


Yamāntaka's Wrathful Magic: An Instance of the Ritual Legacy of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes on the Byang gter Tradition via the Figure of rGya Zhang khrom*

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Introduction

 part from his more philosophically oriented works, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes is also (perhaps even especially) known for his mastery of the arts of black magic, which he is said to have achieved by meditating on the deity Yamāntaka and which he famously put to use when facing persecution during the troubled times that followed the collapse of the Tibetan empire.¹ It is this latter aspect of gNubs chen's persona and legacy that seems to have been particularly appropriated by rGya Zhang khrom, who was identified (and may also have self-identified) as his incarnation. In this paper, I will seek to briefly present and contextualize a short Yamāntaka ritual of wrathful magic revealed by rGya Zhang khrom, which is transmitted as part of the Byang gter tradition.

1. The treasure revealer

Not much historical information is available regarding rGya Zhang

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¹ Esler, Dylan, 'On the Life of gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas ye-shes', in *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 29, April 2014, pp. 12f, pp. 20f.

khrom.² He is generally placed in the early 11th century, and is said to have been born in a dragon year,³ though the prophecy from a text called the *Zab pa chos drug gi dkar chag* [Index of the Six Profound Doctrines] announcing his birth mentions a dragon or dog year.⁴ Based on this information, the year of his birth suggested by Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein in their masterful translation of Dudjom Rinpoche's *Chos 'byung* is 1016 (a dragon year).⁵ This calculation tallies with Guru bKra shis' (early 18th c.) statement that rGya Zhang khrom preceded Mi la ras pa (1040–1123) by one generation,⁶ which makes good sense, since rGya Zhang khrom is known as the teacher of lHa rje gNubs chung, who instructed Mi la ras pa in the arts of destructive magic.⁷

According to 'Jam mgon kong sprul (1813–1899), rGya Zhang khrom was born in gTsang rong near the Dum pa hot spring in order to fulfil the past aspirations of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes,⁸ although an alternative opinion, attributed by Guru bKra shis to Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624), gives his birthplace as g.Yung mda'.⁹ This latter view may have arisen due to confusing the place of one of his treasure discoveries with his place of birth. His family line (*rus*) was the rGya; his given name (*bla dwags kyi mtshan*) was Zhang khrom; and his secret name (*gsang mtshan*) was rDo rje 'od 'bar.¹⁰ The account provided by Tshul khriims bzang po (1884–1957), a

² The present biographical sketch is based on the works of Guru bKra shis, of 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas and of Tshul khriims bzang po. A brief *rGya Zhang khrom gyi gter byung gi lo rgyus* appears in the *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 20, *Byang gter dpe sgrig tshogs chung*, n.p., 2015, pp. 227–230, but unfortunately it contains nothing that is not found in the above-mentioned works.

³ This is the opinion retained in 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Zab mo'i gter dang gter ston grub thob ji ltar byon pa'i lo rgyus mdo bsdus bkod pa Rin chen bai dū rya'i phreng ba*, in 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (ed.), *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 1/ka, Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976–1980, p. 366.2: *dgungs snying 'brug yin pa dang [...] lung dang mthun par yod ces grags!*

⁴ The prophecy is quoted in 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Rin chen bai dū rya'i phreng ba*, p. 365.6: *lo ni khyi 'brug lo pa la!* Likewise, Guru bKra shis (*Gu bKra'i chos 'byung: bsTan pa'i snying po gsang chen snga 'gyur nges don zab mo'i chos kyi byung ba gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad mkhas pa dga' byed ngo mtshar gtam gyi rol mtsho*, Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1990, p. 367), quotes the same prophecy, though ends up siding with the opinion of the dragon year.

⁵ Dorje, Gyurme, and Kapstein, Matthew, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, vol. 2: Reference Materials, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991, p. 65, n. 908.

⁶ Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, p. 369.

⁷ Martin, Dan, 'The Early Education of Milarepa', in *The Journal of the Tibet Society*, vol. 2, 1982, pp. 56f.

⁸ 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Rin chen bai dū rya'i phreng ba*, p. 366.1.

⁹ Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, p. 367.

¹⁰ 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Rin chen bai dū rya'i phreng ba*, p. 366.2.

Byang gter master who may well be considered one of the most accomplished Tibetan scholars of the early 20th century,¹¹ lists various physical signs conforming to the prophecies of his birth, including a short and corpulent body, a mole, curly and blondish (!) hair, a yellowish complexion tinged with white on the right side and red on the left, and strong white teeth.¹² Of course, from a modern academic perspective, the manner in which a particular prophecy announcing a treasure revealer (*gter ston*) in fairly broad terms becomes linked to a specific master can be seen to be part of a wider process of authentication which legitimizes a given revealer's vocation and status by connecting him to a compelling religious narrative of predestined activity.¹³ In any case, if the textual record is anything to go by, rGya Zhang khrom's overall appearance must have been that of a short yet impressively built, and perhaps even somewhat frightful man.

Tshul khrim bzang po tells us that, foregoing all wealth, Zhang khrom lived in the manner of a beggar (*mu to ba*) and took up the occupation of a goatherd (*ra rdzi*). Once, as he arrived at a temple in Nya mo, he met a mysterious wandering *yogin*, who told him that they both had great purposes to accomplish together. He thereupon followed him. When they arrived in gTsang Ri bo che, they begged for some food and had a meal of barley flower. The *yogin* then told Zhang khrom to stay there and that he would return within a short while. Having searched for a small circular stone, he found one and brought it along, telling Zhang khrom to hit it upon the back of the rock, where a *svastika* was drawn with red vermilion. Zhang khrom pierced (*bsnun pas*)¹⁴ it five times, until a treasure chest was released from

¹¹ Arguillère, Stéphane (tr.), *Tülku Tsullo – Manuel de la Transparution Immédiate*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2016, pp. 27–30.

¹² Tshul khrim bzang po, 'Jam dpal gshin rje tshe bdag gi dbang gi Lo rgyus mun sel sgron ma, in Tshul khrim bzang po, *gSung 'bum*, vol. 8, n.d., n.p., fol. 49b.1–2. It may be remarked that the biographical note repeatedly gives the apparent misspelling Zhing khrom. The text has been republished (with the odd spelling Zhing khrom) in the more recent edition of Tshul khrim bzang po's collected works (in 16 volumes): Tshul khrim bzang po, 'Jam dpal gshin rje tshe bdag gi dbang gi Lo rgyus mun sel sgron ma, in Tshul khrim bzang po, *gSung 'bum*, vol. 3, n.p., 2014, pp. 349–358.

¹³ See Cantwell, Cathy, *Dudjom Rinpoche's Vajrakīlaya Works: A Study in Authoring, Compiling, and Editing in the Tibetan Revelatory Tradition* (with a chapter by Robert Mayer), Sheffield: Equinox, 2020, p. 115. For a discussion of this theme within the context of a revealer's autobiographical writings, see Gyatso, Janet, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001, p. 128, pp. 240f.

¹⁴ Whereas Tshul khrim bzang po has the verb *bsnun pas*, meaning 'to pierce', Guru bkra shis (*Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 367) has *brgyab pas*, 'to hit'.

within a door in the rock.¹⁵ The *yogin* eliminated the debris and squeezed into a crack in the rock, followed by Zhang khrom. Upon an arrow-length *maṇḍala*, there was a silver vase filled with longevity water, which the *yogin* suddenly drank from. Zhang khrom wanted to take his share of the water, yet the *yogin* handed him the empty vase, telling him that his was another share. As the light from the crack in the rock above their heads was dwindling, Zhang khrom inserted the silver vase into his breast pocket; distracted by thinking where this other share might be, he found some paper scrolls – below the ice according to Guru bKra shis, within a terracotta box according to Tshul khriims bzang po. Then, after having walled up the door, the two companions came out. By selling the silver vase, Zhang khrom made some wealth and learnt to read and write. Having become skilled in reading, he looked at the original scrolls, and deciphered the *gShin rje kha thun*, and the inventories (*kha byang*) for the treasures of g.Yung and rMu.¹⁶

Guru bKra shis also supplies an additional anecdote, which is said to be taken from the previously mentioned *Zab pa chos drug gi dkar chag*: According to this account, the inventories of his treasures¹⁷ were found by a poor monk above the door of the sPra dun rtse temple. Wanting to meet rGya Zhang khrom, the anchorite searched for him by means of the prophecy mentioning his country, year, name and family line, and found him at the Dum pa hot spring. The two of them conversed, and taking out the treasures, there were twenty-one yellow scrolls on cycles for benefiting and harming (which we might call 'white' and 'black magic'). There was also an inventory of other treasure caches; they were taken out by Zhang khrom from the Dum pa hot spring. Before the anchorite had vanished, he knew that he was an

¹⁵ Tshul khriims bzang po, *Lo rgyus mun sel sgron ma*, fol. 49b.3–6. At this point, the TBRC scan of Tshul khriims bzang po's text is almost illegible, so I here turn to the more recent edition (of 2014), which I have supplemented with the text of Guru bKra shis, both accounts being in any case very close.

¹⁶ Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 367f. Cf. Tshul khriims bzang po, *Lo rgyus mun sel sgron ma* (2014), p. 356.

¹⁷ The crucial role played by the inventory (*kha byang*) and similar forms of certificate (*byang bu*) in the process of treasure discovery is discussed in Gyatso, Janet, 'The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition', in *History of Religions*, vol. 33:1, 1993, pp. 126–130.

emanation (*sprul pa*)¹⁸ of Sangs rgyas ye shes.¹⁹

It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on these various accounts: in both of them, the treasures are recovered as physical objects in a rather matter-of-fact manner, a pattern which may also be observed in other early treasure revelations, notably those of Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192).²⁰ Furthermore, in both our accounts, a mysterious anchorite plays an instrumental role as a catalyst for Zhang khrom's revelations; in the second story, the unnamed monk comes to be identified as having been emanated by Sangs rgyas ye shes,²¹ and it may be assumed that he also triggers Zhang khrom's self-identification with the latter, though the story is not too explicit about this point.

The socially embedded nature of treasure discovery and the revealer's reliance on a network of significant others²² is nicely illustrated by this further story recounted by Guru bKra shis. On one occasion, rGya Zhang khrom was going for alms with two companions. There was a former recluse who had previously worked for twelve years in the service of the king of dBus, and as a farewell gift had been offered the choice between a copy of the extensive *Prajñāpāramitā* and an inventory of treasures; he had chosen the latter, yet arriving in his country, he had lacked the courage to search for the treasures. Later, he became a layman and then died. When Zhang khrom and his companions arrived in the area, the wife of the deceased layman invited

¹⁸ Regarding the distinction between an emanation (*sprul pa*) and an incarnation (*sprul sku*), and their occasional intentional blurring, see Hirshberg, Daniel A., *Remembering the Lotus-Born: Padmasambhava in the History of Tibet's Golden Age*, Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2016, p. 71. Briefly put, whereas an emanation signifies a magically evanescent apparition that can manifest from a great master even as he resides in a pure field, an incarnation refers to a definite embodiment of enlightened activity as a highly evolved but nonetheless still reincarnating *bodhisattva*. It is the former term, emanation, that is used in Guru bKra shis' account to describe the mysterious *yogin*.

¹⁹ Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, p. 368.

²⁰ Cf. Mayer, Robert, 'Rethinking Treasure (Part One)', in *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 52, October 2019, p. 147; and Esler, Dylan, 'The *Phurpa* Root Tantra of Nyangrel Nyima Özer's (1124–1192, Tib. Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer) *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* (Tib. *bKa' brgyad bDe gshegs 'dus pa*) Corpus: A Thematic Overview and Philological Analysis', *BuddhistRoad Paper* 7.1, 2020, p. 8, p. 10. For a detailed study of a concrete example of the incorporation of older material within a treasure revelation, see Cantwell, Cathy, 'The Action *Phurpa* (*'phrin las phur pa*) from the *Eightfold Buddha Word, Embodying the Sugatas* (*bKa' brgyad bDe gshegs 'dus pa*), Revealed by Nyangrel Nyima Özer (1124–1192, Tib. Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer)', *BuddhistRoad Paper* 7.2, 2020.

²¹ Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, p. 368: *bya bral ba gar song ma byung ste Sangs rgyas ye shes kyi sprul pa yin par shes/*.

²² See Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, pp. 176f; and Cantwell, *Dudjom Rinpoche's Vajrakīlaya Works*, pp. 17f.

them into her home. Explaining her late husband's story, she offered them the inventory of treasures. Zhang khrom was very pleased, and this inventory subsequently allowed him to discover many other treasure caches.²³

Again basing himself on the *Zab pa chos drug gi dkar chag*, Guru bKra shis writes that rGya Zhang khrom's treasure caches were revealed in the following eight locations: Phung po Ri bo che in gTsang; Phu'i rdza lhung mo in g.Yung; the rock of Mon mo gTsug rum in rGya; the adamantine casket (rDo rje sgrom bu) in Nyug; 'Gram skyer ma in gTsang; as well as sPra dun rtse; the mKhon mthing temple; and bSam yas mchims phu.²⁴ As remarked by Jacob Dalton, it is interesting that the treasures associated with gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes and discovered by rGya Zhang khrom were revealed in areas of Central Tibet that are closely connected to the Zur and rGya clans.²⁵

2. The treasures discovered

In terms of the content of his treasure discoveries, the works listed by Guru bKra shis²⁶ include many 'doctrinal sections on accomplishing enlightenment' (*byang chub sgrub pa'i chos sde mang po*), specified by 'Jam mgon kong sprul as chiefly pertaining to the mind orientation (*sems phyogs*),²⁷ as well as fierce spells (*drag snags*) to guard the teachings. Notable among these are the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag nag po'i skor lcags sdig; the lCags 'dra; and the Thog 'dra gnam thog chen mo'i skor; as well as evocations (Skt. *sādhana*) for the 'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed kha thun nag po'i rgyud and for the 'Jam dpal khro bo 'dus kyi rgyud; the gShin rje ru mtshon dmar po'i skor,²⁸ etc. Also mentioned are a few cycles on therapeutics (*gso dpyad*), as well as a rDzogs chen cycle related to Yamān-

²³ Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, p. 368. The story is also briefly alluded to in Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las, *Tshe bdag dbang bshad*, in *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 50, pp. 135.6–136.2.

²⁴ Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 368f.

²⁵ Dalton, Jacob, 'Preliminary Remarks on a Newly Discovered Biography of Nupchen Sangyé Yeshé', in Bogin, Benjamin, and Quintman, Andrew (eds.), *Himalayan Passages: Tibetan and Newar Studies in Honor of Hubert Decler*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2014, pp. 155f.

²⁶ Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, p. 369. Cf. the list supplied in Tshul khriims bzang po, *Lo rgyus mun sel sgron ma* (2014), pp. 356f.

²⁷ 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Rin chen bai dū rya'i phreng ba*, p. 366.6: *sems phyogs gtso bor gyur pa'i byang chub sgrub pa'i chos sde mang po*.

²⁸ A cycle with this name is found in sNga 'gyur bka' ma, ed. Kaḥ thog mKhan po 'Jam dbyangs, vol. 6/cha, Chengdu: Kaḥ thog, 1999, though the contributions after p. 563 seem to be re-workings by later masters.

taka, entitled *Ye shes gsang rdzogs*, again said to be of the mind orientation; and commentaries on the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, on the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*, and on the phases of meditating on wisdom at the time of death.²⁹ The allusion to cycles connected to the mind orientation of rDzogs chen is intriguing, considering his predecessor's, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes', role in codifying the early rDzogs chen tradition. However, many of the cycles listed no longer seem to be extant, and some of the works given by Guru bKra shis (the philosophical commentaries, for instance) are slightly incongruous given rGya Zhang khrom's background as an illiterate goatherd, intended perhaps to represent him in a more positive light, as being more than a sorcerer. Nonetheless, it must also be said that vast quantities of Tibetan texts have indeed been lost (sometimes irretrievably so) and that the only picture we have of rGya Zhang khrom is that handed down to posterity by later tradition. Given this state of affairs, what may seem incongruous to us today may simply be due to our having a biased and limited knowledge of Zhang khrom's range of interests and activities in the first place. This is what Guru bKra shis suggests when he writes that whereas many of Zhang khrom's teachings were lost and are no longer extant,³⁰ his Yamāntaka cycles were transmitted to the new schools via the figure of Rwa Lo tsā ba (1016–ca. 1128). Dudjom Rinpoche too explains that rGya Zhang khrom gave Rwa Lo tsā ba about half of his Yamāntaka teachings (the full extent of which made up a clay barrel), and that the latter appended these to his own Yamāntaka cycle, inventing a Sanskrit origin for it in the process.³¹ Of course, the version of this encounter recounted in Rwa Lo tsā ba's biography sheds a slightly different light on these events, casting Rwa Lo tsā ba in a favourable role as the master who awakened Zhang khrom's former positive propensities.³² Be that as it may, it is clear that most, if not all, of rGya Zhang khrom's revelations as they have come down to us are concerned with the wrathful deity Yamāntaka, which was also the tutelary deity of Zhang khrom's precursor, gNubs chen

²⁹ Interestingly, in view of his association with gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, a similarly named instruction is quoted in the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, 424f. For a translation of the passage, see Esler, Dylan, 'The Exposition of *Atiyoga* in gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas ye-shes' *bSam-gtan mig-sgron*', in *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, no. 24 (Special issue), October 2012, pp. 112f.

³⁰ Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, p. 369: *gzhan rnam ni dus snga ches bas deng sang mi bzhugs pa 'dra'ol*.

³¹ Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, Translated and edited by Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, vol. 1, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991, p. 713.

³² See Cuevas, Bryan J. (tr.), *Ra Yeshé Sengé – The All-Pervading Melodious Drumbeat: The Life of Ra Lotsawa*, New York: Penguin Books, 2015, ch.12.

Sangs rgyas ye shes,³³ and with the associated fierce spells of destructive ritual magic. It is thus a Yamāntaka cycle revealed by rGya Zhang khrom, the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag, which became part of the heritage of the Byang gter tradition, playing a significant role in its annual ritual calendar³⁴ and being practised intensively during a one-year retreat by Nus ldan rdo rje 'gro phan gling pa (1802–1864),³⁵ the throne-holder of 'Khor gdong monastery in eastern Tibet. The textual material making up this cycle occupies a full ten volumes in the recently published *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*,³⁶ although at least some of this material may turn out to be accretive in nature, incorporating subsequent reworkings of older texts.³⁷

To gain an idea of when these teachings became integrated into the Byang gter heritage, we may turn to the *dBang chog mu tig phreng ba*, an empowerment rite used to initiate disciples into the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag cycle, which mentions three distinct lineages of transmission.³⁸ The early part of the lineage, which is connected to Mañjuśrīmitra, passes through Vasudhara, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes and rGya Zhang khrom, as well as a number of intermediary figures, before converging in a master named Nam mkha' dpal ldan. In the general lineage Nam mkha' dpal ldan passes on the teachings to Padma dbang rgyal (i.e. Mnga' ris Pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal, 1487–1544), who transmits them to bDud 'joms rdo rje (alias Legs ldan rdo rje, 1512–1625). In the close lineage (*nye brgyud*) Nam mkha' dpal ldan transmits them, simultaneously it seems, to both Padma dbang rgyal and Legs ldan rdo rje, a transmission which is also mentioned by Rig 'dzin

³³ Esler, 'On the Life of gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas ye-shes', p. 8.

³⁴ Low, James (ed.), *The Collected Works of C.R. Lama*, Simply Being, 2013, p. 164.

³⁵ See Arguillère, Stéphane, 'Khordong Terchen Nuden Dorje', in *The Treasury of Lives*, July 2018: <https://treasuryoflives.org/zh/biographies/view/Khordong-Terchen-Nuden-Dorje/13617> (accessed 13 October 2020).

³⁶ *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, Byang gter dpe sgrig tshogs chung, vols. 18–27, n.p., 2015. Stéphane Arguillère has started preparing a catalogue of the volumes making up the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag, here: <https://www.arguillere.org/2021/03/manjusri-master-of-life-a-table-of-the-texts-of-the-jam-dpal-tshe-bdag-cycle-included-in-the-byang-gter-phyogs-sgrigs.html> (accessed 1 April 2021).

³⁷ A case in point is the *dPal gshin rje 'khrul 'khor nag po sdig pa snying 'dzings gsang ba'i rgyud*, in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag edition, vol. 28/sa, pp. 691–720, translated by Vasudhara and gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (under the name sPus ngan (*sic!*)), which is reproduced with some interpolations as *sDig pa snying 'dzings 'khrul 'khor gsang rgyud*, in *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 20, pp. 1–32. I am grateful to Stéphane Arguillère for pointing out this correspondence and for drawing my attention to the empowerment rite mentioned in the following note.

³⁸ *lCags sdig khams lnga'i 'od mdangs las dBang chog mu tig phreng ba*, in *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 19, pp. 126f.

Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717) in his *Tshe bdag dbang bshad*.³⁹ Incidentally, the close lineage (i.e. the treasure lineage) is also interesting for placing rGyal ba g.Yung ston chen po (i.e. g.Yung ston rDo rje dpal, 1284–1365)⁴⁰ immediately after rGya Zhang khrom. g.Yung ston rDo rje dpal's position in the treasure lineage is confirmed by Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las, although he places four additional figures, the last of which is Śākya 'bum (13th c.), between rGya Zhang khrom and g.Yung ston rDo rje dpal.⁴¹ In the lineage of orally transmitted injunctions (*bka' ma'i brgyud pa*), which does not mention rGya Zhang khrom, since the latter is associated with the treasure teachings instead, the lineage passes from Nam mkha' dpal ldan to bDud 'joms rdo rje directly.⁴² The upshot is that Legs ldan rdo rje, the second incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, appears to have played a key role in integrating the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag cycle into the transmissions of the Byang gter lineage. This is not altogether surprising, since his treasure companion, 'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs (1509–1557),⁴³ was also a renowned specialist of rGya Zhang khrom's Yamāntaka revelations, which he transmitted to Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659).⁴⁴ The latter integrated these teachings with his own revelations, compiling the *Yang zlog gshin rje me'i spu gri* cycle,⁴⁵ and used these techniques of fierce magic against the Qoshot Mongol armies of Gushri Khan (1582–1655), which in 1641–42 attacked and defeated the forces of the ruler of g'Tsang, ushering in the political dominance of the 5th Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682).⁴⁶ Due to his opposition to the Dalai Lama's takeover, Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa was imprisoned in 1645, but he was pardoned after swearing never again to magically attack the newly established dGa' ldan pho brang government. He subsequently seems to have become fairly close to the Dalai Lama, even exchanging notes with him and helping to clarify

³⁹ Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las, *Tshe bdag dbang bshad*, p. 138.4.

⁴⁰ For a brief biography, see Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, pp. 666f.

⁴¹ Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las, *Tshe bdag dbang bshad*, p. 137.5–6. This same listing is taken up by sTag lung rtse sprul Rinpoche (1926–2015) in his *Byang gter chos skor khag gi thob yig*, in *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 63, p. 216.3–4.

⁴² *dBang chog mu tig phreng ba*, p. 126.5.

⁴³ Valentine, Jay Holt, *The Lords of the Northern Treasures: The Development of the Tibetan Institution of Rule by Successive Incarnations*, PhD thesis, Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2013, pp. 150f.

⁴⁴ FitzHerbert, Solomon G., 'Rituals as War Propaganda in the Establishment of the Tibetan Ganden Phodrang State in the Mid-17th Century', in *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, vol. 27, 2018, p. 106.

⁴⁵ Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, 'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i chos skor, 4 vols., Bir: D. Tsondru Senghe, 1977–1982.

⁴⁶ van Schaik, Sam, *Tibet: A History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 121f.

the latter's doubts regarding technical aspects of the Yamāntaka rites of reversal. Thereafter, the 5th Dalai Lama instituted these practices within the rNam rgyal grwa tshang.⁴⁷ This was part of a wider trend reflecting the Dalai Lama's keen interest in rNying ma traditions of exorcistic magic⁴⁸ and his personal devotion to the Byang gter, which no doubt went back to his earliest years, since he was blessed in the year of his birth by a Byang gter Yamāntaka longevity empowerment bestowed upon him by Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), the third incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.⁴⁹ This connection is particularly interesting for our purposes, given that Ngag gi dbang po's father, bKra shis stobs rgyal dBang po'i sde (ca. 1550–1603),⁵⁰ also seems to have played a role in the transmission of the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag corpus within the Byang gter lineage, thus continuing the work of his master Legs ldan rdo rje, referred to above. However, in the Byang gter lineage of the orally transmitted injunctions (*bka' ma*) of the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag, bKra shis stobs rgyal's immediate predecessors are Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan (b. 14th c.), sPyan tshab mGon po zla ba (b. 15th c.) and gNubs dgon pa Byams pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan (b. 16th c.),⁵¹ thus indicating that he received these particular teachings from the latter rather than from Legs ldan rdo rje. This is also confirmed by a lineage prayer for the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag, apparently composed by bKra shis stobs rgyal, which again mentions the stages of the transmission from Mañjuśrīmitra, Padmasambhava, Vasudhara, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, rGya Zhang khrom and a number of intermediary figures, before being received by Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan, sPyan tshab mGon po zla ba and Byams pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan, and then by dBang po'i sde himself and his son and successor Ngag gi dbang po.⁵² bKra shis stobs rgyal's contribution to this process of transmission would have been quite natural, since as the incarnation of Legs ldan rdo rje's elder brother Mnga' ris Paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal, he was educated and reared by Legs ldan rdo rje himself,⁵³ and thus would have considered it his duty to consolidate the transmission of the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag within the Byang gter lineage which Legs ldan

⁴⁷ FitzHerbert, 'Rituals as War Propaganda', pp. 106f.

⁴⁸ van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, p. 120.

⁴⁹ Boord, Martin J., *A Roll of Thunder from the Void: Vajrakīla Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition, Volume Two*, Berlin: Wandel Verlag, 2010, p. xviii.

⁵⁰ On the relationship between bKra shis stobs rgyal and Ngag gi dbang po, see Valentine, *The Lords of the Northern Treasures*, pp. 158–162.

⁵¹ sTag lung rtse sprul, *Byang gter chos skor khag gi thob yig*, pp. 214f.

⁵² 'Jam dpal tshe bdag gter brgyud la gsol 'debs kyi rim pa kun khyab ma, in *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 20, pp. 148.1–150.3.

⁵³ See Valentine, *The Lords of the Northern Treasures*, pp. 154–158; and Chhosphel, Samten, 'Tashi Tobgyel', in *The Treasury of Lives*, May 2013: <https://treasuryof-lives.org/biographies/view/bkra-shis-stobs-rgyal/9052> (accessed 19 May 2021).

rdo rje and others⁵⁴ had spearheaded.

3. Yamāntaka and wrathful magic

As far as the deity Yamāntaka is concerned, Martin Boord draws attention to the fact that the epithet Yamāntaka was originally used to refer to Yama, the Lord of Death, and thus carried the meaning 'Death, the ender'. Later, however, the same epithet came to refer to a separate deity held to 'put an end to death', with the name being reinterpreted accordingly.⁵⁵ There is thus, implicit in the very name and symbolism of Yamāntaka, an intimate correlation, or even an inbuilt tension, between death and its overcoming. The *Phur 'grel 'bum nag*, for instance, explains that Yamāntaka is associated with longevity (the forestalling of death) because he has abandoned the fault of taking life,⁵⁶ yet it is evident that many of the rituals of destructive magic connected to Yamāntaka are concerned precisely with killing. How is this contradiction to be resolved? The fierce rites of 'liberation through killing' (*sgrol ba*) must be understood as part of a wider soteriological framework where they belong to a repertoire of ritual practices designed to overcome various difficulties and to enhance positive circumstances;⁵⁷ these practices are codified as the four tantric activities of pacifying (Skt. *sānti*), increasing (Skt. *puṣṭi*), dominating (Skt. *vāśa*) and fiercely exterminating (Skt. *māraṇa*) – all of them are supposed to have enlightenment as their ultimate goal, although this does not preclude the attainment along the way of useful magical powers, termed 'common accomplishments' (Skt. *sādhāraṇasiddhi*). In this context, the activity of liberation through killing is primarily directed towards an internal enemy, namely the inveterate tendency of self-grasping (Skt. *ātma-graha*):⁵⁸ by exterminating this fiend, there can be no question of 'taking life' in the ordinary sense. Yet there can be little doubt that the practice of liberation does often take as its referent an actual human enemy, and that success in the ritual is achieved when the enemy has been killed; numerous examples could be given of lamas engaging in

⁵⁴ Viz. Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan, sPyan tshab mGon po zla ba and Byams pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan.

⁵⁵ Boord, Martin J., *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīla, According to the Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition of Tibet*, Tring: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1993, p. 205.

⁵⁶ Boord, Martin J., *A Bolt of Lightning from the Blue: The vast commentary on Vajrakīla that clearly defines the essential points*, Berlin: Edition Khordong, 2002, p. 189.

⁵⁷ For an example of the way the fierce rites are integrated into the larger ritual framework of a tantric scripture, see Esler, 'The *Phurpa Root Tantra*', pp. 46–50.

⁵⁸ Meinert, Carmen, 'Assimilation and Transformation of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet and China: A Case Study of the Adaptation Processes of Violence in a Ritual Context', in *Zentralasiatische Studien*, no. 45, 2016, p. 343, p. 353, p. 356.

such magical attacks, yet for present purposes it will suffice to say that gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes and rGya Zhang khrom are both considered to be specialists in this genre of activity. The doctrinal justification in such cases is that the adept who performs the ritual does so motivated by great compassion and in a state of mind in which the sharpness of hatred has been transformed into indestructible egoless wisdom. If the adept has the indispensable compassionate motivation and required skill, the ritual of killing is equated with liberation, since the consciousness of the enemy is sent off to a pure field and the enemy is freed from his entrenched tendencies to perpetuate vicious deeds that would otherwise have further bound him to the lower realms of cyclic existence.⁵⁹ The tension, remarked upon above, between death and its vanquishing that is implicit in Yamāntaka's name, might be said to reflect the ambivalent nature of the fierce rituals themselves,⁶⁰ which always risk slipping out of the soteriological framework within which they normatively operate, thereby degenerating into a glorification of violence for its own sake.

This, then, is the background against which rGya Zhang khrom's Yamāntaka revelations must be placed. What, if anything, is remarkable about them is certainly not that they are wrathful rituals, for that is in the very nature of the fierce spells, but perhaps only Zhang khrom's seemingly exclusive focus on such practices, to the extent that 'Jam mgon kong sprul considered him to be "the single ancestor of all the fierce spells in Tibet."⁶¹ Whereas gNubs chen is believed to have hidden away the wrathful spells to prevent them from being misused, and indeed is depicted as having authored the *bSam gtan mig sgron* in his old age in order to purify the misdeeds associated with his prior engagement in black magic,⁶² Zhang khrom seems to have embraced the destructive rituals with almost unbridled enthusiasm. In terms of narrative structure, there is a clear continuity between the concealment of the spells by the illustrious and perspicacious gNubs chen,

⁵⁹ Cantwell, Cathy, 'To Meditate upon Consciousness as Vajra: Ritual "Killing and Liberation" in the rNying-ma-pa Tradition', in Krasser, Helmut, *et al.* (eds.), *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997, pp. 107f, pp. 110–112.

⁶⁰ Meinert, Carmen, 'Between the Profane and the Sacred? On the Context of the Rite of "Liberation" (*sgrol ba*)', in Zimmermann, Michael (ed.), *Buddhism and Violence*, Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2006, pp. 99–130.

⁶¹ 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Rin chen bai dū rya'i phreng ba*, p. 367.3–4: [...] *bod yul 'dir drag sngags thams cad kyi phyi mo pa gcig pu ste gter ston rgyal po gcig go/*. An almost identical statement is found in Guru bKra shis, *Gu bKra'i chos 'byung*, p. 369.

⁶² Esler, 'On the Life of gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas ye-shes', p. 15.

rallying figure of many rNying ma transmission lineages,⁶³ and their later revelation by the more marginal and perhaps more imprudent rGya Zhang khrom. The narrative of gNubs chen's involvement in concealing the treasures serves at once to legitimize Zhang khrom's discoveries and to highlight their dangerous yet potent nature. Despite the above-mentioned caveat that Zhang khrom may have revealed texts on other subjects which were subsequently lost, it must be said that he does not seem to have enjoyed a particularly good reputation, even within early rNying ma circles. Such is the impression one gets from a quotation attributed to Guru Chos dbang's (1212–1270) father, Pang ston grub pa'i snying po, where the latter chastises Zhang khrom for his overt propagation of the fierce spells.⁶⁴ It is possible that this reflects an internalization on the part of early rNying ma sensitivities of the criticisms levelled against literal interpretations of tantric praxis in Tibet, notably the disapproving comments formulated by lHa Bla ma ye shes 'od (ca. 947–ca. 1024).⁶⁵ In any case, this negative impression of rGya Zhang khrom was evidently not shared in all quarters, since the late Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche (1922–2002), a learned and highly respected master of the Byang gter tradition of 'Khor gdong monastery and pre-eminent disciple of the aforementioned Tshul khrim bzang po, refers to rGya Zhang khrom in laudatory terms, mentioning in particular his skill in the practice of transference (*'pho ba*), which enabled him to liberate many of his goatherd disciples, a favour he is said to have granted them before dying himself.⁶⁶

4. The ritual text

The ritual text presented here is called the *Tshe bdag gi zor las*, which can be translated as 'Ritual of the Magic Missile of the Custodian of Longevity', and is described as being a treasure of rGya Zhang khrom.

⁶³ Germano, David, 'The Seven Descents and the Early History of rNying ma Transmissions', in Eimer, Helmut, and Germano, David (eds.), *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, p. 254.

⁶⁴ Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, p. 765. This quotation of Guru Chos dbang's father is also mentioned by Martin, 'The Early Education of Milarepa', p. 57. Janet Gyatso has succeeded in tracing this citation to Guru Chos dbang's *gTer 'byung chen mo*; see Gyatso, 'The Logic of Legitimation', p. 121, n. 56.

⁶⁵ See Karmay, Samten Gyaltzen, 'The Ordinance of lHa bla-ma Ye-shes-'od', in Karmay, Samten Gyaltzen, *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 2009, pp. 3–16.

⁶⁶ Low, *The Collected Works of C.R. Lama*, p. 119.

The text is transmitted within the Byang gter tradition as part of the rituals dedicated to the deities of the eight injunctions (*bka' brgyad*),⁶⁷ alongside the teachings connected to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's (1337–1408) major revelation on this topic, the *Drag po rang byung rang shar chen po'i rgyud* [Tantra of the Great Self-Originated and Self-Arisen Fierce (Eight Injunctions)].⁶⁸ The continued relevance of rGya Zhang khrom's short text for the ritual life of the communities practising the Byang gter tradition⁶⁹ may be gauged from the fact that it has recently been republished as part of the essential recitations of rDo rje brag monastery in Simla.⁷⁰ Moreover, as mentioned above, rGya Zhang khrom's Yamāntaka revelations as a whole are highly valued by the Byang gter tradition, and we may mention in this respect another short text transmitted in the same Byang gter collections, namely the *Tshe bdag nag po'i gtor bzlog* [The Oblation-Exorcism of the Black Custodian of Longevity].⁷¹

Of course, the 'custodian of longevity' in the title of both these texts is none other than Yamāntaka, the deity whose particular form of slaying increases rather than diminishes life. The magic missile (*zor*) named in the *Tshe bdag gi zor las* refers to the ritual weapon that is hurled at the enemy to be destroyed by the rite. It is a particular type of oblation (*gtor ma*), which is empowered by the tutelary deity invoked in the rite and is thrown in the manner of a bomb in the enemy's

⁶⁷ *Tshe bdag gi zor las rGya Zhang khrom gyis gter nas spyang drangs pa rgyas pa*, in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, *Drag po rang 'byung rang shar chen po'i rgyud dang bka' brgyad kyi bsnyen thabs 'das pa'i zhal lung rin chen phreng ba*, vol. 2, Delhi: Tashi Dorji, 1975, pp. 447–453.

⁶⁸ *Drag po rang byung rang shar chen po'i rgyud kyi rgyal po*, in *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 9, pp. 29–175. Stéphane Arguillère has prepared a useful catalogue of this and related texts of the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* cycle: <https://www.arguillere.org/2019/07/catalogue-du-bka-brgyad-rang-shar.html> (accessed 29 March 2021).

⁶⁹ The important social function of such rituals in binding together the community of practitioners and in providing a common ground of shared interests for the laity and the group of ritual specialists is discussed in Turpeinen, Katarina, *Vision of Samantabhadra – The Dzokchen Anthology of Rindzin Gödem*, PhD thesis, Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2015, pp. 156f.

⁷⁰ *Tshe bdag gi zor las rGya Zhang khrom gyis gter nas spyang drangs pa rgyas pa*, in sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor las 'don cha'i skor, vol. 3, Simla: Thub bstan rDo rje brag e waṃ lcog sgar dgon, 2000 (?), pp. 313–319.

⁷¹ *lCags sdig yan lag drug pa las tshe bdag nag po'i gtor bzlog*, in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, *Drag po rang 'byung rang shar chen po'i rgyud dang bka' brgyad kyi bsnyen thabs 'das pa'i zhal lung rin chen phreng ba*, vol. 2, Delhi: Tashi Dorji, 1975, pp. 433–445; and *lCags sdig yan lag drug pa las tshe bdag nag po'i gtor bzlog*, in sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor las 'don cha'i skor, vol. 3, Simla: Thub bstan rDo rje brag e waṃ lcog sgar dgon, 2000 (?), pp. 325–340.

direction or on the effigy representing him.⁷² It belongs to the magic arsenal of the Tibetan sorcerer.

Our text is a fine and unabashed example of the 'art of cursing',⁷³ yet as is typical of this genre of rNying ma literature, it succeeds in weaving profound metaphysical ideas and elaborate cosmological notions into the fabric of seemingly mundane rites, ensuring thereby and *en passant* that the hereditary (and other) *mantrins* who engage in these forms of pragmatic magic often retain a relatively high degree of doctrinal learning alongside their ritual expertise.⁷⁴ Moreover, the sinister language of the text reflects the context within which it is used, one in which it functions as a ritual to avert and violently exorcize various harmful influences.⁷⁵

The text opens appropriately with an invocation, during which offerings are presented to the masters, the peaceful and wrathful deities, and especially to Yamāntaka and his entourage. This then continues for the various deities of the eight injunctions: the gods of awakened body, Yamāntaka; the gods of awakened speech, Padma (i.e. Hayagrīva); the gods of awakened mind, Yang dag Heruka; the gods of awakened qualities, Che mchog; the gods of awakened qualities, Vajrakīlaya; the gods of Ma mo rbod g tong; the gods of 'Jig rten mchod bstod; the gods of dMod pa Drag sngags (fierce spells for cursing); as well as the leader of the arrogant custodians of spells; the seventy-two glorious wardens; the ocean of pledge-bound guardians; and the land-owning deities (*gzhi bdag*).⁷⁶ All these deities are invited to accept the golden libation (*gser skyems*) and asked to perform the deeds entrusted to them by the holder of spells (*sngags 'chang*; Skt. *mantradhara*), i.e. the *mantrin* doing the ritual. The text then proceeds to describe the trajectory of the magic missile as it is hurled in the four directions; in each case, the particular guardian of the direction is addressed in honorific terms and urged to dodge the missile (*sku zur*) and avert his gaze (*spyān byol*). This is interesting considering the violent and potentially disruptive nature of the rite: since ultimately the aim of the ritual is to destroy a negative, disturbing influence (be it a demonic or a human

⁷² FitzHerbert, 'Rituals as War Propaganda', p. 74, n. 84, p. 85; see also Boord, *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīla*, pp. 197f; and Esler, 'The Phurpa Root Tantra', p. 55.

⁷³ Boord, *A Bolt of Lightning from the Blue*, p. xvii.

⁷⁴ Mayer, Robert, 'Indigenous Elements in Tibetan Tantric Religion', in *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragensia* '14: Ethnolinguistics, Sociolinguistics, Religion and Culture, vol. 7:2, 2014, pp. 43f.

⁷⁵ For a detailed anthropological study of the sociological dimension of such violent rituals and the specialist practitioners who perform them, see Sihlé, Nicolas, *Rituels bouddhiques de pouvoir et de violence: La figure du tantriste tibétain*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2013, pp. 172–177, pp. 215–261.

⁷⁶ On the complex relationship of the *gzhi bdag* deities to the treasure tradition, see Mayer, 'Rethinking Treasure (Part One)', pp. 150–153, p. 166.

enemy!) and thus to restore harmony, it is necessary to secure the co-operation of the appropriate cosmic forces – here the four great kings (Skt. *cāturmahārājakāyikas*) presiding over the cardinal directions.⁷⁷ In order to avoid upsetting the four benevolent kings and their entourage by the violence of the ritual proceedings, they are asked both to duck the missile as it tears through their rightful domain and to turn away their eyes from the devastation it wrecks. Let us here quote from the text itself:

HŪM. Showing the path of the oblation, showing wherever [it goes].

Showing the path of the oblation, showing it eastwards.

In the east, king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, [p. 449]

Surrounded by your retinue of many scent-eaters (Skt. *gandharva*),

Your body dodging, turn your gaze away!⁷⁸

Refrain:

The red oblation missile, *sha ra ra*.

The red bloody magic missile, *khyi li li*.

The minute yellow cursed missile, *nyi li li*.

The star-like arrow missile, *brengs se breng*.

The skull missile, like an avalanche, *ri li li*.

The dagger missile, into the flesh, *thims se thim*.

The rock missile, like lightning, *rbab de rbab*.⁷⁹

HŪM. Showing the path of the oblation, showing wherever [it goes].

Showing the path of the oblation, showing it southwards.

In the south, king Virūḍhaka,

Surrounded by your retinue of many trolls (Skt. *kumbhāṇḍa*),

Your body dodging, turn your gaze away!

Refrain.

⁷⁷ According to the Abhidharma cosmology, they are the rulers of the first and lowest of the six classes of gods of the desire realm (Skt. *kāmadhātu*). They have a cosmological function as protectors of the world. See Lamotte, Étienne, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien: Des Origines à l'Ère Śāka*, Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1958, pp. 759f.

⁷⁸ *Tshe bdag gi zor las*, p. 448.6–449.1: *hūṃ gtor ma'i lam bstan gang du bstan/ gtor ma'i lam bstan shar du bstan/ shar du rgyal po yul 'khor srung/ dri za mang po'i 'khor gyis bskor/ sku zur de ni spyan byol cig/*. These verses are repeated with appropriate modifications for the other kings.

⁷⁹ *Tshe bdag gi zor las*, p. 449.1–2: *gtor zor dmar po sha ra ra/ khrag zor dmar po khyi li li/ thun zor ser phran nyi li li/ mda' zor skar ltar brengs se breng/ thod zor rbab ltar ri li li/ phur zor sha la thims se thim/ rdo zor thog ltar rbab de rbab/*.

HŪM. Showing the path of the oblation, showing wherever [it goes].

Showing the path of the oblation, showing it westwards.

In the west, king Virūpākṣa.

Surrounded by your retinue of many sovereign serpent-spirits (Skt. *nāga*),

Your body dodging, turn your gaze away!

Refrain.

[p. 450] *HŪM*. Showing the path of the oblation, showing wherever [it goes].

Showing the path of the oblation, showing it northwards.

In the north, king Vaiśravaṇa,

Surrounded by your retinue of many goblins (Skt. *yakṣa*),

Your body dodging, turn your gaze away!

Refrain.

One may note in the refrain given above the various kinds of magic missiles; these will be picked up and their function elaborated upon below in the text. Again securing the cooperation of the various inhabitants of the Tibetan Buddhist cosmos, the next three verses emphasize whom the missile is *not* intended to hurt: the gods in the sky above, the serpent-spirits in the netherworld and the powerful *gnyan* above ground.⁸⁰

The missile is not hurled at the gods above;
Assemble at the feet of the king of great gods!

The missile is not hurled at the serpent-spirits below;
The king of great serpents has been vilified.⁸¹

The missile is not hurled at the cruel spectres (*gnyan*) in between;
You four groups of great cruel spectres, with your bodies
dodge [the missile]!⁸²

⁸⁰ On this popular tripartite classification scheme, see Karmay, Samten Gyaltzen, 'Une note sur l'origine du concept des huit catégories d'esprits', in *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 2, April 2003, p. 69.

⁸¹ In Tibetan *dbu 'phang smod*, meaning 'to belittle'.

⁸² *Tshe bdag gi zor las*, p. 450.2–3: *steng gi lha la zor mi 'phen/ lha chen rgyal po zhabs sdus shig/ 'og gi klu la zor mi 'phen/ klu chen rgyal po dbu 'phang smod/ bar gyi gnyan la zor mi 'phen/ gnyan chen sde bzhi sku zur cigl.*

At this point begins the actual magical attack, and the language becomes more blood-curdling, with the function and target of each of the missiles being explicitly described:

This oblation missile of the fierce Yamāntaka,
This oblation missile is for the hateful enemy, YĀ:
May the enemy's lineage be eradicated for seven generations!

This bloody missile is for the harmful obstructors, YĀ:
May the uterine blood of their mother's lineage dry up!

This cursed missile is for the lineage of sons, YĀ:
May the sons' lineage be eradicated for seven generations!

This arrow missile is for the livestock, YĀ:
May the livestock be swept aside by misfortune and devils!

This skull missile is for the devils (*sri*) of the storehouse, YĀ:
May they be swept aside and cast to the wind like dust!

This dagger missile is for the enemy's heart, YĀ:
May the enemy be killed by the sword or by illness!

This rock missile is for the enemy's castle, YĀ:
May his retainers and retinue be cut off!

Repel the curse, turn the dagger round!
Accomplish your entrusted activities!⁸³

The next part of the text (pp. 450.6–452.3) gives various spells for exorcism, which it would be both tedious and unnecessary to reproduce here. Suffice it to say that they are identified as: the Reversal that is the Turquoise Jackal (*bZlog pa g.yu yi spyang mo*); the Spell of the Black Dawn,⁸⁴ the Fifteenth Town (*'Char kha nag po'i sngags grong khyer bco*

⁸³ *Tshe bdag gi zor las*, p. 450.3–6: *drag po gshin rje'i gtor zor 'di/ sdang ba'i dgra la gtor zor yā/ dgra bo bdun rgyud rtsad nas chod/ gnod pa'i bgegs la khrag zor yā/ mo rgyud khrag gi mngal nas skems/ thun zor bu rgyud tsha la yā/ bu tsha bdun rgyud rtsad nas chod/ mda' zor sgo yi nor la yā/ sgo nor god 'dre phyags mas thob/ thod zor bang khang sri la yā/ phyags mas thal ba rlung la skur/ phung zor dgra bo'i snying la yā/ dgra bo gri thab nad kyis sod/ rdo zor dgra bo'i mkhar la yā/ skye bo 'khor gyi rgyud lam chod/ byang kha bzlog la phur kha sgyur/ bcol ba'i 'phrin las 'grub par mādod/.*

⁸⁴ During the 9th month of the Tibetan calendar, monks from rDo rje brag would perform the *'Char kha nag po* rites of Yamāntaka in the southern gate of bSam yas monastery. See Boord, *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīla*, p. 33. The performance of Yamāntaka rites at 'Khor gdong monastery during the 10th month of each of the

lga pa);⁸⁵ the Reversal that is the Spell of the Diamond (*Yang bzlog rdo rje pha lam gyi sngags*); and the Reversal that is the Spell of the Fire Razor (*Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i sngags*).⁸⁶

At this point, the so-called dance of the horse (*rta bro* = Hayagrīva?) is to be performed, whereby the various negative forces are trampled upon and suppressed. As can be seen from the accompanying text, the dance evokes Yamāntaka, filling the entire tripartite cosmos with his emanations, and the dancer, who identifies with this awe-inspiring deity, tramples upon the different kinds of harmful influences, personified as devils. The final part of the dance consists in accomplishing the four tantric activities, which are correlated with the four cardinal directions, as is typical in tantric literature. The text reads:

HŪM. Everywhere in the third order chiliocosm
Mañjuśrī Yamāntaka
Fills the whole of space with his assembly of male wrathful
ones;
Fills the entire atmosphere with his assembly of female wrathful
ones;
Fills the earth's surface with his assembly of little wrathful
ones.

From within the state which assembles all of these,
I dance with the right leg,
Suppressing the male devils (*pho sri*) under my right foot.
I dance with the left leg,
Suppressing the female devils (*mo sri*) under my left foot.
I dance the dance of non-duality,
Smashing to dust the infant-harming devils (*chung sri*) and the
pledge devils (*dam sri*).

This dance is the dance of great wisdom,
The dance which pulverizes enemies,
The dance which grinds the demons to powder;
Hence, the song and dance are uninterrupted.

male years is also mentioned by Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche, in Low, *The Collected Works of C.R. Lama*, p. 164.

⁸⁵ A text of this name is found in 'Char kha nag po'i sngags grong khyer bco lga pa, in 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (ed.), *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 17/tsa, Chengdu: lHo nub mi rigs dpar khang, 1990s (?), pp. 201f. Whereas the spell provided there is longer than the one found in our text, its final part does parallel, with a few minor variations, the spell as it is given in our text.

⁸⁶ These different spells are also conveniently compiled together along with related materials in sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor las 'don cha'i skor, vol. 3, pp. 315–322.

In the east, through the dance of pacifying, [p. 453]
 May the enemies, obstructors and pledge devils be pacified!
 In the south, through the dance of increasing,
 May longevity and merit increase!
 In the west, through the dance of dominating,
 May the gods, ghosts and men be overwhelmed!
 In the north, through the dance of fierce extermination,
 May the enemies, obstructors and pledge devils be liberated!⁸⁷

In this final part concerning the four activities, it is worth noting that the objects of the activities of pacifying and of fiercely exterminating are identical; this is not illogical, though, since despite the different means employed, both activities are concerned with the riddance of undesired evil.

The ritual text ends with a spell, in a mix of Sanskrit and Tibetan, signalling the final suppression of the negative forces and the successful performance of the four activities:

*Oṃ sumbhāni sumbhāni hūṃ. Svambhāni svambhāni hūṃ.
 Grhṇāpaya grhṇāpaya hūṃ. Ānaya hoḥ bhagavān vajravidyā rājaya
 hūṃ phaṭ. Mi mthun pa'i phyogs thams cad sāntiṃ kuruye svāhā.
 gNod byed dgra bgegs thams cad māraya hūṃ phaṭ. Tshe dang bsod
 nams puṣṭiṃ kuruye svāhā. lHa 'dre mi gsum vāsaṃ kuruye svāhā.*

Conclusion

This article has merely provided an impressionistic sketch of the life of rGya Zhang khrom, insofar as it can be pieced together from the traditional sources, and of the types of revelations, centred on Yamāntaka, which are said to have been discovered by him. More research is clearly required, particularly regarding the life of the revealer and the manner in which his treasures became part of the Byang gter tradition; the latter aspect will no doubt become clearer as the biographies of the

⁸⁷ *Tshe bdag gi zor las*, pp. 452.3–454.2: *hūṃ stong gsum stong gi 'jig rten nal kun kyang 'jan dpal gshin rje'i gshed/ khro bo 'dus pas nam inkha' gang/ khro mo 'dus pas bar snang gang/ khro chung 'dus pas sa gzhi khengs/ thams cad 'dus pa'i ngang nyid las/ rkang pa g.yas kyis bro brdungs pas/ pho sri thams cad g.yas su mnan/ rkang pa g.yon gyis bro brdungs pas/ mo sri thams cad g.yon du mnan/ gnyis su med pa'i bro brdungs pas/ chung sri dam sri rdul du rlogs/ bro 'di ye shes chen po'i bro/ dgra rnam thal bar rlog pa'i bro/ bdud rnam phyé mar 'thag pa'i bro/ de phyir glu bro rgyun mi 'chad/ shar du zhi ba'i bro brdungs pas/ dgra bgegs dam sri zhi bar shog/ lho ru rgyas pa'i bro brdungs pas/ tshe dang bsod nams rgyas par shog/ nub tu dbang gi bro brdungs pas/ lha 'dre mi gsum dbang sdud shog/ byang du drag po'i bro brdungs pas/ dgra bgegs dam sri sgrol bar shog/.*

various Byang gter lineage masters are carefully studied by scholars working on the tradition. As I have suggested above, Legs ldan rdo rje seems to have played an important role in this regard, as does his disciple bKra shis stobs rgyal. To these must also be added the lesser-known earlier figures of Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan, sPyan tshab mGon po zla ba and Byams pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan, who in the lineage accounts are placed just above bKra shis stobs rgyal.

What I hope to have shown is that despite, and perhaps even because of, his marginality, rGya Zhang khrom presents an interesting case study for research into the tantric traditions of treasure revelation. His marginality is evident in at least three ways: firstly, from the point of view of his social status, he was apparently an illiterate wandering goatherd who succeeded in building a reputation as a powerful sorcerer and productive treasure revealer. Secondly, from the point of view of the purported source of his revelations, he is an example of an early revealer whose inspiration centres not on Padmasambhava, as would become increasingly normative after Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer,⁸⁸ but rather on gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes. Thirdly, from the point of view of the deity at the heart of his treasures, Yamāntaka, while revered as an important deity of the eight injunctions, seems in the long run to have been displaced, though certainly not eclipsed, by Vajrakīlaya in most traditions of rNying ma tantric practice.⁸⁹

The scarcity of biographical or even hagiographical materials concerning rGya Zhang khrom may well be due in part to a bad reputation that early on seems to have accrued around him because of the morally ambivalent character of his treasures, mainly centred on destructive magic. Yet the line between lowly marginal sorcerer and exalted thaumaturge is a thin one in tantric contexts,⁹⁰ and despite his bad reputation, rGya Zhang khrom has produced numerous treasures which are still valued for their magical potency. Moreover, from the emic perspective of the treasure tradition's own logic,⁹¹ he has contributed to the post-mortem literary legacy of his precursor gNubs chen, invoked both as seal of legitimacy and as inspirational impulse.

⁸⁸ Doney, Lewis, 'Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhism', in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 2, Leiden: Brill, 2019, p. 1199. See also Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born*, p. 92, p. 151.

⁸⁹ For a story illustrating the superiority of Vajrakīlaya over Yamāntaka, see Boord, *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīlaya*, p. 121.

⁹⁰ See Samuel, Geoffrey, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 232–235.

⁹¹ Cf. Gyatso, 'The Logic of Legitimation', pp. 102–104, p. 111, p. 115.

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