

Introduction to the Third Special Issue “For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures”

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s mentioned in the report by Stéphane Arguillère that opens this special issue, this volume 81 of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* derives in large part from the conference held in Paris in October 2024. It was a great pleasure to host this conference in Paris, and it is similarly an enriching and precious opportunity to gather in this volume so many pieces of scholarship that shed a multifaceted light on the Byang gter tradition. Twelve of the eighteen articles published here were initially part of the conference program and six are independent contributions. From the conference, the four talks by members of the team are included in the first two volumes of *Northern Treasures Histories*. Five talks given during the conference are not presented here as they will become part of their authors' individual publications.

The present collection of articles is divided into two sections, respectively dealing with the Northern Treasures' history and with the lineage's teachings. Regarding the first section, the religious history of the Byang gter, the first five articles describe the founding of the lineage. The remaining eight describe later phases of the tradition, shedding light on important members of the lineage between the 15th and 17th centuries and exploring its metamorphoses beyond Tibetan borders until the 21st century. With regard to the 16th and early 17th century, a period particularly rich for Tibet, these pieces of scholarship are welcome additions to the field of rNying ma studies that remains until now somewhat understudied, with the exception of Marc-Henri Deroche's publications.¹

The second section delves into the Byang gter teachings themselves, dealing with rDzogs chen as it was understood in the *dGongs pa zang thal*, deity practices associated with various strata of the Tradition, and the protector gNyan chen Thang lha.

The editors of this special issue hope that these papers, along with

¹ Deroche, Marc-Henri, *Une quête tibétaine de la sagesse : Prajñāraśmi, 1518-1584, et l'attitude impartiale (ris med)*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2023.

the other publications of the FCHNT project, will contribute to a better knowledge of the rNying ma tradition in general, and its specific iteration in the Byang gter lineage and thank all the authors for their dedication to the subject.

*Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and the
Founding of the Northern Treasures Tradition*

This special issue starts with five articles concerned with the history of its founder, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–ca. 1401), and the geography of its early settlement in Byang.

The first article examines the *The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens* (*brDa chen bco brgyad kyi gsol 'debs*), an autobiographical work by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. Valentine provides a critical edition and annotated translation of this twenty-two-verse prayer, which presents eighteen portentous events from the treasure revealer's life as signs (*rtags*) of accomplishment and omens (*brda*) of future developments.²

The article analyzes how the two main biographers—Se ston Nyi ma bzang po (15th c.) in *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight* (*Nyi ma'i 'od zer*) and mKhan po Chos dbyings (20th c.) in *The Garland of Wondrous Tales* (*Ngo mtshar gtam gyi phreng ba*)—incorporated and reordered verses from the prayer. Valentine identifies significant chronological discrepancies between the prayer's sequence and the biographies' reconstructions, particularly regarding events at bKra bzang and sKyid grong. He also underscores the interpretive challenges surrounding the identity of the “three treasures” (*gter gsum*) mentioned in verse 18, examining whether these refer to treasure keys, objects from multiple sites, or items discovered at bKra bzang itself. Valentine's analysis illuminates both the prayer's function as primary autobiographical source material and the complex relationship between the treasure revealer's self-representation and later hagiographical interpretations. It usefully complements volume 2 of our *Northern Treasures Histories* as well as Valentine's translation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's lifestory by Nyi ma bzang po, and is an enlightening example of the way Tibetan *rnam thar* are composed.

The second article by Roberto Vitali examines Rig 'dzin rGod ldem within the historical and political context of 14th-century La stod Byang. Vitali challenges previous scholarship by clarifying the *gter ston's* ethnic origins, arguing he descended from Turkic stock rather than Mongolian Gur Ser, and tracing his lineage to De gyin De wa ra dza, a Western Turk minister under Srong btsan sgam po. Through

² It is supplemented by an article on the FCHNT blog containing a chart with four editions of the complete prayer : <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/3391>.

genealogical analysis of the *sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig*, Vitali dates the family's relocation to g.Yas ru Byang to the early 13th century.

The great strength of this article is to contextualize Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's treasure revelations against the backdrop of the political upheavals following Yuan decline and Phag mo gru pa ascendancy under Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan. Vitali demonstrates how the collapse of Sa skya hegemony created favorable conditions for rNying ma *gter stons*, contrasting with earlier periods dominated by doctrinal disputes. The study traces Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's activities across multiple principalities—including his crucial 1366 treasure extraction at Zang zang lha brag and connections with Mang yul gung thang rulers—illuminating the complex political landscape that shaped the Northern Treasures Tradition's emergence.

John Bellezza offers in the third piece of this section a tour of the early Byang gter settlement of Ri bo bkra bzang. The article contains several beautiful pictures taken during his 2002 fieldwork, thus making the reader travel through time to the early 15th century as well as to the early 21st century, in the company of Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med, the 25th family lineage holder descending from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

Bellezza catalogs the site's sacred geography, including Padma sgrub phug (where Gu ru rin po che concealed a ritual dagger), the *bla brang* complex built on tortoise-shaped rock formations, and multiple chapels housing self-formed footprints (*zhabs rjes*) and body impressions. He lists bKra bzang's protective deities and the various shrines and places associated with each of them. He also identifies archaic defensive structures and revetments at several places suggesting pre-Buddhist Hor occupation and raising questions about cultural stratification at Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

This first section then concludes with two complementary articles that significantly advance our knowledge of an important legacy of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, the opening of hidden lands, and particularly the way this was theorized in *The General Introduction to the Hidden Land* (*sBas yul spyi'i them byang*), a treasure said to be revealed by the gTer ston.

The first article authored by Zsóka Gelle examines this foundational text classified as a *them byang*, "a preliminary guide that initiates the journey of exploration, while also functioning as a prophecy to be fulfilled." The text frames Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as the predestined individual capable of unlocking the seven hidden lands in the southern borderlands.

Gelle argues that the text's apocalyptic tone is deeply rooted in the socio-political instability of 14th-century Tibet. The narrative reflects

the anxieties caused by the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, the fragmentation of the Sa skya hegemony, repeated Mongol invasions, and possibly the bubonic plague (*gnyan nad*), which ravaged Asia and Europe during this period and may well have entered Tibet. These crises are interpreted through the Buddhist framework of the Age of Degeneration (*snyigs dus*). In this context, the *sbas yul* are not merely geographical locations but soteriological refuges where the Dharma can be preserved and where an idealized Tibetan society, ruled by a *cakravartin*, can survive the apocalypse.

The General Introduction provides a complex, sometimes contradictory, map of these sanctuaries. While it lists numerous sites, it places particular emphasis on a triad of major hidden lands: Tsa ri in the east, La phyi in the west, and 'Bras mo gshongs (Sikkim) in the south, which is heralded as the "king of all hidden lands," and prophesied to be opened by seven revealers. The text also mentions specific locations like mKhan pa lung and Yol mo gangs kyi ra ba (Helambu). Gelle notes that the geographical descriptions vary from one text to another and that the list of lands in *The General Introduction* does not match the standardized list of "Seven Hidden Lands" found in other works attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem such as the *Gu ru'i ga'u bdun ma*. This, according to Gelle, suggests the composite character of *The General Introduction*, which synthesizes earlier geographical knowledge from various sources. Gelle concludes that *The General Introduction* is a "self-legitimising discourse" for the Byang gter tradition serving as a bridge between the mythic imperial past and the fragmented reality of the 14th century, and offering a "key" to safety during a perceived end-time and waiting for its corresponding "door" to be revealed in the future, hence the title of her article "Here the key, Elsewhere the door," borrowed from a Victor Hugo painting.

The article also provides an annotated outline of *The General Introduction* corresponding to the translation provided in the second article by Martin Boord. This piece is a very welcome addition to the Northern Treasures FCHNT project and a tribute to Martin Boord, who played an significant role in the spread of that lineage in the West. The article is prefaced by Stéphane Arguillère, who provides a biography and a bibliography of Boord. Arguillère also reevaluates the dates of Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan, who may have been one of the sources of inspiration for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's quest for hidden lands, and shows that Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan may have been born at the end of the 13th century and active in the first half of the 14th, living sometime between 1280 and 1365. This foreword is followed by the translation by Martin Boord of *The General Introduction* together with a diplomatic edition of the 2008 edition of that text and a few notes providing context.

Expanding the Tradition

The second section of this volume describes the expansion of the tradition between the 16th and 21st centuries. The first article is another piece of scholarship by Zsóka Gelle, who offers here a reconstruction of the life of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po (1480–later than 1541), a *gter ston* famous for the renovation of the Bodhnath stūpa and the opening of the hidden land of Yol mo gangs ra. In the absence of a full-fledged biography and despite considerable debate about the chronological details of his life, Gelle synthesizes brief biographies, local manuscripts, oral traditions, and sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's own treasure text, *The Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stūpa that Grants Liberation Through Hearing* (*mChod rten chen po bya rung kha shor gyi lo rgyus thos pas grol ba*) to retrace the activities of this important teacher of the Byang gter in the Himalayas in the 16th century and his influence beyond that date through the Yol mo sPrul sku incarnation lineage.

She sheds light on the various traditions he received and shared, his masters, his disciples, and contextualizes his activities within early 16th-century political instability, thus bringing together many details about Himalayan Buddhism at that period. sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po transmitted Northern Treasures teachings across traditions, established Tsuṭi temple in Helambu, and became progenitor of a family lineage still locally called the Nyingma Lama clan. His treasure text's popularity derived from addressing contemporary apocalyptic anxieties while legitimizing trans-Himalayan Buddhist networks during the Age of Degeneration.

The second article is written in Tibetan by gTsang phrug sTobs lags and contains an English introduction by Tenpa Tsering Batsang. It examines *A Play of Kun tu bzang po's Compassion* (*Kun bzang thugs rje'i zlos gar*), the biography of bKra shis stobs rgyas³ (1550–1603) authored by 'Brug pa Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645) in 1636 at the behest of bKra shis stobs rgyas' son, Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), who was recognized as the third incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. bKra shis stobs rgyas founded in central Tibet the lay community of Gu ru Padma E waṃ lcog sgar, which his son transformed into the rDo rje brag Monastery. In this article, sTobs lags uses this biography together with his own knowledge and connections in the region of Ngam ring in western Tibet in order to determine the exact locations of the monasteries founded by bKra shis stobs rgyas, together with pictures of the remains of these institutions. He also provides detailed

³ This is an alias of Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal.

historical analysis of the *byang bdag* title and its holders across regions, discusses bKra shis stobs rgyas' lHa sa rdzong pa family's relationship with Sa skya, identifies several geographical locations in gTsang, and sheds light on some details of the life of this controversial character, who was expelled from the region of Byang by the gTsang pa leader Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje that he is said to have then ritually killed.⁴

This provides the link with the next article by Alexandra Sukhanova, who examines the life of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1657). Zur chen received *Byang gter* cycles from Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po and the Third Yol mo sPrul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1589–1644) and was among the masters of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), thus playing a pivotal role in the transmission of these teachings. Sukhanova is especially interested in describing Zur chen's role in preserving the Northern Treasures in 17th-century Central Tibet and his contribution to the development and institutionalization of its tradition in rDo rje brag.

Sukhanova analyzes the Fifth Dalai Lama's biography of Zur chen, the *Theg mchog bstan pa'i shing rta* (1676), and his record of teachings received, the *Ganggā'i chu rgyun*, to document Zur chen's transmission lineages. Following the Third Yol mo sPrul sku's death in 1644, Zur chen became the regent of the Northern Treasures until ca. 1658, ensuring lineage continuity during the youth of the Fourth Rig 'dzin, Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717). His approach, however, far exceeded the Byang gter tradition as he was a holder of many dharma lineages belonging to different Tibetan religious schools and acted as an important intermediary in the dialogue between the dGa' ldan pho brag and the rNying ma establishments. Sukhanova shows that Chos dbyings rang grol's ecumenical approach and ritual expertise secured institutional consolidation of Northern Treasures at rDo rje brag.

A great interruption in the spread of the Northern Treasures in central Tibet was the Dzungar invasion of 1717–1718, during which rDo rje brag was destroyed and its abbot, Padma 'phrin las, was killed.⁵ Although the transmission continued in central Tibet at a much lower scale, it mostly continued further away, and this is where Alexander Schiller picks up the threads of Northern Treasures history.

⁴ This was the object of an article published by the FCHNT collaborator Simon Martin in the second special issue of the RET: "From Rāhula with Love: The Gruesome Liberation of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje as Told by his Compassionate Executioner", *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, no. 68, Janvier 2024, pp. 192-205.

⁵ For more details, see the article by the FCHNT collaboration Tenpa Tsering Batsang: "Reflection on the Dzungar Persecution of the rNying ma School of Tibetan Buddhism in the 18th Century, Focusing on Its Causes and the Scale of the Destruction", *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, no. 68, Janvier 2024, pp. 206-248.

Schiller's article, the longest in this collection, examines the *Records of Teachings Received* (*gsan yig*) of the fifth incarnation of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, who was described in the article by Zsóka Gelle that was introduced above. The Fifth Yol mo sPrul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789) was primarily active in Mang yul (Western Tibet) and Helambu (Nepal). This article is an updated English translation of Schiller's research initially published in German⁶ and was thus not presented during the 2024 conference. It, however, provides such a meticulous account of the Byang gter tradition as it was revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem until the 18th century that it is a very welcome addition to the present issue. As is now well-established, records of teachings received, especially when they are detailed, are a precious source of historical information. As regards the rNying ma tradition, the most extensive is the one of the Fifth Dalai Lama, who himself used many earlier rNying ma records (documented by Schiller) that are now lost. The record studied here, microfilmed in 1992 in Samagaun (Nepal), provides detailed information on the content of *gter mas* revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and their transmission history between the late 14th and 18th centuries. It is particularly interesting as the Fifth Yol mo sPrul sku, who descended paternally from the treasure-revealer bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1535), received transmissions from both the rDo rje brag lineage and from bKra bzang monastery, thus representing parallel preservation of traditions at the Central Tibetan monastery and at the original revelation site, and illuminating complex transmission networks spanning La stod byang, dBus, Mang yul, and Nepal. Although describing this text is a great achievement in itself, Schiller's goes much further than that, as he provides detailed information on many of the sources documenting the tradition, be it narrative accounts such as biographies and autobiographies (*rnam thar*), epitomes (*spyi chings*) and other records of teachings received (*gsan yig*), providing outlines of these texts in footnotes. This article is therefore an invaluable source for further study of the Northern Treasures history.

The other three articles of the historical section of this special issue bring us further away from the cradle of the tradition in bKra bzang and its further implantation in central Tibet. Giigch Borjigin and Husel Onggud examine the Manchu Prince Yunli's (1697–1738) commission

⁶ "Das Studienbuch des 5. Yol mo sPrul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms als Quelle zum Inhalt und zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der ‚nördlichen Schätze‘ (byang gter)," in: Volker Caumanns, Jörg Heimbels, Kazuo Kano, and Alexander Schiller (eds.), *Gateways to Tibetan Studies: A Collection of Essays in Honour of David P. Jackson on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (Indian and Tibetan Studies 12), Hamburg: Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2021, vol. II, pp. 821–890.

of the translation of over 600 rNying ma *gter mas* into Mongolian during the early eighteenth century—a corpus that never circulated among its intended Mongol readership but represent an untapped window into the tradition as it was transmitted by disciples of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Prince Yunli commissioned translations from rNying ma lineages, including 90 works revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and extensive commentaries by the Fifth Dalai Lama and other rNying ma masters such as gTer bdag gling pa. He also personally translated and composed four treasure commentaries. Analysis of colophons, seals, and onomastic evidence reveals Prince Yunli's profound commitment to the Byang gter lineage mediated by the Fifth Dalai Lama.

The translations studied in the article are the ones preserved at the Inner Mongolia Normal University (511 treasure texts and 126 commentaries) and rank among the most extensive Mongolian Buddhist scripture translation projects outside of the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur*. More texts are preserved in other institutions (St. Petersburg State University Library, University of Marburg, Cambridge University Library, and the Scheut Mission Archives in Belgium) and require further study.

These texts are “twice-buried treasures” in Mongolia, that is to say that they were textually preserved but not ritually transmitted, let alone practiced. The anonymous translators who authored these translations contrast with the ones meticulously documented in the Mongolian *Kangyur* (1717–1720) and *Tengyur* (1742–1749) translation projects. The authors of this article hypothesize that this may be due to Qing court anxieties regarding rNying ma expansion, restrictions dating from the Fifth Dalai Lama's era prohibiting dissemination beyond central Tibet and southern Khams, and the absence of qualified lineage holders in Mongolia.

The last two articles then bring us further east, in Khams, which became the Byang gter gravity center after the destruction of rDo rje brag in 1717. The article by Dylan Esler examines the life of the sixth Bāḥ gnas incarnation, Thub bstan mdo sngags bshad sgrub rgyal mtshan (1888–1964), also known as sPrul sku rGyal lo, an important throne-holder of Bāḥ gnas monastery and a close disciple of sPrul sku Tshul lo (1884–ca. 1957).⁷ The article, based on mKhan po Chos dbyings's biography of sPrul sku rGyal lo, traces his incarnational background, his studies and spiritual practice, his teaching career and religious activities, his students, and his death. It also includes descriptions of remarkable signs of accomplishment (such as

⁷ sPrul sku Tshul lo is the author of the *dGongs pa zang thal* commentary that was published by Stéphane Arguillère in French in 2016. A revised English translation with an edition of the Tibetan is forthcoming at Edition Khordong in 2026 (see the Report introducing this special issue for more details).

levitation, clairvoyance, and perhaps more significantly visions of Padmasambhava as well as being seen as Padmasambhava by his disciples). The sixth Bāḥ gnas sPrul sku reintroduced rDo rje brag ritual procedures to Bāḥ gnas monastery, established important annual ceremonies alternating between the *bKa' brgyad* and Yamāntaka traditions, founded a learning institute, and transmitted Byang gter teachings widely. His teaching activities encompassed canonical texts like the *Guhyagarbhatantra* and *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, attracting disciples from both eastern and central Tibet. The article demonstrates significant religious exchange between rNying ma and dGe lugs traditions, as evidenced by mutual transmission of esoteric teachings. His principal disciple, another Bāḥ gnas sPrul sku called Ye shes bdud 'dul (1935–2017), continued his legacy, eventually overseeing the monastery's reconstruction after the Cultural Revolution.

The last article is authored by Varvara Chatzisavva and is based on several field trips to the eastern Tibet monastery of 'Khor gdong, one of the most significant Byang gter institution located in Brag 'go in Khams, and its exile counterpart in Siliguri, India. Traditionally considered to be founded by gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (ca. 832–942), and historically associated with major figures including gTer chen Nus ldan rdo rje (1802–1864) and gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin (1922–2002), the monastery was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and rebuilt in 1985. The author provides detailed ethnographic documentation of contemporary conditions under Chinese governance, including surveillance systems, sinicization policies, and educational curricula. The article describes religious activities, preserved treasures kept in the monastery's temple, and architectural developments while analyzing the possible future of the institution in rapidly changing circumstances. It is completed by an article on the FCHNT blog with pictures by Chatzisavva illustrating what she described in the article.⁸

Dzogchen, Tantras, and Protectors

The third section of this special issue contains six articles related to the philosophical and ritual perspective of the Northern Treasures. The first piece of scholarship, by Jean-Luc Achard, examines the transmission of the *dGongs pa zang thal*, the core Byang gter rDzogs chen cycle, into the New Bon tradition through bDe chen gling pa (1833–1893). Achard contextualizes historical exchanges between Bon pos and rNying ma pas regarding rDzogs chen teachings, noting

⁸ <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/3718>.

documented cases of mutual borrowing since the 11th century, and remarks on the relative fluidity between the two traditions and between Bon and the other Tibetan Buddhist traditions in general. The article briefly retraces the history of Bon by presenting the threefold distinction of Old Bon (*bon rnying*), Eternal Bon (*g.yung drung bon*), and New Bon (*bon gsar*). New Bon is based on works hidden as *gter ma* by Dran pa nam mkha' and Vairocana and revealed later, thus bridging Eternal Bon with Buddhism. It started historically with the revelation of treasures in the 14th century, but mostly spread in the 18th century in Khams with the further revelations by Sangs rgyas gling pa (1705–1735) and the first Kun grol grags pa (1700–1769?). bDe chen gling pa described twenty-eight of his previous incarnations, the most significant in our context being his secret birth as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, one out of ten Buddhist masters. bDe chen gling pa received the complete *dGongs pa zang thal* transmission and a few other Byang gter teachings from Kun bzang nges don klong yangs (b. 1814) in 1859 and created links with other masters of the Ris med movement. He transmitted the *dGongs pa zang thal* to a few of his New Bon disciples, including his son rGyal sras Tshe dbang 'gyur med, who practiced them throughout his life. This case exemplifies actual transmission rather than textual borrowing, demonstrating continued inter-traditional exchanges of rDzogs chen teachings between Bon and Buddhist masters into modern times.

In the next article, Katarina Turpeinen examines philosophical contemplations as contemplative practices within the *dGongs pa zang thal*, which, she argues, is one of the first texts to include such meditations in the context of Breakthrough (Khregs chod). The part of the text where these contemplations are to be found is *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana (bai ro'i snyan brgyud)*, whose paradigmatic topic, according to Turpeinen, is Breakthrough, which is why it contains robust philosophical discussions. The article focuses on three analytical contemplations: (1) investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of mind; (2) distinguishing mind (*sems*) from awareness (*rig pa*, synonymous with wisdom, *ye shes*); and (3) differentiating the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) from the dharmakāya. Unlike typical rDzogs chen literature, rGod ldem's texts assert that mind possesses an origin (the universal ground), a dwelling (the six realms), and a destination (the body of essence, which is the universal ground). The universal ground is treated as synonymous with the common ground (*gzhi*) of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, resembling early Great Perfection usage rather than the individualized conception found in fourteenth-century Seminal Heart authors like Klong chen pa. Evidence from later commentaries and contemporary practice at rDo rje brag monastery suggests fluid, dialogical application of these contemplations.

Following these two explorations of rDzogs chen in the Byang gter, we then move to *yi dam* practice, and especially the way it is iterated in the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* system, the longest section in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's revelations. The first article by Kanako Shinga examines the *Longevity Sādhana of the Eight Pronouncements (bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub)*, an eight-text compilation totaling twenty-five folios attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. Shinga identifies a four-layered archetypal core (Outer, Inner, Secret and Most Secret) shared with two other longevity sādhanas by rGod ldem: the *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* and the *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*, which she studied in the previous issue of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*.⁹ In this article, Shinga is especially interested in exploring three topics. The first are divergences in this four-layered structure, especially with regards to the nomenclature and sequence of the *gsang sgrub* and *yang gsang* sections, as well as diverse descriptions of the way to practice these four levels. Here, she especially compares the three systems and underlines their differences. Second, she presents two transmission lineages of this text, the one preserved in the *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* (the main Byang gter lineage) and the other received by Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. She shows that the former incorporates names from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* in the lineage prayer, which is a specificity of that tradition. The third topic of the article is that of the Indic equivalents of the term *tshe sgrub/bsgrub*. Shinga argues that the term **āyurjñānanopika* (attested in *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* §5 as a translation of *'chi med tshe yi sgrub thabs* and being a Tibetan corruption of the compound **āyurjñānasāadhanopayika*) represents the proper Indic equivalent of *tshe sgrub* specific to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's revelation, rather than the commonly accepted **āyuhśādhana*. This, she shows, reflects sNga dar period terminology preserved in Dunhuang manuscripts, where the term *no pi ka* appears as a synonym for *sgrub thabs*.

The second article on the *bKa' brgyad* is authored by Stéphane Arguillère and is a tribute to Eva Neumaier-Dargyay, the first Western scholar to study and publish on Byang gter in her pioneering 1971 article on the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar*. Arguillère first explains what the *Eight Pronouncements* are: "the practice of the Mahāyoga consists of the Eight Pronouncements, either separately (e.g., individual sādhanas of Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, Vajrakīla...) or as a group (as in the large cycles we call *bKa' brgyad*, which combine them all)." He then contextualizes Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's massive *bKa' brgyad* cycle within the historical evolution of *Eight Pronouncements*

⁹ "Section X² of the *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs*". In: *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 68, 2024, pp. 426–453.

systems, using the lens provided by Kong sprul's compilation of the *Rin chen gter mdzod* and tracing the development of these systems from Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192) and Guru Chos dbang (1212–1270) until the 17th and 19th century. Nyang ral's *bDe gshegs 'dus pa*, tradition says, is more *Mahāyoga*-oriented; Chos dbang's *gSang ba yongs rdzogs* is more *Anuyoga*-oriented; and rGod ldem's *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* is more *Atiyoga*-oriented, that is to say that it contains *rdzogs rim* practice instructions that lead to rDzogs chen in what was recognized in the 14th century as its ultimate form: visionary, *sNying thig*-style meditation.¹⁰

The article provides revised English translations of the two texts translated in German in the original paper. The first text, *The Teaching of the Ten Aspects of the Heart-Drop of the Completion Phase of The Eight Pronouncements, Self-Produced and Self-Arisen* (*sGrub chen bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar gyi rdzogs rim snying tig rnam pa bcu bstan pa*), is an allegoric explanation of the *Eight Pronouncements* understood in rDzogs chen terms, demonstrating how rGod ldem's *bKa' brgyad* culminates in the *dGongs pa zang thal* through continuous ascent from *Mahāyoga*-style practice to advanced *sNying thig* visionary meditation. The second text, *The True Instructions of Sky-Face: The Essence of the Great Sādhana of the Eight Pronouncements, Spontaneous and Self-Arisen* (*sGrub chen bka' brgyad rang byung rang shar gyi snying po gnam zhal don khrid*) contains a full system of practice starting with the development phase of a deity yoga on Che mchog He ru ka in union with gNam zhal ma ("Sky-Face") and continue with various perspective of achievement phase practices "based upon the deity" (*lha [la] brten pa'i rdzogs rim*) and concludes with rDzogs chen instructions on the view.

With the next article authored by Amanda Brown, we navigate between religious history and Buddhist studies, between the Byang gter and the 'Bri gung bka' brgyud lineage, and between epochs. The tantric transmission studied, a Yamāntaka practice based on the *Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor* (*Yang bzlog me'i spu gri*), is a subsection of a cycle known as *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* (*'Jam dpal tshe bdag*) that was discovered by the 11th-century sorcerer rGya Zhang khrom. The *Blazing Razor* is a treasure related to that cycle revealed by the 'Bri gung Che tshang Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659), and it is now largely practiced in 'Bri gung centers under the leadership of the charismatic Tibetan master mGar chen Rin po che (b. 1936). It is not part of the treasures revealed by rGod ldem in 1366, but became central to later

¹⁰ The topic of the *Eight Pronouncements* and their specificity in the Northern Treasures when compared to other systems was the subject of the talk delivered in Tibetan by 'Ju bsTan skyong during the conference and entitled *The bKa' brgyad in the Byang gter Tradition*.

Byang gter masters. This cycle can be interpreted as protection (against inner demons) and destruction (of outer obstacles), hence “war magic,” and as such was an important cultural capital in the fights that agitated dBus gtsang in the 17th century.

In the article, Brown describes the way this practice entered the Byang gter and various lineages associated with it in the 16th century and subsequently expanded and circulated among networks of power in the 17th century. In doing so, Brown sheds further light on the rich history of that period and its actors. She also describes the content of large collections related with this Yamāntaka practice in both rNying ma and bKa’ bryud contexts, and she studies and translates two samples of this rich corpus that figure in both Chos kyi grags pa’s *gSung ’bum* and the 2015 Byang gter collection. The first text, a *Yang bzlog* lineage supplication by Chos kyi grags pa, is the occasion for an exploration of the complex transmission history of this cycle. The second one, a “liberating” dagger (*kīla*) rite, illustrates the general function and structure of the ritual and thus provides a good idea of what is done or imagined in this practice. In that sense, it resembles the previous translation of a *bKa’ brgyad* excerpt by Stéphane Arguillère and gives a taste of another of the important Byang gter cycle, albeit one with a more diverse origin.

Brown’s article concludes with three appendices: 1) a chart describing the overlap of Chos kyi grags pa’s *Yang bzlog* texts in the Byang gter Collection (CNT), in Chos kyi grags pa’s *gSung ’bum* and in a *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* collection (*’Jam dpal gshin rje’i gshed yang bzlog me’i spu gri’i chos skor*). 2) Another chart listing the masters mentioned in three supplication prayers (by the Fifth Dalai Lama, in the Byang gter collection and in Chos kyi grags pa’s *gSung ’bum*), and 3) a visual Representation of the *Yang bzlog* history.

The last article of this special issue was written by Yuewei Wang and examines the multiple Buddhist identities of gNyan chen Thang lha, a mountain deity who became one of the Byang gter protectors.

As demonstrated in Wang’s previous research,¹¹ the mountain god Thang lha’s role evolved because of three vows made to Padmasambhava through which he became a protector of Buddhism in general, the body and life-force god of Dharma King Khri srong lde btsan, and the treasure guardian of one of the *gter ma* revealed by rGod ldem in 1366 in Zang zang lha brag—hence a Byang gter protector. In this research, Wang further elaborates on the way the Byang gter texts develop auxiliary identities of Thang lha under multiple forms, including executioner of vow-breakers, ancestral male god (*pho lha*),

¹¹ “gNyan chen Thang lha and His Three Vows in Byang gter,” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines*, no.68, 2024, pp. 454-490.

wealth deity, territorial god (*yul lha*) of Tibet's four regions, and an incarnation of Bodhisattva Akāśagarbha. She describes diverse iconographic manifestations found in the Byang gter lore—ranging from a peaceful figure with five topknots to more wrathful forms and animal emanations (white yak, falcon, scorpion, nine-headed garuḍa). This multilayered identity system exemplifies rNying ma strategies for incorporating indigenous deities into Vajrayāna Buddhism, demonstrating how the Northern Treasure tradition transformed earlier, simpler conversion narratives into sophisticated ritual and doctrinal systems through contributions from key figures like Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, and the Fifth Dalai Lama. A noteworthy role of Thang lha in the Byang gter is as a subjugator of the *rgyal po* spirit Pe har, here considered as a malevolent force, while he is considered a protective deity in other systems (especially in the rNying ma system of Nyang ral or in the later dGe lugs tradition). This point is an interesting example of the fluid instrumentalization of local deities as protectors by various Tibetan traditions.

