
2. *Ri dvags rgyal* (*Ri dvags rgyal po*) — deer (*ri dvags*) (Fig. 3)
3. *sKem byed* (*sKem byed pa*) — young man (*gzhon nu*) (Fig. 2)
4. *brJed byed* (*brJed byed pa*) — fox (*wa*) (Fig. 4)
5. *Khu tshur can* — raven (*bya rog*) (Fig. 5)
6. *Ma mo* — human being (*mi*) (Fig. 6)
7. *Dza mi rta* (*Dza mi ka*) — horse (*rta*) (Fig. 7)
8. 'Dod pa can — vajra (*rdo rje*) (Fig. 8)
9. *Nam gru* — dog (*khyi*) (Fig. 9)
10. *Srul po* — pig (*phag*) (Fig. 10)
11. *bZhin rgyas* (*bZhin brgyad pa*) — owl (*'ug pa*) (Fig. 14)
12. *Ma 'phyang* (*Mig 'phyang po*) — bat (*pha wang*) (Fig. 15)
13. *gNya' lag can* — chicken (*bya gag*) (Fig. 13)
14. *Ma dga' byed* (*Ma dga' byed pa*) — cat (*byi la*) (Fig. 11)
15. *Bya* — winged animal (*'dab chags*) (Fig. 12)

Without giving further details Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1975: 310) just mentions a group of eighteen such demons. The names are also listed by Duff 2007 according to the text *mDo rgyud bstan bcos du ma nas 'byung ba'i chos kyi rnam grangs shes ldan yid kyi dga' ston* written by dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po under the entry *byis pa'i gdon chen bco lnga*. In this list the names have the same spelling as in the Illustrations to the Blue Beryl with one exception: Instead of *Ma 'phyang* we find *Mig 'phyang*. Baker and Shrestha (1997: 84f) also mention the group of fifteen "demons of childhood". However, the eight images and names of demons which are depicted in the illustration belong to a different group of fifteen demons of children also listed and depicted in the Illustrations to the Blue Beryl (261f, no. 69-83).

According to the *gZi brjid*, the famous Bon biography of *ston pa gShen rab* — as quoted by Nam mkha'i nor bu (1989: 294; Namkhai Norbu 1995: 142) —, the group of fifteen demons is divided into the five so called *pho gdon* (male *gdon*), the seven *mo gdon* (female *gdon*), one so called *las byed rgyal* (the action performing *rgyal po*), one *las byed bsen* (the action performing *bsen mo*) and one *sprul gzhi* (cause of illusion), together fifteen. Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (2002: 1488) presents a different spelling of these names: five *phog gdon*, seven *mi gdon*, one *las byed rgyal* and one *las byed sen* and four *sbrul* (snakes, *sbrul bzhi*) which is obviously a corruption of *sprul gzhi* because otherwise the total number would be eighteen instead of fifteen. Five of the names are also given by Nam mkha'i nor bu (1989: 294f): *Srul po*, *sKem byed*, *brJed byed*, *Nam gru* and *Bya*. In the English version of his book (Namkhai Norbu 1995: 142f) the *Srul po* are described as "that cause to rot", the *sKem byed* as "that emaciate", the *brJed byed* as "that cause oblivion", the *Nam gru* as a "name of a constellation" and the *Bya* as "birds". However, Namkhai Norbu does not identify them as members of the fifteen great *gdon* of children but merely lists them among all different kind of *gdon*.

- 3 The names are translated by Gyurme Dorje and Fernand Meyer as 1) "Gentle ox[-faced] demon", 2) King of the wild life [Lion-faced Mṛgarāja]", 3) "Dehydrating demon", 4) Demon of epilepsy", 5) "Fist-forming demon [Muṣṭisandhi]", 6) "Mātaraḥ demoness", 7) "Man-horse demon", 8) "Attachment-demon", 9) "Revati", 10) Demon of decomposition", 11) "Broad-faced demon", 12) "Non-descending demon?", 13) "Demon with birdneck and talons", 14) "Displeasure-causing demon", 15) "Bird-faced demon" (Parfionovitch, Gyurme Dorje and Meyer 1992: vol. 2, 261).
- 4 Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (2002: 1488) lists all names of the individual fifteen demons and mentions their respective appearance (*gzugs*).

Except of some varieties in spelling⁵ the Tuvinian cards differ especially with regard to the figures 6 and 12. While according to the illustrations to the Blue Beryl the *Ma mo* has the appearance of a human being below it is given the head of a goat. And the winged animal called *Bya* (bird) is called *Kyi* or *Kyi ni* below. Neither this word nor the image gives a clear indication of what being this could be.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

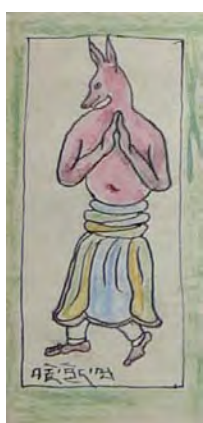


Fig. 4

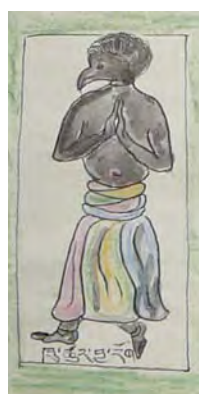


Fig. 5

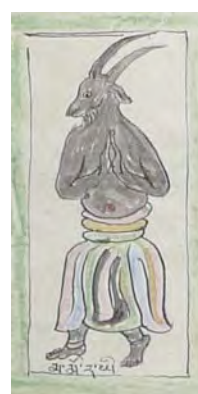


Fig. 6

5 But note that the figures 1, 3, 14 and 15 of the Tuvinian images do not have the names of the respective demons.



Fig. 7

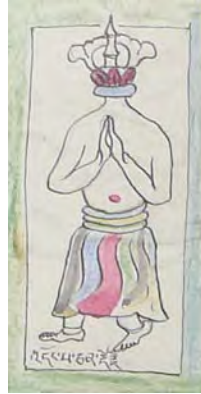


Fig. 8

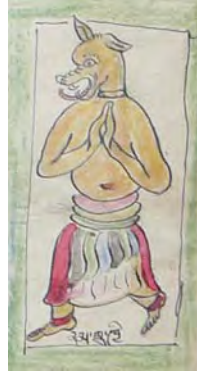


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

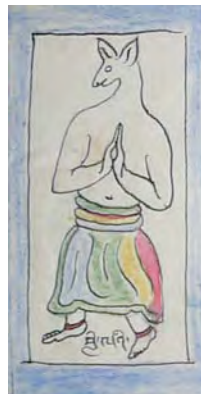


Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

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