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Introduction

Northern Treasures: Lives and Deities For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures 2

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It is our great pleasure to present this second collection of articles devoted to the Northern Treasures tradition to the readers of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*. All members of the team working on the project “For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures” funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR) have contributed to this volume, not only through their articles, but also by assisting and editing. Thus, a number of articles, while bearing the names of their principal authors, are in fact the product of a cooperation, the scientific value of which it will be up to readers to appreciate, but whose friendly quality we, for our part, can nonetheless salute.

The current publication builds upon our [previous Byang gter special issue in the RET \(No. 62\)](#), and assumes it as a prerequisite. Thus, reiterating all the basic aspects about the Byang gter tradition, its past, and the significance of comprehending it is deemed unnecessary here as this was addressed in the [introduction to the previous special issue](#).

The present volume that has emerged since we unexpectedly received Franz-Karl Ehrhard’s article has taken on the shape of a vast Tibetan *sādhana*. Indeed, in its thematic structure, it begins with a lengthy section about the masters, followed by a discussion of a *yi dam* deity, the internal practices of long life and rDzogs chen, and concludes with the guardian deities of Buddhism.

1. Lives of the Masters

The initial section of this segment focuses on the Bon religion and comprises two articles. The first one, “A Brief Note on the Northern Treasures of the Bon Tradition” is by Jean-Luc Achard, and the second one, “Feats of an Eclectic Bon po Master: dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal’s *’Das log* Journey and *gTer ma* Rediscoveries,” is by Roberto Vitali. The reason for their presence in this volume is twofold.

First, a Bon master, *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*, aka *dByil ston He ru ka*, has often been conflated with *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* (1337–1408/9). It is indeed the case that some *gter ston* discovered both Buddhist and Bon treasures. As regards *Khyung rgod rtsal*, Anne-Marie Blondeau and Samten G. Karmay already doubted this assimilation, which presents numerous chronological difficulties. Although Jean-Luc Achard and Roberto Vitali have not come to a united conclusion regarding the dating of *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*, it is certain from their two articles in this volume that the assimilation of *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal* to *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* is impossible. The matter is now definitively settled.

Jean-Luc Achard's article elucidates another point: the asymmetry between the two traditions—one belonging to the *rNying ma pa*, the other to the *Bon po*, both being referred to as the "Northern Treasures." While the *rNying ma* one started in the 14th century with *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*, the *Bon* tradition is significantly older, prior to *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*. Although this master abundantly contributed to its literature, he did not found the *Bon Byang gter*. And unlike the *rNying ma* version, the *Bon* tradition does not seem to have developed as a distinct school within the *Bon* religion.

All in all, this seems to be a case in which the *rNying ma pas* got inspired more by a *Bon* term than by *Bon* corpora. This was a key point to untangle, considering the intricate connection between the *rNying ma pa* and *Bon po*, which range from almost identical practices, with entire sections of texts borrowed in either direction, to unclear echoes, the use of common names or terms without real link to their meanings on either side. It globally appears to be the case in this instance.

This is not all straightforward, however. We are not in a case of pure and simple homonymy: there must be at least something like an echo of *Khyung rgod rtsal*'s personal reputation shining through in the figure of *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*.

This is the second point: it was deemed necessary to inquire further into the life, work, and revelations of *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*. The two papers admittedly extend beyond an inquiry on a hypothetical connection of some sort of the *rNying ma Northern Treasures* tradition with the *Bon Byang gter*. They nonetheless identify some intriguing convergences between *Khyung rgod rtsal* and *rGod ldem*. While the similarity of their names may have contributed to confusion between the two individuals, it is not the sole factor. Two examples to exemplify the topic, among many possible other ones: the first, most relevantly, are *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*'s vast accomplishments in *Zang zang lha brag* and the surrounding area, *Byang Ngam ring* in *gTsang*, where *rGod ldem* eventually became active. A second aspect would involve the significance of "black leprosy" or more probably "bleeding

leprosy” in both life accounts. Khyung rgod rtsal is briefly killed by the disease but reborn later as a *’das log*. Similarly, rGod ldem protects himself from the same disease in his youth through the practice of a Yamāntaka *tantra* called *mDze nag las kyi ’khor lo*. However, the reason for this protection remains unknown.

While Roberto Vitali provides an in-depth account of *dPon gsas* Khyung rgod rtsal’s biography, Jean-Luc Achard’s article discusses the broader topic of Byang gter and its significance in Bon. Part of the plot, however, is also aimed at understanding *dPon gsas* Khyung rgod rtsal’s significance in the Bon Byang gter, which is crucial, yet not as fundamental as Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s role in the rNying ma Northern Treasures.

After these two contributions, we turn to the Buddhist side where we first have three papers directly relating to Rig ’dzin rGod ldem.

The first paper, “A King of Dharma forgotten on the Jewel Island: Was Me ban *Chos rgyal* Rin chen gling pa Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s rDzogs chen master? (How half of the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig* got included in the *dGongs pa zang thal*),” is written by Stéphane Arguillère. It attempts to prove that Rin chen gling pa (1289?–1368?), a *gter ston* whose significance in his era has been underestimated, was Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s rDzogs chen master. The article reads like a philological investigation, reconstructing aspects of the Tibetan spiritual landscape during rGod ldem’s youth. Despite lacking indisputable proof of Rin chen gling pa’s role in rGod ldem’s life, the article sheds some light on the intricate matters of legitimacy during the decades following the demise of Padma las ’brel rtsal (1291–1319?), the revealer of the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig*. Large portions of the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig* are found amalgamated in the *dGongs pa zang thal*. This paper is an attempt to provide a historical explanation of this fact through the hypothetical role of Rin chen gling pa, in the context of the tensions between the various contenders for legitimacy over the transmission of the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig*—*rGyal sras* Legs pa and Rin chen gling pa on one side, the successors of Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339)—especially g.Yung *ston pa* (1285–1365)—on another, with Klong chen pa (1308–1364) as an outsider.

The next article by Jay Valentine, “A Preliminary Analysis of the Prophetic Guides and Concealment Narratives of the Northern Treasure Tradition,” begins with a summary of the series of events—as presented by Nyi ma bzang po (14th–15th c.) in his biography of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem—that are traditionally understood within the Byang gter to have transpired during the late eight and early ninth centuries in Imperial Tibet. The narrative involves Padmasambhava, King Khri srong lde btsan (c. 742–796), lHa sras Mu khri btsan po (761–815), Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and sNa nam rdo rje bdud ’joms. It focuses on the

concealment of three separate treasuries (once concealed at Zang zang lha brag, a second in Mang yul, and a third at Yang le shod) as well as two groupings of prophetic guides and treasure keys (one concealed in rGyang and another at bKra bzang, both of which are in Western gTsang). Valentine draws attention to the fact that it is completely unclear if Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (or anyone else for that matter) successfully extracted the second or third treasuries, which are believed to have been concealed in Mang yul in Tibet and at Yang le shod in Nepal.

In the remainder of the article, Valentine offers brief summaries of the prophetic guides, which were among those concealed in rGyang and bKra bzang, that Nyi ma bzang po employed as sources while constructing the concealment narrative that would appear in the biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. This exploration allows the reader to appreciate, at the very least, the selective processes and compositional skills that were employed by Nyi ma bzang po as he attempted to extract a succinct concealment narrative from these prophetic treasure texts that contain such a wide range of details about other treasuries and other issues of concern for the treasure revealer (i.e., Rig 'dzin rGod ldem) and his disciples. Lastly, Valentine hypothesizes that the prophetic guides—at least for the Byang gter—may have been decoded from the encrypted treasure scrolls on an *ad hoc* basis as the patriarchs of the tradition sought visionary guidance to help them overcome various obstacles over time. If such a hypothesis is proven to be correct, a judgement that will require additional research, it would surely affect the manner in which prophetic guides are employed as historiographic sources.

Arguillère and Valentine's papers clarify aspects of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's childhood and youth, including information on his masters, and his treasure discovery activities around the age of 30. However, much of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life remains unclear. For instance, it is unknown how Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302–1364)'s rise to power over Central Tibet could have impacted his career, as in the case of Klong chen pa and a few others: we do not know much of what Rig 'dzin rGod ldem did in the 1350s. Be that as it may, these two papers provide new insight into his timeline and the societal contexts in which he conducted his pursuits.

With Cécile Ducher's article, "The significance of the Byang gter in the Life and Legacy of Thang stong rgyal po," we advance to the next century. Thang stong rgyal po (1385–1464? or 1361–1485?) is a famous character in Tibetan history and much has been written on him; his contribution to the Northern Tradition, however, is not very clear. Although his birth date is somewhat uncertain, he was active in the 15th century. Our previous Byang gter issue discussed Thang stong

rgyal po's involvement in a *dGongs pa zang thal* lineage that expanded to Kaḥ thog in the Far East during the following century, but little was known about Thang stong rgyal po's direct association with the Northern Treasures. Thanks to Cécile Ducher, we now have a better understanding of his role in the early fame and diffusion of the Northern Treasures, especially with regards to two of the treasures revealed by rGod ldem, the *dGongs pa zang thal* and the *Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma*, and his regional interactions with Byang gter specialists in the Byang Ngam ring region, in gTsang, and in dBus, where his two main monasteries, gCung Ri bo che and Chu bo ri respectively, were located.

In the next paper, "From Rāhula with Love: The Gruesome Liberation of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje as Told by his Compassionate Executioner," Simon Martin presents an annotated translation of Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603)'s narrative of his magical battle and ultimate triumph over his adversary Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje in the late 16th century. Similar to Cécile Ducher's article, this one showcases the Byang gter masters as formidable miracle workers. While Thang song rgyal po is primarily famous for his long lifespan and other positive marvels, Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal provides a better representation of the more sinister abilities attributed to Northern Treasure ritual specialists, namely the capacity to kill or perform ritual "liberation." Additionally, this event is crucial to the next phase of the history of the Byang gter, which is not covered in this volume: the establishment of this tradition in its current location, E waṃ thub bstan rDo rje brag in Central Tibet.

The article by Tenpa Tsering Batsang that comes next, "Reflection on the Dzungar's Persecution of the rNying ma School of Tibetan Buddhism in the 18th Century, Focusing on Its Cause and Scale of Destruction," discusses the 1717-1718 Dzungar invasion and subsequent civil war, with its consequences for the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism in general and for the Byang gter tradition in particular. The author uses previously untapped sources, including biographies, to shed light on these important events. Through this research, a clearer understanding of the plot and extent of the disaster is established. The article shows that this massive persecution was fueled by sectarianism with political ambition of eliminating rNying ma influence from the dGa' ldan pho brang's political sphere. It also presents the epoch of rise and fall of rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling, two major centers of rNying ma studies in central Tibet. Despite traditional understatement in the later rNying ma historiography, the Dzungar persecution definitely caused significant changes in this school of Tibetan Buddhism. An example of such change is the shift of its main center of activity to Khams from the time of 'Jigs med gling pa

(1730–1798)'s disciples onwards.

In the next article, “Biography and Historiography: The Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug (1720–1771) and His Travels,” Franz-Karl Ehrhard focuses on the restoration of the Byang gter tradition in the 18th century, particularly through the successor of Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717) as the rDo rje brag seat-holder, Rig 'dzin sKal bzang padma dbang phyug. This historical account is crucial to understanding the resurgence of the rNying ma school in a transformed world, as can be observed following mass extinctions where novel life forms dominate. In the modern rNying ma landscape, dominated by 'Jigs med gling pa and his disciples, the Byang gter faced significant challenges in adapting to the new environment, despite receiving some support from the Tibetan state. It is, incidentally, worth noting that Rig 'dzin sKal bzang padma dbang phyug's autobiography is a remarkable literary work, on par with those of Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las or the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682).

In the last article of the “Lives” part, “Khor gdong Monastery 'ja' lus pa Lama sGrib bral (1946–2018),” Varvara Chatzisarava brings us to the contemporary era, with her description of the life of a modern Byang gter master, Lama sGrib bral, who, it is said, attained the rainbow body upon dying in the early 21st century. This article is based on a Tibetan biography of this Yamāntaka specialist and on Chatzisarava's fieldwork in Kham. It describes the biography of Lama sGrib bral and briefly assesses other such cases of rainbow body attainment in Tibet under Chinese rule.

2. Yi dams, Long-life Practices and rDzogs chen

This section has three subgroups. First, two articles discuss Yamāntaka practices among the rNying ma pa in general and in the Byang gter in particular. Second, an article examines the *Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma* long-life practice, which played a crucial role in spreading the Northern Treasures. The final article explores peculiarities concerning the description of the intermediate post-mortem state in the *dGongs pa zang thal*.

In “Yamāntaka among the Ancients: *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* in context,” Stéphane Arguillère presents a comprehensive review of the Yamāntaka traditions within the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. This study is essential in the critical history of Northern Treasure in order to understand why and how the Byang gter rDo rje brag masters have become experts in Yamāntaka, while Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *gter chos* does not incorporate any cycle centered around this deity as the principal figure.

Arguillère's paper takes us through the various strata of the

Yamāntaka corpus within the rNying ma tradition, beginning with the oldest layers found in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and the *rNying ma bka' ma* compilation, followed by the *Rin chen gter mdzod* selections, and concluding with a focus on rGya zhang khrom (11th cent.)'s *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* cycle, which is included in the 63-volume compilation of the Northern Treasures that is the main documentary resource of the FCHNT project, the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* (2015). This article provides insights into overlooked aspects of rNying ma history. Notably, it discusses three versions of a *tantra*, the *Zla gsang nag po*, and their connection to the ongoing translation of Sanskrit (?) texts among adherents of gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes (9th–10th cent.) during the “dark age.”

The precise time when the Byang gter masters began being viewed as the specialists of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* among the rNying ma pa and the specific status it granted them within this school of Tibetan Buddhism would require additional research, especially on the group consisting of 'Jam dbyangs rin chen rgyal mtshan (1445–1558) and his two sons mNga' ris *pan chen* (1487–1542) and Legs ldan rje (1452–1565). Indeed, the emergence of rDo rje brag in the late 16th century marks a period of amalgamation for the Byang gter proper with a significant amount of *bka' ma* and other *gter ma* materials. Through this process, the *Byang gter rdo rje brag lugs* attained its nearly final form.

It is indeed noteworthy to remark that there has been no research on the branch of the Byang gter that remained in its original birthplace, around mount bKra bzang. As of yet, it is unclear whether the foundation of rDo rje brag (after Byang bdag bKra shis stobs gyal was expelled from Byang ngam ring) provided an opportunity for a full-scale reformation or recreation for this tradition. It is possible that the Byang gter masters specialized in Yamāntaka materials in this later period only. Stéphane Arguillère suggests, however, that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem may have had some personal interest in Yamāntaka.

Another noteworthy aspect regarding Yamāntaka is the continuous exchanges among the 'Bri gung and Byang gter masters throughout the sixteenth century (and possibly earlier and later), to such extent that the presently existing *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* tradition may be regarded as the outcome of a common 'Bri gung-Byang gter work of elaboration, in which the 5th Dalai Lama played an important role. This 'Bri gung-Byang gter interface is incidentally addressed in the next article, and also deserves further investigation.

In “Favorable Ferocity: The Byang gter Rites that Invoke the Wrathful Deity Khro chu dug sdong,” Amanda Brown provides more information on this form of Yamāntaka which is one of the various aspects of this deity found in rGya zhang khrom's *gter chos* as compiled by the Byang gter (and 'Bri gung) masters. Detailed research on

Yamāntaka corpora, their practices, and present-day preservation and continuation is crucially important not only for the study of Byang gter but also more broadly. These cycles are strongly focused on large-scale offensive magic, including protection of the kingdom against aggression from foreign armies. The 17th century “king-priest association” between the Byang gter masters, the 5th Dalai Lama, and also gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714) and sMin grol gling specifically granted rNying ma masters the task of protecting the country through violent rituals centered, but not exclusively, around the Yamāntaka cycles.

The reorganization of the rNying ma institutions throughout the 18th and 19th centuries coincided with a redistribution of the preferred practices hierarchy. The diminished presence of Yamāntaka in the “new gter ma” (*gter gsar*) and in the updated narratives employed by the rNying ma pa to describe and interpret their tradition may conceal alternative manifestations of the tradition that differ from its present state. From this perspective, the Northern Treasures possess the qualities of a living fossil or an archaic state of the Ancient School, representing an earlier stage of its development. The status of the Yamāntaka practices in this lineage of the rNying ma school may thus give us a hint of the pre-Dzungar invasion state of this branch of Tibetan Buddhism. However, although, out of all the surviving and documented branches of this order, the *Byang gter rdo rje brag lugs* appears to have undergone less evolution since the era of the 5th Dalai Lama, it did not survive out of space and time, but in constant interaction with the other forms of the rNying ma tradition. Maintaining a 17th century style, in which extensive rituals of destructive magic in the service of the dGa’ ldan pho brang played a so central role, may also participate in giving its distinctive flavor or style to the Byang gter in the contemporary rNying ma landscape.

Amanda Brown’s forthcoming research will probably reveal, through anthropological fieldwork, additional information about the present-day application of these practices. However, it is noteworthy that they possess a historical significance since they enable researchers to rebuild the self-perception of rNying ma practitioners from previous eras, some of which might have been subsequently forgotten or repressed. These practitioners’ *ethos* marries profound contemplation, seen in rDzogs chen, with proficiency in magic, even in its most violent forms. Such a reputation of witchcraft was indeed one of the pretexts for the Dzungar persecution.

The next article by Kanako Shinga delves into a practice of the Northern Treasures, the *Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma*, that has gained much popularity and is extensively documented in her previous publications. It is evident to any reader of Tibetan biographies that this

sādhana, or rather the corresponding empowerment ritual linked to the Byang gter *Thugs sgrub* cycle, was widely favored in the centuries following its revelation by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. If a quantitative study of lamas' biographies was conducted—counting all the rituals implemented in order to promote their longevity as children, or that they performed for the welfare of others—it could provide factual records of the relative prosperity of different practices and serve as a noteworthy indication of the increasing or diminishing popularity of the Northern Treasures at various periods. It would definitely demonstrate how well inspired Kanako Shinga is to focus on this specific group of rituals.

Kanako Shinga's approach is, however, strictly philological and focuses on the contents of the texts. With this new piece in the series she has been arranging on the *Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma*, the text can now be regarded as well-established and its meaning quite clear, especially with regards to the name *lcags sdong ma*, which came to refer to the practice as a whole when it is actually the name of only one of its parts.

In "Divine Visions at the Last Breaths: A Creative Teaching on Dying in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection Anthology," Katarina Turpeinen deals with the pinnacle of Byang gter practices and the *bar do* descriptions given in the *dGongs pa zang thal*, the Byang gter's main rDzogs chen cycle.

Indeed, the high reputation of the Northern Treasures masters was not solely built on their abilities as wizards in the fields of war magic or rituals for long life. They were also highly regarded for their contemplative practice of this expansive rDzogs chen cycle, which many considered to be supreme. Unlike the paper about Rin chen gling pa, which sheds light on the genesis of the *dGongs pa zang thal* corpus in relation to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* materials amalgamated in it, Katarina Turpeinen's research is more internal and descriptive: it highlights some unusual aspects in the *dGongs pa zang thal*'s depiction of our post-mortem fate and clearly demonstrates, along with Turpeinen's doctoral dissertation, the anthology-like nature of the collection.

3. Guardian Deities

The present special issue concludes with two articles discussing protector deities associated with the Northern Treasures tradition.

Yuewei Wang's article, "gNyan chen Thang lha and His Three Vows in Byang gter," focuses on a deity closely linked to Tibetan royalty and widely recognized in the pantheon of indigenous deities in Tibet that have been enrolled as protective deities (*chos skyong*, *srung*

ma).

Yuewei Wang's article is an insightful exploration of the Byang gter corpus about gNyan chen Thang lha, which contains various narratives about the deity's oath and "buddhicization." The paper describes in particular 16 texts in the Byang gter collection that provide a detailed map of the evolution of Thang lha's identity, place, rituals, and representation in the Northern Treasures, focusing on Thang lha's "three vows" that define his status in that tradition.

This literature includes materials that come across as quite archaic in both their form and content: for example, the presentation of Pe har as the king of demons and the arch-foe of gNyan chen Thang lha was uncommon in post-Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's Tibet. This must have been even more surprising for readers during the period of the 5th Dalai Lama, when the cult of Pe har was widely promoted.

A significant portion of the *rTen 'brel chos bdun* cycle from the original Byang gter revelations—in which all the gNyan chen Thang lha literature is found—is dedicated to exploring the use of magic in order to control the invisible part of the Tibetan kingdom through Hayagrīva. This cycle serves as a resource intended to be utilized by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his successors to serve the Gung thang kings, descendants of Khri srong lde btsan.

It is a commonplace statement to stress the political aspect of the Byang gter, but it is not devoid of solid foundations: few *gter ston* were so strongly focused on the restoration of legitimate monarchy as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was. It would be no exaggeration to compare the figure of rGod ldem in Tibetan culture to that of the Enchanter Merlin in the legend of King Arthur (with, of course, typically Tibetan features): a magician aiming at the restoration of social order through the empowerment of the one predestined to rule.

For example, some cursive remarks in the Rin chen gling pa paper in this volume dwell on the various behaviors of different *gter ston* regarding the important and dangerous issue of the substitute (*gter tshab*) to be placed in the *gter ma* cache when the treasure is extracted. It is evident that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's attitude, involving the Gung thang kings in the process, is clearly aimed at reinforcing the sacrality and charisma of kingship.

In this context, the worship of gNyan chen Thang lha as the "life-force deity" of Khri srong lde btsan is crucial: what the king is or should be in the visible world, gNyan chen Thang lha is in the invisible world. In order to restore sacred monarchy on the former level, the right deity must be properly propitiated on the other plane; a harmonious human society would ensue from a reinforcement of the "white side" in the invisible world and this is supposed to be achieved, among other means, through the cult of gNyan chen Thang lha.

The last piece in this volume is an article by Christopher Bell about Tsi'u dmar po, a protective deity closely linked with the Byang gter before becoming part of the shared heritage of the rNying ma pa.

In his significant contribution on Pe har,¹ Christopher Bell examined the evolution and dissemination of the deity's cult. This investigation encompasses both synchronic textual analysis and actual social history, aligning with the concerns of the researchers involved in the critical history of the Northern Treasures project.

In the case of Tsi'u dmar po and his entourage, though maybe not completely unknown earlier, the development of this practice appears to have initiated with mNga' ris *pañ chen* and Legs ldan rje around bSam yas during the 16th century. However, the central human figure in Christopher Bell's article is Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639, the incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem between Legs ldan rje and Padma 'phrin las), who was the 5th Dalai Lama's maternal uncle and another significant figure of spiritual master who was also viewed as a wizard.

Christopher Bell's contribution to deity studies always encompass a consideration of the social factors that encouraged the promotion of such and such divinity beyond the context of eternized ritual literature, symbols, and declared purpose. To gain insights into the agendas of the promoters of this cult is indeed fascinating. Here, we discover Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, as portrayed by the 5th Dalai Lama, involved in the context of civil war and Mongol invasions; and here again, as with gNyan chen Thang lha (although with a more violent coloration), the visible and invisible worlds mirror one another and problems that develop on one of these planes can often only be resolved on the other.

In presenting this anthology, our aim is to provide readers with profound insights into the rich tapestry of the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism, with a specific focus on the distinctive teachings of Byang gter. Through the collaborative efforts of specialized authors, the present issue thus aspires to unravel the nuanced aspects of this spiritual tradition, offering a fascinating exploration of its history, philosophy and practices.



¹ Christopher Bell 2021: *The Dalai Lama and the Nechung Oracle*. New York: Oxford University Press.